

North Yorkshire County Council

Richmond (Yorks) Area Constituency Committee

Flooding Working Group

Notes of the meeting held on 18 January 2022, commencing at 12noon – held remotely via Microsoft Teams.

Present:-

Members: County Councillors David Hugill and Annabel Wilkinson.

NYCC Officers: Emily Mellalieu (Development Management Team Leader, Highways) Roger Smith and Matthew Cooke (Swale/Ure Internal Drainage Board), James Copeland (NFU) and Steve Loach (Democratic Services)

Apologies: County Councillor Yvonne Peacock

1. Flooding Working Group – Discussion with Internal Drainage Board and NFU

The following issues were highlighted:-

- The role of the Internal Drainage Board was explained, which included engineering works, maintenance work, consultation on planning applications, etc.
- They are part of a Public Sector Cooperation Agreement with NYCC, and would provide support in response to a flooding event in their area. A series of maps indicates which of the water courses the Board is responsible for in terms of the free flow of water.
- Funding for the Boards comes from the District Councils within which their remit lies, ie, for the Swale/Ure it was Hambleton, Harrogate and Richmondshire Councils.
- A Member considered that there were a large number of organisations and Flood Zone authorities responsible for watercourses and asked how these were co-ordinated. In response it was stated that details of the strategy for water issues was set out on the NYCC website and this detailed the various roles and responsibilities. The County Council is the Lead Local Flooding Authority, the Environment Agency focussed on the main river system and the IDBs had responsibility for local community areas with their main priorities being responding to planning and development proposals in terms of potential impact on water courses.
- A Member considered that the co-ordination and areas of responsibility in terms of responding to flooding issues were extremely complicated for the lay-person and suggested that it would be useful to have a simple map of responsibilities set out on the NYCC website. In response it was stated that the position of Lead Local Flood Authority had been established to provide clarity in terms of the responsibilities for water management in the area, and details were set out on the website. It was acknowledged that the details could be confusing for the public, particularly in emergency situations, and consideration would be given to providing clearer signposting to advice, going forward.
- It was asked whether the website provided details of areas prone to flooding, which District Council area these were located in and contact details for local Flood Wardens. In response it was stated that the amount of information provided on the website was dependent upon the flood risk for that specific area but details were held for all areas. Flood Zone and Surface Water maps were available together with details of historic investigations, which are undertaken statutorily by NYCC as Section 19 investigations. Details of historical flooding events and risks are also

provided to the Environment Agency to ensure that their flood risk data is continually updated.

- Parish Councils should develop their own Resilience Plans that would provide information on potential flooding at a very local level. Details of which Parish Councils held these Plans would be obtained from the Emergency and Resilience Team at NYCC and provided to Members. It was noted that all Parish Councils were provided with an offer of assistance with the development of their Plan.
- The representative of the NFU welcomed the discussions taking place. He acknowledged that the flood response system was complicated, with various bodies and individuals having different responsibilities, and he had previously shared a detailed guide to those responsibilities with County Councillors, called “Living on the Edge”, which was available for anyone with an interest in this. He noted that the responsibilities for attending to flooding issues varied from site to site, with this dependent upon land drainage issues and the natural flow of water.
- Landowners/Farmers have to deal with excess weather events, which can result in changes to water courses and their flow. This is managed in many ways to avoid the flooding of property and highways/infrastructure where possible. New initiatives are continually assessed to try to lower the flood risk. All initiatives need to be financially viable due to the financial pressure on the sector and care has to be taken so as not to conflict with existing legislation and the work of the statutory bodies. Much of this involved allowing land to be used for flood alleviation.
- Lobbying was taking place to ensure that flood risk was taken account of, and built in, to development projects, and policies were not conflicted.
- The development of reward schemes was the main focus for the sector in terms of flood response, which would be complementary to the existing work, but would not be a duplication, going forward. Plans were in place for this but were not expected to roll out until 2025.
- The Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS) was being introduced by the Government to assist farming and agriculture. The Common Agricultural Policy would be replaced by new Policies that would provide additional funding. It was expected that new environmental projects would be developed through this funding, some of which would assist with flood alleviation.
- A Member referred to many farms operated as small businesses and wondered how they would provide land for flooding alleviation without that being detrimental to their business financially. In response it was stated that previously food production was the main policy focus, but environmental issues are now being given more prominence within the policy framework, with funding provided to accommodate these.
- The natural environment was also changing with an emphasis on preventing water courses from seeping into other areas, with farmers/landowners working on this to optimise the natural flow of water. It was noted that there was conflict in terms of providing a natural flow of water and flood prevention work, especially with the emphasis now on environmental impacts bringing challenges to the IDBs and farmers/landowners.
- A Member considered that there were some puzzling aspects to current policies ie the blocking off of gulleys on higher moorlands which would inevitably lead to water flowing into lower areas. He asked how important the retention of peatland was to mitigating flooding. In response it was stated that there was evidence to indicate that peatland had a significant effect on flooding risk, helping to reduce that, however, the re-wetting of the North Yorkshire Moors, for example, would have a dramatic effect on the iconic landscape, with large swathes of the purple heather having to be removed. This would be likely to have an impact on tourism in that area, which would impact farmers/landowners financially due to the secondary, diversified businesses they had developed in line with high levels of tourism, therefore, there had to be a carefully balanced approach to this. Although there was no IDBs in the moorland it was acknowledged that the balanced approach between reducing the flow of water versus financial impact had to be taken account of.

