



Slindon Parish Council

Minutes of the Extraordinary Meeting of Slindon Parish Council

Held 'Remotely' via Zoom Software
On Wednesday 31 March 2021 at 7.00 p.m.

Present: Councillors Jan Rees (Chairman), Barbara Brimblecombe, Peter Fenton and Derek Thomas.

In attendance:

Sarah Linfield BSc (Hons), CiLCA (Parish Clerk/RFO/Proper Officer)
Simon Mockford, Ranger, South Downs National Park Authority
11 members of the public

181. **Declarations of Interest**
None.

182. **Public Participation**

Councillor Rees opened up the session welcoming those present and providing an insight into the Council's planned application under 'Operation Watershed'.

Operation Watershed was last discussed in 2018 but not pursued, attributed to a lack of community interest (Annual Meeting of the Council, May 2018). Then in 2020, interest in the scheme was revived and with the financial support of South Downs National Park and Arun District Council the application progressed. Historically there has always been problems with the tree roots and drainage issues and the application is also supported by West Sussex County Councillor Derek Whittington. The parish is small, with a modest precept, yet extensive responsibilities - including the playground, recreation ground, war memorial and pond - and the importance of grant funding for capital expenditure was stressed.

Recent events had highlighted the importance of an effective communications policy, and whilst there was some disquiet about a lack of awareness of the project, the matter had been comprehensively covered both in the Parish Council minutes and Parish Magazine from September 2020. A briefing document to further assist had now been posted to the Parish Council website, annexed to these minutes.

The parish council has just four councillors, manages its responsibilities on a modest precept and with a part-time clerk without the capacity to continue to take on ad hoc projects of this size, so it welcomed offers of support from residents. The focus however



needed to be on taking direct responsibility for such activities; there was an offer to assist with fund-raising activities, mention was made of joining pond warden workshops and possibly forming a 'Friends of Slindon Pond' as there is no co-ordinated volunteer activity to maintain the pond. The pond is in need of attention, and although it had benefited from Landfill Grants through Spec 2000 () grants over the years, most recently 4 or 5 years ago, it was no longer eligible for such funding.

Simon Mockford, Ranger with the South Downs National Park Authority, spoke regarding his involvement in and support for the planned application, collaborating with the Parish Council and partner organisations to deliver a project which balanced enhanced pond biodiversity with effective flood management. His report is annexed to these minutes.

Paul Cann, Principal Drainage Engineer with Arun District Council was unable to attend at short notice although the Clerk read out his assessment of the situation, also annexed to these minutes. In summary, the willow tree will need to be felled as part of the proposal to manage water run off effectively and the application has the support of Arun District Council in its present form.

The Clerk explained that in March 2020 there was the possibility of a community grant from the South Downs National Park to improve the biodiversity of the pond. However, with funding withdrawn as the country entered its first lockdown 'Operation Watershed' was then identified as and manage water run-off from the highways.

A resident offered to provide a report - not a survey - from a civil engineer "on a favour" as an alternative scheme to the one which formed the basis of the current 'Operation Watershed' application. It had the apparent potential to save the tree through changes to the engineering work, sealing of pipes and root proofing the system. The initial assessment of the civil engineer – who it was highlighted was not a drainage engineer - was that "if the impact of the tree roots on the drainage system is the sole reason for removing the trees, this would be unreasonable" and cited evidence that willows can be part of the solution in improving water quality, through absorbing excess nitrogen as well as pollution. This conflicted with advice and guidance provided to the Parish Council, the project in its current form was supported by both the South Downs National Park Authority in relation to enhancing biodiversity and Arun District Council in respect of the engineering work.

A number of people voiced concerns over the felling of the willow including a tree surgeon who in observing that it showed no signs of being unhealthy nor of approaching the end of its life and, whilst accepting the damage caused to the drain by its invasive roots, wanted to preserve it. Several people cited its visual appeal as a reason.



