

SAFAG-report to Shipston Town Council-October 2025.

John Dinnie attended the recent Warwickshire Avon Catchment Partnership Meeting in Coventry organised by SRT (Severn Rivers Trust). Much of it was devoted to actions being taken to protect and enhance wildlife habitat and the health of the various rivers and tributaries which make up the Severn catchment (includes the Avon and Stour).

Mink is an invasive species and in South Staffordshire they are being trapped and eradicated. This is in response to the reducing water vole population. There's no current activity in Warwickshire.

The beaver is now regarded as a native and protected species with the reintroduction being controlled by the Severn Beaver Partnership. They are interested in preparing rivers to be 'beaver ready'.

With the support of Severn Trent and WCC, extensive mapping data is now available and being used to evaluate the financial benefits of NFM (Natural Flood Management) projects. It's anticipated that this can be used to identify suitable areas for development and agency action in the Avon catchment (includes the River Stour).

Due to time constraints, the remaining sessions were condensed into the presentation of a list of objectives for future projects which will be circulated, and it's hoped the Partnership members can align these with their own future plans.

In the afternoon, there was a visit to a large area of CCC (Coventry City Council) land to inspect a redirected stream. In the 2 years the project has been running the stream is cutting itself an incised channel into the Warwickshire clay rather than spreading out into a wetland as was anticipated.

Councillor Dale Bridgewater, WCC Cabinet Portfolio Holder, Fire and Rescue and Community Safety (this includes flooding), has responded to the enquiry made about the outstanding update to the WCC Local Flood Risk Management Strategy and the apparent lack of funding from the Regional Flood and Coastal Committee (RFCC) for the South Warwicks Area.

As expected, other identified priorities, such as responding to flood events over the county, and other statutory functions (no elaborations given) have been cited as the reason for the delayed WCC Flood Risk Management Strategy update.

The Flood Risk Management team have been updating flooding risk assessments across the county, and these will be reviewed when considering future schemes, as will previous investment, viability and available funding.

Property flood resilience schemes (PFR) have been delivered in both Cherington and Lower Brailes, as well as significant works to a culvert in Long Compton. Furthermore, DEFRA funding has been provided for the NFM (Natural Flood Management) interventions implemented by SAFAG.

According to Councillor Bridgewater, the government has recently undertaken a consultation about how flood schemes are funded, with the intention of simplifying the process, and that the Stour catchment is always under consideration by WCC.

More information has since been provided about the PFR schemes in Brailes and Cherington. SAFAG has requested a meeting with Councillor Bridgewater, either in Shipston or at Shire Hall in Warwick. Campden House Estate lies in the western part of the Stour catchment.

In 2017, SAFAG installed interventions at this location-1 pond, 2 bunds and 9 leaky dams, the latter on a watercourse which feeds into the Cam and then on to Knee Brook.

SRT has recently arranged for the on-site pond to be de-silted, which will help reduce water run-off and flood risks further downstream.

The landowner will carry out any future maintenance on these interventions.

Picture below- the de-silted pond at Campden House Estate.



Mike McCarthy represented SAFAG at the inaugural meeting of the Long Compton Flood Action Group (LoCoFAG), a new working group which will report to Long Compton Parish Council. Attendees included local farmers (some of whom have SAFAG interventions on their land), Parish Councillor Jane Brewin, Sam Gibson (who has been working with SAFAG over the last 12 months), Mark Banning and Rianveer Mahal of the WCC Flood Team and some residents.

The agreed aim of the group is to prevent flooding to property within Long Compton, without detrimental downstream impact-this will need to be monitored.

Mapping where the water comes from, where it goes, flood areas and properties affected has already been completed. One key task is to locate and carry out a survey of the various culverts, to review condition and identify any maintenance requirements.

Mark Banning (WCC) intends to make an application for financial support from the next round of RFCC funding, commencing early 2027. Further options may also be available from WCC.

NFM mitigation measures will remain a priority over the short term, which is of interest to SAFAG as Long Compton and Nethercote Brook account for approx. 20% of the Stour catchment area and proportionate flooding levels. Sharing best practices is a priority.

This networking raises the interesting possibility of new NFM interventions in the current void between Long Compton and Shipston, which would contribute to 'slowing the flow'. Ben Goren and Mike McCarthy visited Brailes (Glebe Farm) to inspect the interventions on Sutton Brook, one of the primary watercourses feeding into the Stour. The power of Sutton Brook in spate conditions was evident, as the very high flows had damaged some of the slatted leaky dams.

One had been washed away, 3 were leaning badly and another was missing the bottom slat. (*see example photos below*). Also identified was the opportunity for some top logs to be inserted.

