

MINUTES OF MEETING  
of Manston Farmers  
held at Manston Village Hall  
on Thursday 30<sup>th</sup> October 2008 at 2.00 pm

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PRESENT:	Mr. D Ash	Newlands Farm
	Mr. N Ash	Newlands Farm
	Mr. R Ash	Newlands Farm
	Mr. N Bateman	KCC Kent Highway Services (KHS)
	Mr. A Burbridge	Little Newlands
	Mr. R Goodban (Chairman)	Lydden Farm
	County Cllr C Hibberd	KCC Member for Thanet Villages Div.
	Mr. D Spanton	Nash Farm
	Mr. D Steed	Spratling Court Farm
	Mr. M Whelam	NFU Secretary & Mutual Insurance Agent
	Mrs. A Twyman	Clerk to Manston PC

Apologies were received from Mr. R Montgomery and Mr. G Philpott.

Mr. Goodban welcomed those present to the Meeting, which had been called at the request of Cllr Hibberd.

Cllr Hibberd stated that he was attending as the local County Cllr, rather than as the KCC Lead Member for Highways, and had requested the meeting following discussions of the flash floods in Manston during the heavy storms of late Summer 2007, and hoped that it would result in greater understanding between KHS and local Farmers.

Mr. Bateman outlined KHS's responsibility for drainage of water falling on the highway (including that from adjacent land), to an outfall – into a Southern Water (SW) drain or open watercourse. Professional drainage engineers were building up expertise to improve drainage over the whole county. With highway inspectors, they were using the latest IT systems to build a full data base of drainage installations (together with other highway infrastructure details), and up-dating it, with details of work required and completed. This enabled priority setting for repairs and optimization of operations teams' routes and their work to be recorded.

In particular, when gullies were cleared, the arisings would be weighed and amount of flushing required recorded, so that future frequency and level of work required to maintain individual gullies could be predicted and work scheduled accordingly. Operations teams had discretion as to the work required on site to maintain clear gullies, to deal with re-calls etc. The schedule for maintenance and reported faults was available on the KCC website. Where natural dips in the landscape resulted in water being trapped to soak away, investment would be required for drainage infrastructure.

General discussion followed, with the following points being raised:-

Wash-off of top-soil from fields exacerbated the blocking of gullies, as it was washed into them and set, but this was regarded as unusual, occurring only when the fields bore no crop.

Use of narrow country roads as “rat runs” resulted in grit and other debris dropped from vehicles and washing into gullies; vehicles also cut into the soil banks on the roadsides, breaking down the banks so that more soil washed into the roads, and hence the gullies. Cllr Hibberd pointed out that the New Haine Rd. would stop use of “rat runs” to a great extent, a view which was not widely shared, especially as there would be no improved link to the East Kent Access Rd. on which construction was expected to start in 2009.

It was pointed out that farmers had an obligation to retain topsoil on their fields; the strip of land beside the roads was contaminated by spray from passing vehicles, increased due to lack of carriageway drainage (e.g. the stretch of the Haine Rd. north from the Lord of the Manor). This resulted in soil and aquifer pollution. Mr. Bateman acknowledged this problem, and would ascertain whether the New Haine Rd. had a sealed drainage system, which he believed was so.

1-2 metres alongside highways was lost to farming for the reasons outlined above.

Roadside pollution (principally road salt) was great enough to kill plant life on verges and banks, including hedges. This encouraged erosion, and it was impossible to establish new vegetation on re-built banks which were easily eroded away. Kerbstones would be welcome along country roads.

It was agreed that the creation of new drop-kerbs and hardstanding on previously unpaved areas added to the drainage problems; Mr. Bateman pointed out that a small up-stand should be retained to avoid water draining onto the hardstanding and possibly entering buildings; the public could help to keep their homes and outbuildings safe in this way. Planning and highways permission was required to create dropped kerbs, and problems likely to arise would be considered.

It was suggested that farmers would be willing to accommodate soakaways on their land. There was concern as to farmers’ and landowners’ liability if a bund, built to prevent water running off their land onto the highway, burst and released a torrent; slow run-off was felt to be better.

Mr. Bateman pointed out that there was no problem with small quantities of “clean” water draining off fields, as the drains could cope with this – problems arose with large volumes with soil, vegetation etc. in the run-off which blocked gullies. Land occupiers should reduce this as much as practically possible – for example a holding pond system to allow settlement of solid substances before clear water ran off might be a better solution. The present system was accepted as being inadequate for storms of a ferocity experienced only once in 50 years on average (“50-year storms”).

Mr. Goodban suggested that a range of solutions was required and that it must be accepted that exceptional storms would require immediate clearing of gullies.

Mr. Bateman’s priorities were firstly, to clear standing water on high-speed roads (as this could lead to fatal accidents), secondly to prevent flooding of homes and thirdly to clear flooding of local roads. In general, lower-priority problems were more easily solved. Some capital funding was available for prevention of problems and flexibility built into contracts should improve performance.

Mr. Bateman advised that KHS had a fleet of 63 gritting lorries, their use triggered by forecasts from the Met Office of low temperatures; generally extreme weather conditions are becoming more frequent and the Met Office advises on infrastructure designs accordingly. Cllr Hibberd felt that more information was required to plan ahead, and specifications were intended to be sufficient for 50 years. Thanet was very susceptible to extreme conditions.

Mr. Bateman reported that the work measurement he had described had already resulted in more frequent emptying of gullies in Manston Court Rd. being scheduled; also engineers were working on solutions to the problem of flooded properties in Flete Rd. Mr. Spanton reported that gullies in Nash Rd. were regularly full and required more attention and the road received run-off from the adjacent factory car parks, threatening to flood his farm yard.

The 08458 247 800 line continued to be available for reports from the public of highway problems. KHS worked in co-operation with TDC, with a dedicated phone link for referral of calls. It was important that callers obtained an incident number, which they could use to track their reports, either through the KHS section of the KCC website ([www.kent.gov.uk](http://www.kent.gov.uk)) or by phoning back on the above line. At KHS, four professional engineers worked with the operations crew supervisors, receiving job details and feedback on problems.

Gulley blockages typically varied between rural and urban areas, but powerful diggers and high-pressure hoses were able to clear these. Leaves from the 28,000 highway trees (and total of 500,000 trees in Kent) added to problems in the Autumn, with road sweeping prioritized accordingly.

It was agreed that exchanges of ideas, such as at this meeting, were very worthwhile. Cllr Hibberd called for improved working between the County and District Councils and more awareness of the huge rural area in Thanet. Communication needed to be more effective, and Manston Parish Council would play a part in achieving this.

The Chairman thanked everyone for attending, and the meeting was closed at 3.45 pm approx.