



Dauntsey Parish Council Drainage Board

Flooding Update

Dauntsey Brook Blockage: On 9th July there was a weather warning and a forecast of about 40 mm of rain (about what we had during the March flooding). There had been a long-standing



Before

blockage in Dauntsey Brook close by where it heads south under the motorway. This problem was described in the March 2008 Environment Agency's report, but the blockage still hadn't been cleared. The ownership is still unclear (either Highways Agency or WCC), but in case of emergency (e.g. this risk of flooding), anyone can take action to clear a blockage. With the help of John Histed, this is just what we did. The blockage was so solid that I could walk from one side of the Brook to the other without it sagging. There were about 10 fence poles, a tarpaulin and enough other debris to make a solid dam. Later in the day, I checked the Old Sodom Lane bridge and there was still about one foot clearance despite one local resident telling me

that they had expected to flood again given the amount of rain.

Environment Agency presentation to Dauntsey Parish Council: On 22nd July, the Environment Agency presented their first report on flooding in Dauntsey. Two managers from InterRoute (responsible for M4 maintenance), two people from WCC specialising in flooding) plus Howard Greenman (Chairman of NWDC Flood Working Group) also attended. There was a very good turnout (by far the biggest meeting I've attended in the school hall – over 100 people) including District and County Councillors. There was plenty of time for questions - those in power left with a clear understanding of the strength of feeling in Dauntsey.



After

The EA presentation was of their "Pre-feasibility Study" of the flooding in Dauntsey... and they explained that the next stage was a full feasibility study, if they can get the estimated £150,000 to fund it. They still are not actually proposing any firm actions that will reduce or stop flooding, so we still have a lot more effort needed to keep things moving forwards.

The presentation explained a number of alternative actions that could be taken with estimates of both costs and benefits (i.e. number of houses flooded in differing levels of rainfall). July 2007 was about a 1 in 25-year type of event. **If the rain in Gloucestershire had fallen in Dauntsey then we would have had 125 mm, not just 62 mm – this could have easily doubled the**

Dauntsey Parish Council Drainage Board

number of houses flooded. The EA also explained that none of their solutions would protect all houses in all situations, but many of the proposals would dramatically reduce the risks.

During the discussion period, Toby Sturgis mentioned that the section of the Brinkworth Brook through his land (north of the motorway) has had LESS water than normal during the recent flooding. This tends to support what we have been telling the Environment Agency – we get overflow from the Brinkworth Brook because of obstructions just north of the motorway.

We (me, Duke Potter, John Histed and Pete Collinson) now have a copy of the full EA report (about one inch thick) and are currently reading it. We will then provide our own comments and suggestions but, from my own reading, I think that there is a further solution that hasn't been considered that could provide even better protection for Dauntsey. I also feel that some of their cost estimates for work are far too high, but at least we have something to work with. Interestingly, and assuming I am reading the data correctly, most of the culverts along Dauntsey Brook are too small in severe rainfall conditions.

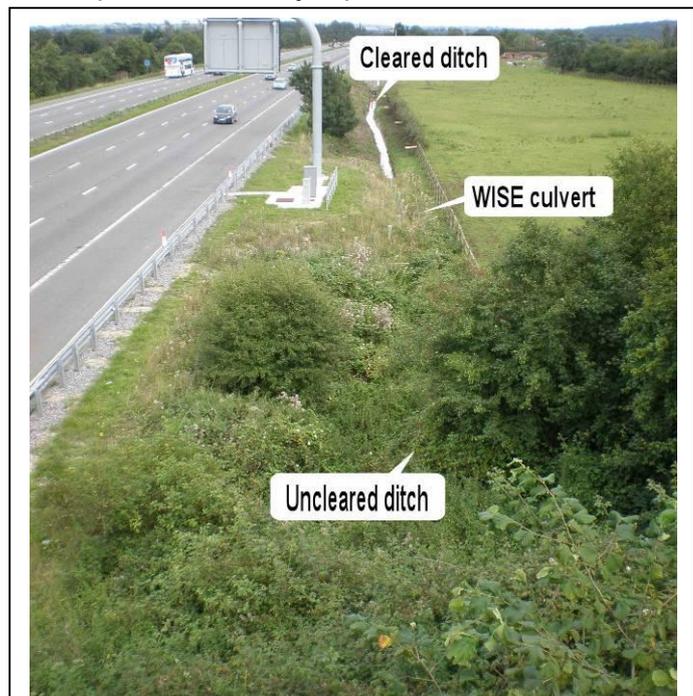
Both in the meeting and in the written report, Dauntsey Parish Council is repeatedly thanked for their efforts. Andy Wallis (the report's author) phoned me to give his special thanks for our efforts – he said that due to our work, the report is MUCH more comprehensive at this stage than any other in his experience and the Dauntsey Parish Council is unique in the amount of work we have been doing.

I have subsequently written to EA asking them to clarify what approvals we need to maintain Dauntsey Brook (do we need a licence and if so just one, or one for each landowner?) and could the silt removed just go onto adjoining land or has it to be disposed of as (motorway?) contaminated waste? I have also asked them to look at the possibility of clearing Brinkworth Brook just north of the motorway. They have confirmed that the request is being passed around different departments and that I should get an answer during September.

NWDC Flood Action Group Meeting: Because of the above meeting, I was invited to attend the 25th July meeting. This gave me the chance to explain Dauntsey's problems – time will tell if anything of real benefit to Dauntsey will come out of these meetings. They do however have funds available (nothing like enough for any of the EA's proposed solutions).

M4 Ditch Clearance: Ditch clearance is progressing on the south side of the motorway between the two Dauntsey Brook motorway culverts. This ditch drains most of the land to the south of the motorway and should take some of Dauntsey Brook's excess water in times of heavy rain – unfortunately, it had been neglected for so long that there were trees of up to 9 inches diameter growing in the bottom of the ditch. Water is now flowing again but a significant amount of work still needs to be done.

Duke Potter, at the EA presentation meeting, was quite "robust" in his criticism for InterRoute's ditch digging abilities. I have also written to their manager expressing my concerns and reinforcing Duke's views – we both feel that the banks are far too steep



Ditch south of motorway with WISE culvert (alongside the sign) and non-cleared section in the foreground

Dauntsey Parish Council Drainage Board

(they will soon collapse) and their levels are wrong. The WISE (Wiltshire Information and Signal Enhancement project) culverts alongside the new motorway signs still remain a major obstruction to flow in the ditches at both sides of the motorway. The culverts were installed without the Environment Agency's approval (which was needed) – Atkins (the project managers) are now talking about removing one section in the southern ditch near the motorway bridge, but still resisting suggestions that the others should be removed.

InterRoute has indicated that it may be possible to have a meeting of all interested parties sometime in September. This may include the Highways Agency who has so far refused to have anything to do with us.

InterRoute has also given me copies of some of the original 1968 motorway drawings – they said that they were asked for them by a woman at the EA presentation meeting, so if you are that person then please give me a call. These drawings provide a lot of interesting information including the design profile for what was originally called “streams” – these definitely include Olivemead Drain and the sections of Dauntsey Brook straightened when the motorway was built, but arguably also show how the ditches should have been profiled. The original shape was with shallow sloping banks – the Olivemead Drain is currently only about 1/3 of the design width at field level and is typical of the sort of reduction in width that has occurred over the years since the motorway has been built.

Andrew Chapman

September 2008