

LCC & NKDC Councillor update – January 2024

The return of both ground and surface water flooding is a tragedy for those involved. It seems Heighington in a vice – ground water from below and rain-driven surface water from above.

In the aftermath of Storm Babet I incorporated Heighington by name into the LCC inquiry which is now under way, so that its unusual combination of risk could be fully considered. As you know, LCC has a specialist ground water team looking at developing solutions, and they will going forward use Heighington as a case study. Their work is following two key strands. Firstly, having spoken to the management team at the school in November I was extremely concerned that before any reconstruction work began, they and their insurers should have the benefit of the advice of our ground water flooding team. It's not a well understood problem, and I felt (and the school emphatically agrees) that there's no point building back as things were. We need to build back better, taking account of both the ground water risk and the becks' increasing propensity to overtop upstream of the school site. Ironically the first meeting of LCC officers and the school happened on Wednesday and of course the site was under water again on Thursday. Nevertheless the school values the advice and LCC will continue to support the school to get it back up and running as quickly and as sustainably as possible.

The second strand of activity will be between our specialist officers and the parish council and residents to make sure we get every scrap of local knowledge and opinion. We will get that in diaries as soon as possible – you'll appreciate that with literally hundreds of Section 19 investigations on-going we are stretched right now, but it will happen soon and we'll make sure residents as well as the PC have every chance to input. But I felt that the school had to come first.

These and other strands of activity are under way, but the weather waits for no one. Lincolnshire is like an over-full sponge right now, and I'm afraid it doesn't take much to trigger both ground water issues and the beck, and we saw the dreadful combination last week. Our Highways team was on site with signage and road closures within hours, but I did witness yet again drivers ignoring the need to slow down.

Finally, as you will recall from earlier meetings, I believe it is vital that we get every agency involved working positively together. Last week I met with senior local and national officials from the Environment Agency, the local drainage boards and the national Association of Drainage Authorities. My contribution to the meeting was to get everyone to agree that we HAD to work together better and more innovatively to deal with the ne situation caused by climate change. That may not sound much, but believe me, it is!

As you know I have previously brought our MP, Dr. Caroline Johnson, to Heighington to see the situation for herself and to meet residents. On Saturday (when I had NOT tested positive for Covid) I was able to host her here again, along with Robbie Moore MP who is the DEFRA Minister for Rural Affairs including flooding, and Alan Lovell who is the national Chairman of the Environment Agency. In addition to briefing them

on Heighington's unusual flood issues I also took them to Millfield school to meet the team there including the head teacher and senior executives of the academy trust. It gave the visitors the opportunity to see what damage had been caused, and to discuss solutions and some necessary changes to the way insurance works. Cllr Harrington accompanied me.

Incidentally, the parish council came up in our meeting: the school team was full of praise for the support you have given not least recently in providing a meeting place for the little ones to be collected from. The Minister was well impressed!

We moved on to Washingborough, where I was keen for the EA chairman to see for himself the overgrown badly maintained Environment Agency water courses which are incapable of properly transporting the waters to Boston as they were designed to do – something which affects every one of our villages, Heighington included. Again, I was able to press some ideas for innovation and new ways of doing things to Robbie Moore. I found the minister very receptive to the need to act and to innovate.

I will keep on pressing hard both locally and nationally, and I will keep Heighington (and Washingborough) on the map as we try to develop ways of dealing with increased flood risk. None of this is easy or quick or cheap and the results won't be instant but the work we are doing is vital if we are to break out of the vicious cycle in which climate change has clearly placed us. Our first thoughts must be with the victims of flooding, but our second, third and fourth thoughts have to be to find new and better ways of protecting our communities and our County in a rapidly changing world.

Regards,

Cllr Ian Carrington