Various residents spoke regarding the application, most specifically in relation to the planned felling of the tree, with the Clerk and Council members answering questions throughout the public session and providing clarity as follows -

- The project is time critical as the tree needed to be cut down if possible before the nesting season and the engineering work take place in the late Summer before the rainy season. Although the nesting season has now started the Clerk understood that a risk assessment at the time of the work was also possible to check for any signs of nesting.
- If the engineering work took place around the willow in all probability it would be harmed by the construction works.
- Preliminary costings had already been incurred at a total cost of £8,500, of which just over £2500 had been met by the parish council, using funds allocated for a VE75 event which had been cancelled due to the pandemic.
- There is no provision in the Parish Council budget to pay for any variation to the existing scheme and it is very unlikely that any further grants could be accessed.
- Capital expenditure for the existing scheme had yet to be quantified with a deadline of 12 April 2021 for tenders.
- West Sussex County Council's current financial year runs from 1 April 2021, Operation Watershed funds were finite, allocated throughout the year and there was no guarantee that it would be possible to secure funds in this year and spend them the following year if the project was delayed by revisions to the scheme.
- Whilst it would be possible to use some of the preliminary work as part of a variation to the current scheme, additional costs would be incurred through obtaining another engineer's survey and report.
- Finding an alternative solution to current issues might not be practical based on the assessment already provided by Paul Cann.
- Concerns were expressed that postponing matters whilst a report was prepared on an alternative scheme might jeopardise the chances of securing 'Operation Watershed' funding and the capital expenditure to implement it might be prohibitive.
- The Parish Council had placed itself in the very best place possible to secure funding through its current scheme at the start of the West Sussex County Council financial year.



- There was no guarantee that Operation Watershed would receive funding after this financial year.
- Planned use of 'eco-plugs' to destroy the roots, confirmed by several experts as the best way to destroy the roots with its close proximity to the pond. The tree surgeon at the meeting did not think that eco-plugs were suitable but could not offer any alternative solutions. It was accepted that willow roots are difficult to destroy and would likely require ongoing management.
- The Council monitors and manages flooding throughout the parish, work continued to take place in respect of flooding in the Meadsway area – run-off from the neighbouring fields - with matters considerably improved and persistent flooding in a car park to the rear of properties off Bridle Lane had been addressed. Lying water in the woods in Slindon Common now referenced had not previously been raised but was unlikely to be a priority.
- There is still a willow on the north side of the pond and a new tree could be planted to replace the felled willow, perhaps to mark the Duke of Edinburgh's centenary year.

The outcome is documented under minute 184.

183. **Apologies for Absence**

Not applicable, all Parish Council members present

184. **Operation Watershed**

With the offer of a report at no expense to the Council to provide an alternative scheme and the potential to protect the pipes against root damage and allow the willow tree to remain in situ, a period of up to 3 weeks was allowed for this purpose. In the meantime, it was agreed to defer felling of the willow.

All but one member of the public left the meeting.

Councillor Brimblecombe left and immediately rejoined the meeting following a technical glitch.

185. **A27 Arundel Bypass Environmental Impact Assessment Notification**

It was **Resolved** – to approve and submit the draft response already circulated to members and posted to the website, statutory response deadline 1 April 2021.

186. **Slindon Recreation Ground and Sports Pavilion**

Clarification and reassurance on the planned weekday use of the pavilion during term times had been received, and the Council had instructed its Clerk to write to its Solicitor to understand how such an arrangement could be incorporated into a



licence. It was also seeking guidance on the best way to record 'permitted hours' as there are 3 sports involved - football, stoolball and cricket – with different training and fixture schedules and the term of the licence for 10 years making it difficult to reflect future use with any certainty.

187. **Date of Next Ordinary Meeting**

The next ordinary meeting will take place on Monday 12th April 2021

The meeting ended at 9.11 p.m.

Signed as a true record of the meeting

Dated

DRAFT



Slindon Parish Council Extraordinary Meeting 31/03/2021

By Simon Mockford Ranger South Downs National Park Authority

I thought it would be helpful just to give some background information about the SDNPA's involvement with the Slindon village pond project.

The SDNPA does not own any land and my role as a ranger is therefore to work with others such as landowners, farmers, Parish Councils, National Trust etc who do in order to help achieve positive results on the ground in terms of both wildlife conservation and access to the countryside.

