

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Portfolio Holder for Environmental Health and Land Drainage Advisory Group
AUTHOR/S: Chief Environmental Health Officer

16th September 2003

COVELL'S DRAIN SWAVESEY

Purpose

1. To report to Members on the ongoing works and current condition of the Covell's Drain and associated embankments.

Background

2. The above watercourse has been the source of particular problems in recent years. Most notable of these are the breaches that occurred to the right embankment in 1998 (Easter) and 3rd January 2003. Over the past three years, considerable strengthening works have occurred along the right hand embankment, which have improved the stability and integrity of the bank over a distance of approximately 2km. However a substantial section of the right embankment between the Mow Fen Drove and the River Ouse (approx 500m) remains in its original condition and is still prone to future breaches.

Considerations

3. In April 2003, the Environment Agency finalised the draft report on the flood defence study of the river Ouse between St. Ives and Earith. The section that relates to the Fen Drayton lakes was presented to local Parish and District Councils and local landowners at the Brampton office of the Agency.
4. Following extensive discussions and requests from the South Cambs representatives, the Agency appeared to agree to the removal of two short sections (approx 100m) of the main river embankments in the Fen Drayton area. It was generally accepted that this action would allow the rapid evacuation of flood waters from the lakes area thereby reducing the threat of flooding and the potential for a further breach to the right bank of Covell's drain downstream of Mow Fen drove.
5. In July 2003, the Council approached the Environment Agency with a request to carry out the above works to the right bank of the river Ouse as agreed in April 2003. However, in its reply dated 5 August 2003, the Agency have advised that works are 'extremely unlikely' to be undertaken in the current financial year due to the consultative process that must be followed.

Legal Implications

6. The Council's legal obligations only extend to carrying out maintenance on the watercourse to enable the free flow of water. However, there will be an expectation among members of the public, the local drainage board and the Environment Agency that the Council will repair any future breach to the embankments. There are, therefore, serious civic or moral implications associated with this issue.

Financial Implications

7. It is difficult to assess the financial implications should a future breach occur in the Covell's drain embankment. However, based on past events, a sum of £5,000 is the minimum likely to be required to put repairs in place.

Sustainability Implications

8. It is important that the embankments of this watercourse are in a stable condition in order to allow for maintenance to be undertaken in a sustainable manner and to afford protection to the communities in the Fen Drayton and Swavesey areas.

Staffing Implications

9. None

Recommendations

10. That the Advisory Group recommends to the Portfolio Holder the type of representations that should be made to the Environment Agency.

Background Papers: The following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

Draft Report on Earith to St. Ives Study
Correspondence with Environment Agency

Contact Officer: Patrick Matthews, Drainage Manager, Tel: 01223 443472