

## **SAFAG-report to Shipston Town Council-June 2025.**

Experience has shown that developing a relationship with new and existing contacts (landowners, farmers, EA, WCC, Severn Trent and anybody who is interested in SAFAG's activities) is the key to securing the co-operation and support necessary to underpin SAFAG's success.

In many cases, it's the personal connection. To enhance the business-like approach to this, it's proposed to issue business/contact cards (designed by Ben Goren) to Mike McCarthy, Brian Cooper, John Dinnie and Ben Goren. These will display SAFAG and STC logos as well as key contact details (email and phone numbers). They will be particularly useful when SAFAG members attend presentations and events.

**Recommendation-that STC approve the printing and issuing of business/contact cards at a quoted cost of £130.00 (excluding VAT if applicable).**

***This expenditure will be allocated to the SAFAG designated bank account.***

Whenever SAFAG attends events or gives a presentation to interested parties (such as clubs and organisations), the promotional material is generally spread over tables provided by the organisers/hosts. Display boards aren't usually available. It will deliver a better visual impact if SAFAG can acquire and use some table- top portable display boards. A Wonderwall Exhibition Panel Display kit is lightweight and comes with its own bag. It has 3 primary boards (each 900mm wide and 600mm high-with centre top section). The kit can be returned within 30 days if not suitable.

It's proposed that this be stored at NCH and, when not being used by SAFAG, could be made available to other local groups/organisations, as approved by STC.

**Recommendation-that STC approve the purchase of a table- top display kit at a quoted cost of £138.**

***This expenditure will be allocated to the SAFAG designated bank account.***

Brian Cooper represented SAFAG at the Shipston Annual Town meeting. A brief report was given explaining 'slow the flow' and SAFAG's activities covering the previous 12 months. The plans for the coming year were also explained. It also provided the opportunity for some post meeting networking, especially about the forthcoming 'River Day' on 15<sup>th</sup> June.

Mike McCarthy and Brian Cooper visited Long Compton to carry out an initial overview inspection to locate the leaky woody dams installed across a couple of the watercourses/streams. These are all slated dams and those which were found were in good condition. There are some that will benefit from being reinforced with rebar as this would retain the brash which inhibits the water flow.

The same intrepid duo returned a couple of weeks later to carry out the first phase of the maintenance work. This covered the leaky dams which had been easily located on the steep upper slopes-approx 50% of the total dams recorded to be on site. The rebar was installed on the upstream side of the interventions to catch the brash and help slow the flow of the water. As evidenced by the enclosed picture (see below), getting to some of the dams was challenging as the access was, on occasions, significantly obstructed by overgrown undergrowth.



To continue with the work in this location, a further visit was arranged. Brian Cooper and John Dinnie were tasked with finding the dams not previously located and, if possible, carry out any minor repair/maintenance work. Access was still significantly obstructed by large sections of brambles and dense undergrowth. Those that were found were, with one exception (a dislodged plank from the top of the dam), in very good condition. It was observed that, in most cases, there was a large gap between the bottom of the dam and the water level, almost certainly caused by the water flow deepening the bottom of the channel. This made getting down to the dam difficult. Instead, the interventions were photographed and their locations recorded on the 'What3Words' app by John Dinnie.

No decision has yet been made about what remedial work will be undertaken.

Simultaneously, Mike McCarthy and volunteer Simon Brookes visited Nethercote Brook to inspect the 37 recorded interventions. These were found to be a mixture of NFM and slatted dams, 7 of which (all slatted), were leaning badly due to the winter storms (major signs of high flows). Simon Brookes also took the opportunity to use a photographic app with GPS time, date etc. A contractor will be needed (quote to be obtained) and, at the request of the landowner, the works must be completed by July.

With the experience and skills of the team now expanding, the work group can be split into teams (minimum of 2 for safety reasons). This will increase the capacity to carry out more inspections/minor repair work on interventions in the future.

SAFAG's work has been recognised by the Environment Agency (EA). A recently published case study-'Working with nature to reduce flood and erosion risks' made specific reference to SAFAG's successful discussions with the community and landowners, leading to the installation of more than 850 natural flood management features in the Shipston area. According to the report, the project is thought to have reduced the flood risk to more than 80 homes.

The relevant extract from the case study, together with a summary overview of SAFAG's current aims, prepared by Ben Goren, has been posted on SAFAG's website.

Ben Goren updates SAFAG's website with news and reports relating to all NFM and flood mitigation related activities across the Stour catchment area and regularly attends Brailes PC meetings when flood related matters are to be raised/discussed.

