

CLERKS REPORT – March 2012

Agenda Items

5. Proposals for Mere water – Wessex Water & Environment Agency: Fiona Bowles will be attending the Parish Council meeting to discuss these proposals:

“As discussed I would like to attend the parish council meeting to talk about a proposal that Wessex Water wishes to make regarding water resources in the Mere area.

Since the public meeting Wessex Water and the Environment Agency have looked at the earlier investigation. Whilst our reviewer has confirmed the original findings, we acknowledge the concern of some parishioners over flows in the local streams. Therefore we would like to offer to do a further trial during a dry year, in partnership with the local community. As well as demonstrating the response of the groundwater and river flow to both climate and abstraction we would like to investigate other water issues such as the importance of water efficiency, leakage reduction and metering with customers.

In terms of abstraction rate, during the trial we would aim to reduce abstraction to that which supports the 'local' area. The overall reduction in abstraction would then be driven by local customers who can influence it by water saving. So at the same time as the reduction, we would run a programme on metering and promotion of water efficiency throughout the 'local' area supplied. This includes areas within Mere, Kington Magna, The Stour's group PCs and Gillingham TC, all of which return the water back to the Shreen. It would be a good opportunity to measure what benefits can be achieved through water efficiency means in these water supply zones. The feedback from customers taking part will be valuable in assessing our next water resource planning programme and new incentives that government is considering for water companies to manage their abstractions.

Our ability to reduce our abstraction will depend on a number of factors, and in particular the overall resource position across our water supply network. We may need to go back to exporting should pressure of demand so dictate. In particular reductions at Mere increase pressure on the River Wylde sources and the storage level in Sutton Bingham reservoir. Over the next 6 years we are improving our water supply network with our “Grid” project. This will significantly improve our flexibility to manage our sources of water in this area, but unfortunately not until 2018.

We are discussing suitable hydrological triggers to start the trial with the Environment Agency and given the dry winter, this is likely to occur in early 2012. Flow gauging and water level monitoring structures will need to be replaced if we wish to go ahead.

I would like to discuss with the parish council:

- how quickly we can develop an effective partnership within Mere and the other local areas mentioned
- set up a steering group who can help to design and run this trial reduction and communicate with the local community,
- engage with the other parishes and town councils within the supply zone affected
- whether you feel that a direct partnership with Wessex Water is preferred or if there is another independent organisation that you would recommend.

I attach the notes of our meeting with Andrew Murrison MP which can be circulated with this email before the meeting.

If you could let me know a suitable time I will be happy to meet the Parish Council on the 12th March. The Environment Agency are not free to attend on that date but have agreed that they would sit on the steering group if this proposal is agreed.

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Mere Meeting Note

For meeting held on December 2nd between A Murrison (MP), N Gupta, A Hicklin (Environment Agency), D Elliot, F Bowles (Wessex Water)

The EA demonstrated the unusually dry conditions experienced in 2011 and referred to their recent press release (1/12/2011) that indicates that even with 100% average rainfall this winter, areas within the Wessex Region will continue to experience dry conditions in summer 2012.

WW confirmed that the abstraction has not changed significantly in recent years and thus the change in extent of the Shreen headwater streams is a response to climatic variation primarily, although abstraction does reduce the water available and thus the length of time the streams dry to a small extent, as demonstrated in their 2006/7 investigations.

A Murrison expressed his constituents concern over the extent of stream drying in 2011, primarily in the Shreen below Sharp Street, and asked what could be done to allay this concern.

WW confirmed that reducing the take from the Mere source at certain times was feasible but would result in increased take (within licence) from the Wylve catchment, a river with high environmental value. However once the water supply grid has been completed (2018) a wider range of alternative sources would be available including the middle Stour, but with much higher operating costs.

WW offered to trial a reduction in abstraction during a year with appropriate winter recharge and spring/summer rainfall, so as to demonstrate more clearly the response of the groundwater and river flow to both climate and pumping. It would not be appropriate to do the trial this year when ground waters are at their lowest level as river flows are unlikely to improve until it rains, in which case the naturally rising ground water levels would give misleading results.

