

**Environment Scrutiny  
Committee**

**31<sup>st</sup> August 2005**

**Scrutiny Committee  
Briefing Note:**

Flash Flooding

**Recommendations:**

That members of the Environment Scrutiny Committee note this report.

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## **Background**

Parts of Oxford were effected by flash flooding in two separate storms at the end of June 2005. The areas affected included the Eastern Bypass between the BMW plant and Rose Hill, which was closed for a number of hours on Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> June and Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> June. Businesses on the Oxford Science Park in Littlemore were flooded, as were roads on the Osney Mead Industrial Estate and Botley Road under the railway bridge.

Residential areas such as Northway and Cowley Road were also affected, but unlike the winter floods of previous years there wasn't widespread flood damage to homes.

## **Scrutiny Committee Concerns**

Members of the Environment Scrutiny Committee have expressed concerns about the incidents of flash flooding that have taken place in Oxford this summer. The Committee has taken an interest in flooding in the past, carrying out a review into the winter floods of 2003 and scrutinising the city's flood plan (which is also on this agenda).

According to the Environment Scrutiny Committee Flooding review group, the 2003 floods were caused by a combination of factors including rivers, streams and ditches bursting their banks and water and sewage rising through the floor of homes as the water table became saturated. Flash floods, as the name suggests, are often the result of massive and sudden rainstorms. In urban areas drainage and surfaces may not be able to deal with large amounts of water in a short period. This appears to have been the case at the end of June, when the floods were caused by heavy rain over a relatively short period of time.

Members of the Committee are keen to ensure that steps are taken to reduce the impact of flash flooding in the city. Although the incidents in Oxford at the end of June were quite minor when compared to high profile flooding elsewhere in the UK, it is important that steps are taken to try and prevent repeat incidents. Officers from City Works and representatives from Thames

Water have been invited to the Committee to answer questions regarding this issue.

## **Responsibilities**

Responsibility for drainage clearance is a little complicated. A single private drain is the responsibility of the owner of the property to maintain, clear and repair if necessary. A private sewer is the joint responsibility of every household draining into it. They remain private until they connect to the public sewer, even though they may run under roads or pavements. Blockages and repairs of private sewers are the responsibility of all households upstream of the problem. Thames Water has to ensure that the public sewers are kept clear. Oxford City Council is responsible for clearing highway gullies on unclassified roads across the city and highway drains that link to outfalls in parts of the city, while Oxfordshire County Council are responsible for the drainage of the classified roads.

The Environment Scrutiny Committee Flooding review recommended that the City Council ensure that all gullies and drains are cleared during the autumn and after the fall of leaves. Whilst this recommendation referred to the prevention of winter flooding, clear gullies and drains will also help to prevent flash flooding. The review group also recommended that the City Council co-ordinate the regular clearing of rubbish in drains and pipe systems and the potential obstacles in major watercourses that are the responsibility of other agencies. This would also assist the flow of water during a heavy rainstorm.

Details of the drainage clearance programme should be set out in the Oxford flood plan, which is also on the Committee's agenda. Members should satisfy themselves that steps are taken to ensure the measures recommended by the Flooding review group and accepted by the Executive Board are carried out.

## **Conclusions**

Officers from City Works and representatives from Thames Water have been invited to the Committee to answer member's questions. At this stage the Committee is asked to note this report.