In view of this, I was very pleased to hear from Sarah who approached the SDNPA seeking advice/assistance about improving Slindon pond for wildlife. I arranged to meet Sarah and was able to bring along Paul Stevens who for 13 years had been the reserve manager at WWT Arundel Wetland Centre and therefore has extensive knowledge of ponds and wetlands in general.

At the site meeting, it was soon apparent to Paul that the pond has three main problems. The first of these is the amount of silt that has built up in the pond. The second is the pond has a large population of fish and in a small pond like Slindon's they will upset the ecological balance by eating most of the ponds invertebrates and pond weed as well as stirring up the silt in the bottom of the pond. The third problem is the heavy shading of the pond by mature trees. Although trees are important, providing food and shelter for wildlife and their roots help stabilize the banks of the pond etc the autumn annual leaf drop will regularly be adding debris into the pond and over many years reduce the water depth. All three problems will over time lead to the lowering of oxygen levels in the pond and gradually the wildlife value of the pond will decline.

Dealing with the silt problem is very difficult because of the substantial costs involved in de silting particularly if the silt has to be taken away to be disposed of. Unfortunately, there is no option in Slindon to spread the silt on land near to the pond. Whilst the SDNPA has a Sustainable Communities Fund, which the Parish could apply to grants from this Fund are relatively small and would certainly not meet the cost of de silting Slindon Pond.

Soon after this meeting at the pond with Sarah and Paul Stevens, we became aware of a West Sussex County Council scheme called Operation Watershed, which potentially might help with funding the de silting work. First and foremost, though the Operation Watershed scheme is about providing funding at a local level to deal with local flooding issues. Nevertheless, the potential is there to both deal with the flooding issues and improve the wildlife value of Slindon Pond. Operation Watershed became even more a realistic option when Arun District Councils, Principal Drainage Engineer, Paul Cann was approached and explained the important role Slindon pond should be playing in dealing with localised flooding issues in Slindon and further away.



Working closely together the Parish Council, Arun District Councils Principal Drainage Engineer and the South Downs National Park Authority all 3 organisations have had undertaken and funded all the necessary work required by Operation Watershed to be in a position to make an application to it. This has included commissioning a silt survey, topographical survey, ecological survey and bat report, production of a drainage design scheme and a CCTV survey of the drain /culvert under the road. In addition, without this information Sarah would not be in a position to seek quotes from specialist contractors to undertake the work which Operation Watershed requires.

Whilst I accept, there is some tension between the flood alleviation function of the pond and biodiversity interests due mainly to the quality of the water that will be entering the pond once the drains and culverts are working again I know that by working together a balance can be struck so that both interests are taken care of. That is why I accept that based on all the work done and clear advice given that part of the overall solution regrettably involves taking the willow tree down.

Although of course there is no guarantee that the Parish will be successful in getting Operation Watershed funding it is now at least in a position to apply for it largely thanks to the incredible work Sarah has undertaken. I should finally add that if nothing is done to the pond it will inevitably decline further as it continues to silt up and oxygen levels in the pond decrease.

Simon Mockford

Ranger

South Downs National Park Authority



Message from Paul Cann, Principal Drainage Engineer, Arun District Council.

Willow tree root systems are extensive and extend way beyond the tree canopy. They are very aggressive in their desire to find water and air (pipes are perfect for their needs), not to mention the pond.

As we know, there is a long history of these tree roots causing damage/blockage to this infrastructure. Numerous works have been undertaken in the past by WSCC to alleviate the issue, all have failed due to the invasive nature of the willow tree's root system. No matter what you do to prevent root intrusion, they will always find a point in the drainage system to exploit. Obviously, the drainage infrastructure existed prior to the willow tree's existence, so would never have been a problem when the drainage was originally installed.

Whilst we obviously always try to avoid tree removal, in this particular circumstance, there is little option or else there will be a continual risk to the pipework for the remainder of the tree's life. I have also sought advice from our own tree officer and whilst he does not like the removal of trees either, he fully understands the situation here and would have supported its removal (if it were outside the South Downs National Park where he has jurisdiction).

