

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

A warm welcome was extended to STC Councillor Vanessa Benjamin-Smith who attended the August SAFAG meeting and has expressed an interest in joining the core team of Mike McCarthy, Brian Cooper, John Dinnie and Ben Goren.

Any additional help will be very much appreciated.

John Dinnie has decided to resign as a councillor on STC in mid-September but intends to remain active with SAFAG. As the current representative councillor, this may impact on the structure of the team which will need to be discussed with STC.

The digital collation and storage of the various records/maps/intervention assessment notes/forms etc generated a prolonged debate at the recent monthly meeting. The primary objectives are to deliver formats which are not time consuming to complete and are easy to access. No final decision has been made, and enquiries continue to ensure that all options are considered and evaluated. In the meantime, the key information continues to be gathered, with Ben Goren reviewing how best to set up any agreed systems.

The recent assessments on some of the leaky dams have revealed too large a gap between the bottom of the dam and the water levels. The simplest solution is to install rebar on the upstream side to catch the brash and improve operational effectiveness. This task can be carried out by the SAFAG team. With 2 pieces of rebar per dam, the existing supply at the WCC store will be insufficient, especially as this seems to be a common issue which is likely to be encountered again when the next phase of assessments is carried out.

**Recommendation-that STC approve the purchase of 60 x 1 metre lengths of rebar at an online cost of £181.20 from B&Q (free delivery).**

**This expenditure will be costed against the SAFAG designated bank account (Maintenance Fund).**

Severn Rivers Trust (SRT) has been active within the Stour catchment for several years and has provided the funding for some of SAFAG's flood mitigation schemes. One major project in Todenham (upstream of Shipston), completed by SRT in 2024, isn't well known and deserves wider recognition for the positive impact on the environment and flood prevention measures.

Supported by the EA (Environment Agency) and SDC, this involved the construction of new ponds, scrapes and the creation of a 4-hectare (9.88 acres) woodland area, with over 3,000 native trees planted. These will improve water quality and enhance riparian habitat. The ponds are situated beside a 1.2km section of Knee Brook and, together with the trees and scrapes, will combine to slow water flow, mitigate flood risk and reduce surface runoff, thereby limiting the sediment and nutrient pollution that can damage freshwater ecosystems.

SRT's Facebook page (entry dated 3/4/2024) has aerial video footage showing the extent of the tree planting at this location.

The next phase of intervention inspections/assessments is expected to commence in December 2025 or January 2026. The targeted areas, in priority order, are the Knee Brook catchment, Brailes and/or the Sibfords. Any identified major repairs/upgrades will be carried out by contractors. Subject to access permission, this will start in late Spring 2026, when the ground conditions and weather are expected to be favourable.

The booklet 'Shipston on Stour, Tredington and Newbold Emergency Advice', available on STC's website, primarily covers flooding. Dated Spring 2015, the required amendments have been prepared, with one exception. The Emergency Rest Centre location (Sheldon Bosley Hub) is believed to be incorrect but, so far, enquiries to obtain the new details have been unsuccessful. In addition, it appears that the existing booklet can't be amended but will require a replacement which will incur a cost. This will be discussed at the September SAFAG meeting and any recommendation to proceed will be subject to STC approval.

***In the meantime, it's suggested that STC nominate/select/confirm an appropriate Emergency Rest Centre for inclusion in the new booklet.***

Using an excel spreadsheet record, the balance in the SAFAG designated bank account (held by STC) is divided into 3 separate funds-General Fund (running expenses of SAFAG), Project Fund (all new schemes) and Maintenance Fund (repairs and upgrades to existing interventions).

STC has supported the Maintenance Fund during 2024 and 2025, with annual grants of £5,000 (total of £10,000). £13,000 has also been transferred from the other 2 SAFAG funds (£5,000 from Project and £8,000 from General).

Income to this fund so far has been £23,000, with expenditure to date totalling £15,354.20. There is further outlay projected before the end of this year.

Even If SAFAG were to receive an annual grant of £5,000 from STC during 2026, there's an identified net expenditure trend which will inevitably require SAFAG to use the other 2 funds to further support the Maintenance Fund. Although this is possible in the short term (12 to 18 months), it's not sustainable over a longer period, especially if the volume of repairs increase as more inspections/assessments are carried out. It may also restrict SAFAG's ability to consider any new schemes using the Project Fund.

