

**MINUTES OF LETCOMBE BROOK STEERING GROUP MEETING HELD AT
GROVE PARISH COUNCIL OFFICES ON 18th MAY 2023 AT 10AM.**

FINAL

Present:

Anthony Harker (AH), Chair of LBP Charity and Steering Group
Clive Manvell (CM), East Hanney Parish Council
Alison Futter (AF), Environment Agency and Trustee
Dominic Lamb (DL), Climate and Biodiversity Team Leader, South Oxfordshire and
VWH DCs
John Backley (JB), SOVWHDC
David Bell (DB), VWHDC
Mike Stead (MS), Trustee
Kiera Bentley (KB), Prospective Trustee
Julian Taylor Gadd (JTG), Prospective Trustee
Lorretta Light (LL), Letcombe Regis Parish Council
Ron Batstone (RB), VWH District Councillor
Tony Gilhome (TG), Wantage Town Council
Mark Bradfield (MB), Project Officer
Lesley Atkinson (LA), Project Assistant

1. Apologies:

Anita Appleby (AA), Environment Agency
Marcus Didcock (MD), Williams F1, Member
Tom Page (TP), Project Assistant
Caroline Stead (CS), Treasurer
Dan Rolfe (DR), Grove Parish Council

2. Introduction of Guests

The guests – DB, KB, JTG and JB – were welcomed to the meeting and introduced themselves.

3. Project Officer's Report (MB) and Questions Arising

MB's report had been circulated in advance of the meeting and was discussed. Key questions and comments arising were as follows:

Water Levels/Flooding:

MB reported that the brook was flowing well at the moment but that because of high rainfall during March, there had been a 'near flood' event in East Hanney on 31st March. In answer to a question from DB, MB replied that no flooding to properties had occurred, although some roads and fields had been flooded.

Pollution:

Pollution monitoring began last year and phosphate levels have been found to be too high. MB has raised concerns with the EA about discharges from the Sewage Treatment Works but has been informed that due to a lack of resources, the EA

is unlikely to investigate this. CM asked if the Water Watch Programme was still active and MB replied that this project, run by Earthwatch, had now lost its funding. However, the project had enabled the LBP to purchase some monitoring equipment, so we are now able to carry out the work ourselves.

Natural Flood Management:

MB reported that we had still not been provided with a copy of the EA report completed some years ago. DB would also like to see this report. MB added that the incident on 31st March, when the brook rose 12 inches within an hour or so in East Hanney, showed that very little progress to prevent flooding had been made and demonstrated the importance of regular cleaning of grips and the need for more water storage areas.

DB informed the group about drainage and flood management plans in respect of the new housing developments in the area, which have to be approved by WHDC. SUDS (Sustainable Drainage Systems), including series of swales and ponds, have to be incorporated into all new developments in order to deal with drainage and to tackle flood risk.

It was mentioned that the new Airplane Roundabout was prone to serious flooding. DB will investigate this. DB will act as LBP's point of contact for any drainage/flooding issues along the brook in future.

MB added that having local flood groups to carry out maintenance and monitoring work was important but that the only active group at the moment is in East Hanney.

LL noted that she has raised concerns about two bridges in Letcombe Regis which are in poor condition and do not cope well during times of high flows. DB will check this but advised LL to contact Oxfordshire County Council who are the responsible body.

MB is pleased that progress is being made in relation to landowners' responsibilities for pollution, drainage and flooding issues. A 'Farmer Cluster' has been set up by the Ock Partnership Group to encourage farmers and landowners to leave borders at the edges of fields, plant hedges and trees etc. KB asked whether we had any educational videos aimed at farmers and landowners. MB responded that information was available on our website and that we had set up a Riparian Owners' Group but so far had had a poor response. KB offered to help to build numbers of this group. AF added that the EA has a leaflet, 'Living on the Edge', aimed at riparian owners.

ACTION: DB to investigate flooding at Airplane Roundabout and two bridges in Letcombe Regis.

KB to assist with recruitment of Riparian Owners to Riparian Owners' Group

Funding:

Thames Water has approached LBP with an offer to fund a Project as part of an "Enforcement Undertaking" following a pollution incident that affected the Woodhill Brook and Childrey Brook. LBP would need to provide an Outline Project Proposal for maximum value of £250,000 that Thames Water were happy with (and met various criteria for community benefit). The project would be fully funded by Thames Water and can include staff costs. Ultimately this would have to be agreed by the EA, who may decide to prosecute TW instead, the decision may take 2 years. This does provide an opportunity for LBP to carry out some work on the Childrey Brook which is fairly neglected at present.

ACTION: Please can Trustees consider if LBP should take this forward?

Construction Developments:

MB outlined his concerns about poor management of some of the new housing developments in the area. Construction materials had been thrown in the river (probably by children) between Kingside and Keel Drive in Grove which LBP staff removed and asked developers to collect. Materials were not collected and ended up back in the brook. Response from contractors has been slow, access control works has not been completed and no Restoration and Management Plan has yet been received - this is now overdue. Mark raised concerns that at a site meeting with the grounds management contractor (Warwick Estates) the representative did not seem to know what he was contracted to do, what the site boundaries were etc. Although Mark raised concerns with VWHDC planning team this was just passed back to the developer David Wilson Homes. TG will follow this up. CM mentioned that in East Hanney, the council is trying to take over land management responsibilities from contractors as similar concerns have been raised.

An idea to erect signs on wildflower meadows to inform contractors not to cut the grass was discussed. We will ask Williams F1 if they could produce a suitable sign.

LL asked whether there was any further news about the proposed reservoir development. DL advised the group that a lot of technical work was currently going on 'behind the scenes'.

ACTION: **TG to follow up problems with building contractors**

MB to ask Williams F1 to produce a sign to prevent mowing of wildflower meadows

4. Project Assistant's Report (LA) and Questions Arising

LA's report had been circulated in advance to the group members. She has been focussing on fundraising for core costs and assisting with the organisation of the 20^h anniversary event held on 22nd April. No questions were arising.

5. Finance Report and Questions Arising

The finance report had been circulated in advance of the meeting. No questions were arising.

6. Suds and Flooding (DB)

Covered under Para. 3 above.

7. Water Quality Monitoring – Parish and Town Council Responsibilities

AH advised the group that we would like each local community to monitor, identify and report pollution and drainage incidents along the brook. This would be a long-term exercise but he would like to start this soon.

TG mentioned that a Climate Change Sub-Committee has been set up by Wantage TC and he will bring this to their attention. A newsletter is also sent by Wantage TC to every household in the OS12 postcode area, so this could be used to publicise our plans. LBP's website and social media channels can also be used for this purpose.

LL suggested that we should send a letter to every PC and TC Clerk and Chairperson explaining clearly what we would like them to do. The letter will include a request for them to nominate a 'champion' to take responsibility for this. MB will organise training sessions once we have received contact details of the nominated individuals.

ACTION: TG to bring these plans to the attention of Wantage TC's Climate Change Sub-Committee

AH to send a letter to all PCs/TCs

8. AOB – none

9. Date and Time of Next Meeting – TBC