

Westham Pond - Summer 2018

The Parish Council tried to locate the inlet pipe at the pond in 2016 and 2017 because neighbouring properties were reporting flooding in their gardens. After a good search two Contractors were unable to find a header wall so they reinstated the pond leaving a channel from a possible water course exposed when they dug their trench. The channel was monitored to see if it continued leaking water into the pond and help reduce the flooding in the affected gardens. Residents who appeared were generally pleased with the work that was done. In June 2018 we received a call and email to say there was still a problem when it rains heavily so we called in Wealden District Council's Drainage Engineer to see if he could help.

Having had a site meeting with residents another site meeting was arranged with the Drainage Engineer to try and establish the drainage system. We needed to find out whether the cause of the flooding is under Parish Council land but as there are several other land owners who could also be responsible Wealden agreed to fund the investigative work. Due to problems they could not proceed with normal types of testing and recommended a dye test. We are now waiting for the results of the dye test.

The severe weather continued, water levels and oxygen levels dropped and around the weekend of the 29th July some of the carp died. A local hire company was called and we arranged for an appropriate pump and generator to be fitted. It was fitted on the 30th July. A plan was then put in place whereby the pond was checked daily by a Parish Councillor and a local company monitored the pump, removed it overnight and reinstalled it every morning including weekends and over the bank holiday. The reason it was removed each night was because it was felt it might keep those who lived in neighbouring properties awake. The pump worked well and this was proved by our Ecological Expert and the fact that on the occasions it was removed more fish died. It is still in place because it has not rained enough. We considered removing the fish but this was not a practical option and we continued aerating the little water that was left.

The Fire Brigade was asked if they could top up the pond for us but they had nowhere to draw any water from. The Environment Agency said the problem was nationwide and the RSPCA said it was 'natural selection' and were happy we are doing all we can. They all said the problem was caused by the severe weather and was not due to a lack of maintenance.

The Parish Council was offered advice by residents on how it must proceed, some demanding the pond is de-silted. When we were about to carry out the work to the bank in 2012 we met the County Archaeologist at the pond and he said he would be unlikely to agree to anything more than hand deep because the pond is of archaeological significance because it is near Pevensey Castle. I checked if it would still be the case now and under the circumstances we could de-silt to a limited depth but we would have to have an archaeologist in attendance. We may be able to get someone from the local Archaeology Society though.

The Parish Council had already commissioned its own report from an independent Ecological and Pond Management Expert. He was recommended indirectly by the Environment Agency. His report was received by the Parish Council in August and was discussed by the Full Council. His report said de-silting is not the only option.

It was also thought and Wealden agreed it would help them if we could try to locate the inlet pipe again and it seemed sensible to do this whilst the water levels are down. Wealden's contractors were approached and we waited for a date from them. This work will be paid for by the Parish Council.

We then received calls from two residents reporting rats at the pond. The pond has always attracted rats because it is a pond but it was suggested it may be because people feed ducks bread and they should feed them seeds etc instead. The Parish Council has run competitions with local schools to educate the children. However some residents say they will continue

taking their children and grandchildren to feed the ducks bread because it is what they did as children. It was also suggested a lectern or sign could be erected but there were various reasons the request was denied and it was agreed to see if the competition ie; pester power would help. The Chairman and Clerk also visited a pond in West Sussex and found a much smaller sign which councilors were asked to consider instead. That said it must also be noted that there is a particularly bad problem with rats this year and the Senior Environment Health Officer said he has never known anything like it in his sixteen years in the role. We asked Environmental Health to visit the pond and do whatever they think is necessary.

It was also suggested that children might get stuck in the silt but there are lifebuoys nearby should this be the case. We checked with our insurance company and they confirm the problem is nationwide and taping off is not necessary.

A red algae was also reported and the caller said it is dangerous to dogs. Rain seemed to disperse it that day but it appeared again the next day. Toxic algae is rare but we asked the Environment Agency to test it and a notice was put in the notice board advising residents not to let their dogs go in the water in the meantime.

It should also be noted that the Parish Council took over Westham Pond from the District Council in 1975 and is legally committed to keeping it preserved as a rural horse pond.

At the last Parish Council Meeting which was on 17th September 2018, Councillors resolved to;

- Find out if planning permission is required for de-silting
- Get prices to de-silt the Pond
- Draft a Management Plan for the next Full Council Meeting.
- Tidy up the brambles, trees etc around the pond area.
- Ask Hadlow College to assess the problems at the pond.
- Erect the same signs as there are at Lindfield pond to discourage visitors from feeding the ducks.
- Talk to Environmental Health about the wording of a poster for the notice board so visitors know what to do if they are bitten by a rat.
- Consider setting up a Management Committee in the future.

Where are we today?

- Investigations to locate the inlet pipe found no evidence of an inlet pipe and it was agreed the Parish Council has fulfilled its obligations under Riparian Rights. It is now the District Council's responsibility to find out why the gardens of some of the neighbouring properties are flooding.
- Contractors have been asked to make the information signs about the ducks. They will be erected once we have them.
- Prices are being sought to de-silt the Pond. Planning permission would not be required. Tests are being carried out to see if the silt is contaminated for disposal purposes and we are waiting for the results.
- The process has started to draft a Pond Management Plan.
- Hadlow College has withdrawn its offer to help.
- Environment Health have treated the rat problem and we are waiting to hear from them if further posters are necessary.
- We have fenced off the area around the silt as a precaution.
- We have put a notice in the noticeboard about the toxic algae with the wording the Environment Agency advised. Many waters are susceptible to problems with blue-green algae, particularly between June and November. Once algal numbers are high, the bloom is likely to resist through the season, declining only at the onset of winter weather conditions.
- We continue to talk with the Environment Agency and the RSPCA to see if anything more can be done.

- We continue to monitor the Pond daily.