There will need to be a review of how SAFAG is funded. So far, attempts to secure funding from other external sources have proved unsuccessful, although efforts continue.

STC will need to consider how it wishes to financially support SAFAG's maintenance activities in the future, as the annual contribution of £5,000 is unlikely to be sufficient.

*Note-STC has decided to have a special meeting on 16<sup>th</sup> October to allow working groups to make representations and apply for a budget for the financial year 2026/2027.*

*SAFAG wants to be represented, preferably by both John Dinnie and Brian Cooper.*

In May, the local parish councils were contacted about the possibility of a donation to help with the maintenance work on the Stour catchment interventions.

There has been a belated response from the Cherington and Stourton Joint Parish Council, requesting further information. Mike McCarthy, with his extensive knowledge of the area, responded in time for their next Parish Council meeting on 18<sup>th</sup> August.

Mike McCarthy and John Dinnie visited Blockley Brook at Draycott (Kettles Barn) to inspect the various flood mitigation measures at that location-37 dams (a mixture of natural and slatted) and 2 offline ponds. The interventions were all installed over 4 phases, from 2017 to 2020. Also on-site is a sewage works.

As with recent inspections on other sites, the dense undergrowth proved obstructive. 1 slatted dam has been significantly damaged and another one (natural) washed away. The 2 offline ponds are starting to silt up. The water from Blockley Brook is channelled to the ponds by a diverter (*see picture below*).



John Dinnie and Brian Cooper revisited the location for an on-site meeting with the contractor, Joe Dee. By chance, the landowner was in the vicinity and came over for a chat. This provided the opportunity for introductions and to receive some very useful local information.

The ponds were starting to silt up and this was raised with the landowner who offered to arrange for these to be scraped (no SAFAG involvement/expenditure) by calling in a favour owed by the nearby quarry.

To carry out the repairs to the dams, the significant access constraints will need to be overcome, notably the steep slopes of the watercourse banks and the close proximity of a bird pen.

Permission to proceed with the work has been given by the landowner. It's estimated that it may take up to 2 days to complete and will involve heavy equipment and materials to address the erosion caused to the watercourse banks and rebuild both dams. Joe Dee was requested to provide a quote based on the worst-case scenario, with the expectation that, if the time taken is not as long as anticipated, the final invoice will be reduced accordingly. It's expected that work can be carried out before the end of September.

**Recommendation-that STC approve the quote of £920 plus VAT provided by Joe Dee for the repair work on the dams at Kettles Barn in Draycott (Blockley Brook).**

***This expenditure will be costed against the SAFAG designated bank account (Maintenance Fund).***

Blockley has a long history of property flooding, caused by Blockley Brook which flows through the village and on to Knee Brook.

Using his local knowledge, Mike McCarthy recently visited the upstream area to determine if there was scope for further flood mitigation measures. The brook runs through a steep valley with woodland on both sides. There are 4 large inline ponds (currently with erosion issues on the downstream banks), which offer the potential for water attenuation and slow the flow.

Further upstream, there's the possibility for wetlands and leaky wood dams-there's a large amount of logs readily available.

SAFAG has an excellent working relationship with the landowner, Northwick Estates, following the installation of interventions on other areas of their land in 2018.

Contact has been made with the EA and SRT about arranging an on-site visit/meeting to review and discuss the opportunities identified.

*Pictures of this area are included at the end of the report.*

In readiness for the planning re-seeding around a number of the repaired/upgraded leaky dams, the stock of seeds will need to be increased. This requires a special flood bund mixture which is supplied by Cotswold Seeds in Moreton.

We need 5 bags (25kgs each)-a total of 125kgs.

**Recommendation-that STC approve the purchase of 125kgs of flood bund mix seeding from Cotswold Seeds at a quoted cost of £695 (no VAT).**

**This will be costed against the SAFAG designated bank account (Maintenance Fund).**

The South Warwickshire Local Climate Engagement Event will be taking place at Leamington Spa on 17<sup>th</sup> October. It will include a workshop on flooding. Mike McCarthy will be attending to represent SAFAG.