- It was recognised that the new acts were throwing out challenges to the IDBs, but these also presented a chance for them to evolve. Currently the IDBs operate at lower levels which is affected by what happens on the moorlands, therefore closer working with farmers/landowners and other agencies would help to alleviate some of the flooding risk. Local knowledge can be vital when addressing flooding issues and this should be utilised.
- A Member asked whether there was conflict between the various agencies and bodies as to how to address flooding issues and who would resolve these, who pays for the required flood alleviation work and whether joint working was undertaken to liaise with Parish Councils/farmers/landowners. In response it was stated that there would always be disagreement as to how matters should be addressed, but every effort would be made to find solutions because of the impact of flooding events. Each of the main parties involved with addressing flooding recognised the need to work together and form direct relationships to benefit the affected communities. Funding remained the number one challenge with the many suggestions received considered and prioritised for funding by the Yorkshire Regional Flood and Control Committee. Parish Councils do take account of the work being undertaken by the various bodies, and it was noted that a 6 year plan had recently been completed by the NFU outlining to assist with funding of schemes and where to find additional funding for these. It was acknowledged that co-ordination and joint working were required to assist in alleviating flooding issues.
- The IDBs were currently undertaking a mapping exercise which would be put through a software package alongside rainfall events to determine where flooding events were then likely to occur, to create greater resilience against such events.
- As many organisations as possible were liaised with to provide a co-ordinated approach to directing water courses to ensure that any work was beneficial to the environment.
- In terms of re-wetting the moors it was emphasised that there was no single solution and co-ordinated work was required to alleviate flooding situations. Despite co-ordinated work it had to be accepted that out of the ordinary weather situations would cause flooding events, the focus, therefore, has to be the protection of property and livelihoods.
- The difficulty of diverting flood water onto agricultural land to save property/businesses was re-iterated, particularly in respect of the financial impact that can have on farmers/landowners. It was stated that there was no insurance available for the loss of a crop in such circumstances and consideration had to be given as to how to provide support in these circumstances.
- A Member requested the notes of the Regional Committee and details of the budget in recent years to determine how assistance was been provided throughout the region. She also considered that it would be useful to determine the level of support for re-wetting the moors. It was noted that NYCC was represented at those meetings and had an input into how each scheme was supported, with each scheme determined on a case-by-case basis. In terms of the re-wetting process it was stated that if this was commercially viable it would be undertaken as it had additional benefits in terms of decarbonisation. A Member emphasised that the reduction of carbon had to be measured against the need to produce food.

The following follow up information was requested by Members:-

- Details of the new National Scheme
- Information from the Resilience and Emergency Team – Flood Wardens, Resilience Plans, etc
- Details of maps outlining flooding risk, etc
- The amount of Highways budget that is spent on attending to flooding issues.

IT WAS AGREED:-

- (i) That the details obtained from the meetings of the Group be collated and fed back into the ACC.
- (ii) That further attempts be made to invite the Environment Agency to a meeting.

The meeting concluded at 1:00pm.

SML