For some time, Mike McCarthy stored at his house a supply of filled sandbags and a large quantity of new nylon unfilled bags which were supplied by WCC, free of charge, some years ago. With the house now on the market, they have now been moved to the SAFAG store at the WCC depot. It's planned to offer them to local Parish Councils, especially Long Compton and Brailes (the latter has since received some of the filled sandbags), for the benefit of 'at risk' residents.

*Note-a large supply of pre-filled sandbags is already stored at the WCC Depot, in the section of the building currently used by Lawns2Mow. These are available for distribution to Shipston residents as and when required.*

Under the current procedure, the quote from a contractor needs to be approved by STC before work can be carried out. Recent events have indicated this can cause a hold up, especially where there is a window of opportunity because of ground conditions/access. It's requested that, where such constraints arise, the process of authorisation be modified as follows,

SAFAG will designate a maximum budget for the defined work (excluding VAT which is recoverable).

SAFAG requests authorisation from STC, at a meeting of the Town Council, for the maximum budget figure.

Where the quote falls under the budget figure, the work can proceed without the need for the quote to be submitted to STC for prior approval.

The invoice is then submitted to STC after the work is carried out, for scrutiny and payment approval in the usual way.

Where a quote exceeds the pre-set budget figure, the work can't proceed until it has been approved by STC at a monthly meeting.

The SAFAG team intends to have a meeting in June to consider all the options which may exist to streamline the procedures for the use of contractors. These will then be presented to STC for due consideration.

At the April meeting of STC, a request was made to allow the required works on Pig Brook to proceed, without the usual submission and pre-works approval of a quote, because of the prevailing ground conditions and timescales. This was given 'the nod' by councillors.

Joe Dee has provided a verbal quote of £2,700 plus VAT. There may be a slight variation to this, as more posts may be needed to address the erosion issues. 4 days work is estimated and will involve moving a lot of heavy plant across the estates. It's understood that this is due to start during week commencing 26<sup>th</sup> May.

The proposals for the repair/upgrade to the leaky dams on Stretton Brook have been approved. This will involve replacing some of the smaller dams with stronger ones upstream of the old railway embankment.

**Recommendation-that STC approve the quote of £900 plus VAT from Simon Healey for the agreed works on Stretton Brook.**

***This expenditure will be costed against the SAFAG designated bank account.***

## **Updates**

1. **From the March report.** Brian Cooper has sent email requests to local Parish Councils and Chipping Campden Town Council, seeking donations to help with the cost of intervention maintenance in the Stour catchment.
2. **From the March report.** The Compton Scorpion Estate has approved the recommendations from the EA and Severn Rivers Trust (SRT) for the installation of a range of interventions, including ponds, leaky dams and wetlands. Funding has yet to be secured.
3. **From the April report.** The desilting of the main pond at Sutton under Brailes has been completed-arranged and funded by the EA and SRT. At the end of this report there are photos showing the pond before and after the remedial work. In the capacity as Mayor of Shipston, John Dinnie sent a letter of appreciation to both the landowners and the EA for supporting this maintenance work.

A response has been received from Suzanne Ward, a senior and long-standing EA Manager in the Midlands. It included the following statement.

*'We would be happy to work with the Town Council and have allocated £40k Water Environment Investment Funding (WEIF), to deliver further work for the Stour for 2025/2026 via SRT. We are also working with SRT to look at the future project options where they align with funding priorities.'*

4. **From the April report.** Following discussions with another landowner at Sutton under Brailes, there is a solution in hand to address the issues of the bund which was causing excessive water run-off into Sutton Brook. The problem was identified as a significant build-up of silt, which the landowner intends to remove and re-use elsewhere, thereby restoring the bund to its original operational state.
5. **From the April report.** The recently approved order of additional rebar has been delivered to the WCC depot for safe storage with the other SAFAG consumables. The on-site record had been updated.
6. **From the April report.** The flood awareness flyers have been printed (a total of 1,500) and delivered to STC. Once the invoice from KMS Litho has been received and paid, a reimbursement request will be submitted to Stour Valley Lions Club in accordance with the terms of the support agreement. At the next SAFAG meeting (projected mid-June), the team will plan the



delivery/distribution of the flyers to the at-risk areas of Shipston, local villages and other key locations.



Pond at Sutton under Brailes-before desilting.



Pond at Sutton under Brailes-after desilting.

