

ALFRISTON PARISH COUNCIL

Paul Levitt

Flood & Coastal Risk Management

Environment Agency

Sent via email: Paul.Levitt@environment-agency.gov.uk

27th November 2019

Dear Paul

On behalf of residents and businesses in Alfriston, as well as large numbers of visitors to this tourist hotspot, Alfriston Parish Council [APC] wish to express their concern about the degree to which flooding affected the lower reaches of the Cuckmere Valley in the first few weeks of November 2019. This is not only due to the large volume of water but also because of the length of time it has remained on the surrounding land, resulting in local road closures, before some improvement in draining away.

We believe this is due to failure of management of the river system, which has prevented floodwater discharging into the sea. A number of issues appear to be the cause of this unacceptable situation and we believe that they are largely due to poor maintenance and failure to take action to ensure flap valves, sluices and locks are properly checked and maintained; and, even more importantly, that the mouth of the river is being allowed to get blocked by shingle.

On this occasion flooding in village could have been a lot worse but for the efforts of local volunteers, whose goodwill cannot be relied on.

APC are also grateful to EA for providing pumps in the village as without these we believe the flooding of the roads and disruption could have been much worse.

The fact that the Environment Agency abandoned their policy of withdrawal and took action through emergency powers to reduce the flooding was welcomed by all and the partial clearance of shingle has allowed the river to flow directly into to the sea.

Our plea is to encourage the Environment Agency to take steps to prevent the need for crisis management in future years. Such last-minute action causes considerable anxiety and disruption whenever flooding occurs. Heavy rainfall and associated flooding is becoming increasingly common and we ask the Environment Agency to put in place a regular programme in the Cuckmere Valley to tackle this and to manage the process in a planned, cohesive and acceptable way.

Our preference would be to see, at the least, proper and regular maintenance of sluices, flap valves and dredging of the river mouth.

If a full scale programme to dredge the river mouth cannot be achieved every year, we would like reassurance that at least there are measures in place to ensure that shingle will

be shifted to some extent so that there is always a direct channel for the river to empty into the sea, especially at the beginning of the autumn season when most rainfall is experienced. The local drainage board have indicated their interest in carrying out the necessary level of dredging and feel they could achieve this at a reasonable cost. However, we understand that your approval is necessary before any such action can be taken.

In view of the need for a satisfactory outcome, and given the importance which so many local people place on finding a solution, the Parish Council urge all agencies involved in the management of the Cuckmere Valley to work together to reach an acceptable long-term solution. Above all we must avoid a situation such as we have recently experienced.

Yours Sincerely



Victoria Rutt
Clerk and RFO

Copied to:

Cllr Michael Lunn, Wealden District Council

County Highways

Mrs Claire Reynolds, Long Man Parish

Mr Mark Lamb, Friends of Cuckmere

Mrs Vanessa Rowlands, parish representative on South Downs National Park

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