Removing the tree is part of the solution. The other parts include desilting the pond, constructing a formal overflow from the pond to replace the current defective one, improving the inflow pipes into the pond including silt management (note that one inflow pipe is completely blocked by roots and will be abandoned as a result), improving the roadside ditch, internally relining pipes that have been damaged by roots, etc. It will all be robust construction but given time there is always a risk that roots will infiltrate the system either through those parts of the drainage system not being renewed/repared or through the new works in years to come.

Relining pipes in itself helps prevent root intrusion but you can't+ apply this lining to all elements of the drainage system i.e., gullies, manholes, etc. Roots can infiltrate these structures and then gain access to the relined pipes too. There are also numerous other lengths of pipes associated with the system that will not be relined which will therefore be susceptible to root intrusion.

Unfortunately, a majority of the existing drainage infrastructure must be retained in its current position, i.e.. within the root zone of the willow tree. This infrastructure is there due to it being the low spot in the road, where it must remain. As a result, it will always be at risk of detriment due to the tree roots. Re-routing the outfall from this existing infrastructure into the pond (beyond what we are already proposing) will not achieve much, as it will still need to be within the root zone, as it needs to connect to the existing infrastructure that remains in place.

If there is a suitable location somewhere in the village that an appropriate species of tree can be planted as a means of compensation, then that can certainly be a consideration.



Operation Watershed Application

Background

The council has the opportunity to apply for capital funding through West Sussex County Council's 'Operation Watershed' to undertake work which will both help reduce the risk of flooding on the public highway and enhance the biodiversity, storage capacity and functioning of the pond.

Changes in the climate are impacting local communities in West Sussex and whilst the floods of 2012 may now be a distant memory, West Sussex County Council's response was the creation of 'Operation Watershed', within which the 'Active Communities Fund' was launched. It resolved to address issues with the drainage infrastructure including:

- the riparian ditch network
- damage to roads
- improving resilience to protect homes, businesses and highways.

What's Happening

The benefits of delivery of the Parish Council's 'Project ResPOND' are two-fold. It is aimed at improving the biodiversity and physical environment of the pond, encouraging more wildlife and making it an area that can be enjoyed by the whole community. It is also designed to have a positive impact on effective flood management for the community by providing a safer environment.

Slindon Parish Council has worked with a number of organisations and also benefited from the experience of Friends of Middleton on Sea Pond, which received funding from 'Operation Watershed' last year.

Chris Drake from 'FLOW' (Fixing and Linking Our Wetlands) has provided ecology and bat reports and the Council has taken advice from the Arundel Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, and the Environment Agency.

Paul Cann, Arun District Council's Principal Drainage Engineer and Simon Mockford, Ranger with the South Downs National Park are supportive of the application and both organisations have made significant contributions towards the preliminary costs to allow it to be made.

Description of issues

Slindon Pond has a key role to play in effective flood management, through the retention of rainwater and controlled discharge of excess water through an outlet structure. Numerous incoming drainage pipes form part of the overall system.

The current construction of the system has a number of limitations which are increasingly impacting the pond's storage capacity, as well as restricting flows into the pond from the incoming drainage pipes. The incoming pipes primarily serve run off from the public highway, running down Church Hill.

Whilst some routine maintenance work of the pond has been undertaken over the years, the removal of substantial layers of silt is now required – last undertaken in 2000 - to improve the capacity of the pond, coupled with material changes to the existing incoming/outgoing



infrastructure, through engineering works. Numerous works have also been carried out by West Sussex County Council in the past to improve the highway drainage system but have proved largely ineffective.

The position has deteriorated such that with the impacts of extremes of climate there is an increasing risk of significant flooding on the public highway in the vicinity of the pond causing damage also to the road surface – for image see end of report.

Description of proposed works or activity

The pond is around 850 square metres and is constrained by an embanked area and woodland to the south and Church Hill to the north.

The scheme is designed to address a ground water flood risk through both material changes to, and increasing the drainage capacity of, the existing infrastructure.

This will be achieved by -

- Felling the willow tree on north bank as it is detrimental to pipework and gullies. Its extensive root system has infiltrated the inflow pipes.
- Increasing the capacity of the pond by dredging and de-silting, silt to be sent to a licensed waste management facility.
- Pond revetment and stabilising the banks adjacent to the northern bank, at the edge of the highway.
- Changes to incoming and outgoing pipe structures, delivered through material improvements to existing infrastructure and new infrastructure installations and builds.