Since abstraction is driven by customer demand, any trial would be assisted by local demand reductions, perhaps through metering and the promotion of water efficiency. This could be implemented within the water supply area supplied by the Mere source.

It was agreed that WW and the EA will develop a trial proposal which includes suitable triggers for determining when conditions are appropriate. The conditions may not be suitable for this in 2012.

It was agreed that engagement with the parish council would be essential and for WW/EA to involve them in understanding the more specific local concerns (aesthetic, commercial, wildlife welfare or ecological) and possible relevant solutions and their costs (financial, social and environmental) and that this may be done through another organisation such as a wildlife trust. This engagement needs to start well before any trial so that they have an input.

A Murrison also enquired whether peer review was feasible. WW confirmed that the original investigation had been subject to both review by the EA and by a panel of independent technical experts (in ground waters and chalk river ecology). Their views may not be easily interpreted by the residents either so suitable peer review could be considered through the engagement process.

9c) Request for financial assistance towards costs involved in resurfacing of main driveway to parish

church: - Churchwardens Mr. Tim Merrell & Mrs. Jean Knapp write: - 'As a result of extreme deterioration and the increasing risk of accidents, we have had to resurface the church drive of the parish church, St Michael the Archangel, at great expense. St Michaels is Grade 1 listed, and any work of enhancement or repair to the building or the churchyard has to be rigorously superintended by English Heritage as well as the Salisbury Diocese, and is generally costly. The method used in resurfacing the driveway, which was required by both parties, meets their exacting standards and provides a very durable surface that should not require further attention for many years. It has eliminated the standing water problems of the past, which occurred on almost every occasion after rain, and now provides a pleasantly appealing, smooth, safe and comfortable access around the church for those who are fully mobile, have walking difficulties or are wheelchair bound. The work, which has been completed to a very high standard, was undertaken by the Mere-based firm of Kingsmere Surfacing. As you know, with the crossing of two designated public footpaths, interconnecting side paths and the church drive itself linking these two routes further, St Michaels churchyard is an open space much used as a walking route by the local community. Now that the church drive has a smooth and pothole free surface, by comparison to the worn tarmac of the public footpaths, we are already noticing that more daily users are including passage along the drive, or parts of it, in their route across the churchyard. Accordingly, we are writing on behalf of the Parochial Church Council, and in the absence of a Priest-in-Charge, to seek financial assistance for the work from the Parish Council. The cost, inclusive of VAT was nearly £11,000 which we can ill afford and a positive contribution would be greatly appreciated. We hope that the Parish Council can help support the Parish Church, which is at the centre of community life and has provided spiritual and practical support to the people of Mere for over a thousand years.'

9d) Interim Internal Audit Report:- The Parish Council's appointed internal auditor, Mr. John Wilson, carried out is interim internal audit on Thursday, 9th February 2012 and this is his report:

I have carried out an interim internal audit of the Mere Parish Council Financial Statements for the year ending 30 April 2012. In my opinion the Council has maintained proper accounting records and the financial statements have been properly prepared. I would like to acknowledge the assistance I have received from the Clerk, Lindsey Wood. She certainly made this task easier by having, as always, everything read to hand and in such good order.

Information Items

Planning applications determined

Application Number: S / 2012 / 9

Location: 15 Whitemarsh, Mere, Warminster.

Proposal: Single storey extension

Decision: APPROVED

Date of Decision: 17/02/2012

Application Number: S / 2012 / 107

Location: Castle Hill Barn Castle Hill Lane, Mere, Warminster.

Proposal: Fell x 1 ash

Decision: APPROVED

Date of Decision: 05/03/2012

Application Number: S / 2012 / 66

Location: Lander House Castle Street, Mere, Warminster.

Proposal: Retrospective change of use from shop to residential.

Decision: APPROVED

Date of Decision: 07/03/2012

Newsletters/Magazines/Periodicals

Wiltshire Wildlife Trust – Members Magazine Spring 2012

Clerks & Councils Direct – March 2012 – Issue 80