Organised by SRT, there's a meeting of the Warwickshire Avon Catchment Partnership at Coventry on 1<sup>st</sup> September. John Dinnie is attending to represent SAFAG.

### **Updates**

**From the July report.** The planned multi-agency meeting (inc SAFAG, SRT and the EA) with a group of South Warwicks farmers has now been deferred from Autumn of this year to March 2026. The objective is to promote flood mitigation measures with a visit to some local interventions. Environmental issues will also be reviewed. As this will be a dedicated purpose business meeting, SAFAG has committed to covering the basic refreshment costs (teas/coffees etc) and due authorisation will be sought from STC at the appropriate time.

**From the July report.** SRT's proposals for the Compton Scorpion area have been outlined in an assessment report produced in January 2025. This contains a list of prioritised recommendations, including flood mitigation, which have been agreed with the landowner. It's expected that the works will commence once approval is given by WCC.

**From the July report.** There has been further contact from Long Compton Parish Council about a possible donation to assist with the cost of intervention maintenance across the catchment area. They have decided to form their own flood action group, under the leadership of a new councillor, Jane Brewin, who has been contacted by John Dinnie. Local landowners are also represented on this new team. The discussions included how the new Long Compton Flood Action Group may wish to take over the responsibility for the interventions within the parish boundary and how SAFAG can help support the new team, especially with key contact details. Mike McCarthy will be attending the local meeting at Long Compton on 4<sup>th</sup> September which should enable some networking to identify matters of common interest.

**From the July and August reports.** Some of the recent leaky woody dam repairs/ upgrades (Stretton Brook, Pig Brook and Nethercote Brook) also required the restoration and securing of the banks of the watercourses due to erosion. These areas will need to be re-seeded. It's planned to carry out this task from mid-September to early October, as both the weather and ground conditions are expected to be more favourable.

For Nethercote Brook, the landowner has offered to do the re-seeding and SAFAG will supply the seeds.

**From the August report.** The low priority minor works required on the leaky dams at Butlers Road Farm (Long Compton) are expected to be carried out by the SAFAG team in February 2026.

**From the August report.** The long outstanding WCC Flood Strategy and the lack of funding for South Warwicks from the Regional Flood & Coastal Committee (RFCC) has been referred to WCC Councillor Dale Bridgewater, who is the new portfolio holder for flooding. The email enquiry has been acknowledged, and progress will be regularly reviewed and followed up.

**From the August report.** The September edition of the Shipston Forum (distributed to local households in late August/early September) contains a feature article on Mike McCarthy who, after 11 years with SAFAG, will be stepping down from his active role as team leader due to a pending house move away from the area. Fortunately, he will continue to offer help and support during the transitional period. An acknowledgement, with thanks, is also included in the Mayor's Column. The Forum will also be available to view on STC's website.

**From the August meeting.** Mike McCarthy, Brian Cooper, John Dinnie and David Hudson attended a Cornmill Meadows on-site meeting with Imogen Rutter of SRT. It provided the opportunity to visually review the planned location of the pond/scrape and consider the options to re-direct water from Pig Brook. It's understood that the works are due to commence in September/October, subject to access permission being obtained from the adjacent landowner.

**From the August report.** The planned woodland planting on the Sutton under Brailes side of Brailes Hill is likely to commence around December. It's estimated that there will be around 500 native species trees, and it will take approx 2 days to complete. SAFAG will be notified in advance by SRT, as this may provide some local volunteering opportunities.

If any STC councillor is prepared to help, subject to availability, please notify Brian Cooper. At this stage this is just registering possible interest, without commitment, until the dates/times and arrangements are confirmed.

Tree planting is a very environmentally efficient way of 'slowing the flow', mitigating flood risks and reducing water run-off.

**From the August report.** Joe Dee has completed the work on the missed 3 dams on Nethercote Brook. There was no additional cost to SAFAG. In fact, more work was carried out at that location by the contractor than had been discussed (primarily addressing the water erosion to the banks around a few of the other dams).



Above-one of the online ponds upstream of Blockley.



Possible area for wetlands and dams (chop and drop) upstream of Blockley.