Costings

- Preliminary work already undertaken to progress the application.

	Actual Cost	Funding Source
Silt Survey (Contamination/Depth)	£2500	Parish Council
Ecology Report	£600	SDNPA
CCTV/Jetting Drainage Survey	£3325	ADC
Topographical Survey	£660	ADC
Civil Engineer's Survey	£2000	SDNPA

Funded – SDNP (28%), Parish Council (28%) and ADC (44%)

- Tenders to undertake the work have been invited from five civil engineering companies by April 12.
- Operation Watershed will have a further allocation of funding from 1 April 2021, being reviewed on an annual basis. An early application provides the best chance of access to limited funds.

Willow Tree – salient points

Although graceful in appearance and traditionally associated with ponds, willows are quick-growing, relatively short-lived and notorious for invasive root systems that, in search of water, will clog up and damage pipes. They are also known for having weak wood that drops readily in storms and as



they age, their roots trend upwards, which can make them problematic for pavements and highways. Sadly, the willow has outgrown its current location.

The CCTV/Jetting Drainage Survey has identified severe, multiple root ingress and mass and where possible it has been removed through high pressure jetting. However, the overflow to pond (beneath the footpath) could not be cleared. After much effort both up and downstream the contractors were unable to remove the 100% root mass for its entirety in both inlet and outlet. The inlet pipe appears to turn on a 90-degree angle which prevented them traversing it, and the root mass appears to have completely penetrated and caused a large hole on this change of direction. Blockage of defective underground pipes by roots is relatively common and although chemical and mechanical means can be effective, the only satisfactory long-term treatment is to repair or replace pipework. The current pipework is constructed in vitrified clay, concrete & plastic material.

The Ecology Report identified low potential roosting features and recommended removal of the tree as its roots have blocked the culvert under the road.

There is no tree reservation order (TPO) in place, an application to fell the tree was made by the contractor appointed to undertake the work, and details reported in the Parish Council minutes. The application can be viewed on the South Downs National Park Authority's planning portal under. Felling the willow tree alone will not address the issues and the possibility of undertaking engineering works whilst leaving it in situ would be impractical due to the invasive root system. After felling the willow tree, the roots will be treated with eco plugs and future management will be required as they are liable to come back.

Timing is critical as the willow needs to be felled before the bird nesting season starts and the engineering works must take place in late summer before the rainy season. Any delay will in turn postpone the start of planned project until the following year.

Evaluation of proposed scheme and application

Advantages

- Potential access to significant capital funding, albeit not guaranteed, for a project which secures the long-term future of the pond and manages the risk of flooding on the highway.
- The funding may not always be available – limited window of opportunity to apply for funding.
- Level of support from South Downs National Park Authority and Arun District Council, which is backed up by a financial contribution towards the project.
- Reduce damage to the highway caused by lying water including dangerous potholes

Disadvantages

- Loss of a common species of willow with a limited life expectancy, which can be replaced with another more suitable tree.



- Ultimately it could fall to the parish council to fund some of the work from its precept. This is based on the PC being responsible for the pond with a riparian responsibility to maintain under the Land Drainage Act 1991. WSCC would be responsible for the highway drainage and culvert between the pond and the shallow ditch. The owner of Mulberry House is likely to be legally responsible for the shallow ditch, perhaps with an interest from WSCC.
- Funding provided by the South Downs National Park Authority and Arun District Council is unlikely to be on offer again.
- Lack of pro-active management leading to increasingly poor road condition, and an unsafe environment with flooding on a bend.

Decision/Next Steps

To balance the possibility and advantages of securing significant capital funding for a project which has the support of Arun District Council & the South Downs National Park Authority, benefiting both the environment and long-term management of flooding, against the loss of the willow and decide whether to continue with the application.

+Appendix A

Damage to road surface caused by flooding in February 2020 reported to LoveWestSussex Report – extensive damage to vehicle when the flooding obscured the pothole.