The landowner has approved the repairs and possible enhancements, together with access arrangements, and is receptive to possible new flood mitigation measures. A meeting has been arranged on 4th October to discuss the options.

A quote for the identified repair work has been obtained from Joe Dee and it's anticipated that this can be completed by the end of October, before the weather and ground conditions become less favourable.

Recommendation-that STC approves the quote of £1,750 plus VAT from Joe Dee for the repairs/upgrades to the dams on Sutton Brook in Brailes. This expenditure will be costed against the SAFAG designated bank account (Maintenance Fund).

Important update-Mike McCarthy and Ben Goren attended the recent meeting of Brailes Parish Council to give an overview of local flood mitigation measures being undertaken by SAFAG. The Parish Council have agreed to reimburse SAFAG with the net cost of the interventions works on Sutton Brook £1,750.





The visit to Sutton Brook in Brailles provided the opportunity to try out on a mobile phone an NFM Assessment Form, designed by Ben Goren, to record the key information relating to each intervention. This includes- date of assessment, assessor's name, name of the brook/watercourse, what3words location, picture, and condition status. It's part of the plan to create a centralised comprehensive record of all the NFM assets. Additionally, it will assist in planning periodic inspections. The process requires a certain grasp of technology (beyond the limited skills of the author of this report who yearns for the return of the parchment and quill). However, the benefit will be that the NFM interventions are properly accounted for and maintained, with a secure record being accessible to the key SAFAG members.

The major works carried out by contractors on interventions (primarily leaky dams) are dependent on key conditions- landowner consent, access, ground conditions, weather and contractor availability, with late Spring to early Autumn generally being the target time to initiate repairs and upgrades.

However, where more time critical action is required outside this time period, it becomes more problematic, especially when it's delayed because STC's approval of any quote is required at the next available TC (Town Council) meeting. It will be helpful if STC can consider and authorise the provision of a discretionary amount (not to exceed £2500 plus VAT) to overcome this timing problem.

It's most likely that this situation will occur in the autumn, when the works are required ahead of the anticipated adverse winter weather conditions. The quote can still be approved by STC at the next TC meeting, with the payment of the invoice still needing STC final authorisation (SAFAG will inspect the work prior to payment). This will ensure that any identified urgent repairs can be carried out promptly.

Recommendation-that STC authorises the creation of a discretionary budget amount from SAFAG's existing funds, not to exceed £2,500 plus VAT, to action urgent intervention repairs where the works are considered necessary before the quote can be approved at the next available STC monthly meeting. Any expenditure will be costed to the SAFAG designated bank account (Maintenance Fund).

Representing SAFAG, Mike McCarthy and John Dinnie had a meeting at Blockley with Nicola Edgar from the Environment Agency(EA) and Imogen Rutter (SRT). The objective was to inspect areas of Blockley Brook, upstream of the village, to consider the opportunities for flood mitigation measures initially identified by Mike McCarthy during an earlier visit.

After the meeting, Nicola Edgar provided some additional information relating to the location, including a map illustrating the water flow routes. Although it's acknowledged that there are future opportunities on Blockley Brook, it's not certain what types of intervention may be best suited for the area immediately upstream of Blockley village. Further investigation / enquiries will be needed. Any new flood mitigation measures would certainly benefit all the downstream communities, as Blockley Brook feeds into Knee Brook and then joins the Stour just south of Tidmington.

If arranged by the EA and SRT, any work would be project managed and funded by them without any direct involvement and financial support from SAFAG.

In August 2023, the EA commissioned JBA to carry out a Hydraulic Modelling Study of the Stour around Shipston, the contents of which were shared with SAFAG via a PowerPoint presentation.

The aim was to obtain a better understanding of flooding in the area, investigate the effects of NFM carried out in the wider catchment and provide a basis for investigations into possible works to reduce localised flooding.

The report also detailed 'the next steps', which included considering new/more gauges to better understand large flood events, the collection of relevant data about the effectiveness of NFM, investigate water storage areas/ target property level protection, improve flood zone mapping to better inform future developments, consider updates to flood alert warning areas and to reduce surface water run-off.

Since the study was originally published, no further information has been provided. Consequently, Mike McCarthy has requested an update report from the EA, which should also indicate to what extent the Modelling Study is still accurate/relevant. Brian Cooper has carried out the half yearly visual inspection of the SAFAG consumables held at the WCC Depot on the Brailes Road. Most items are held in a locked room, with some under cover at the rear of the yard which is covered by a security camera. No identified issues or concerns. The on-site record was updated where required. The next inspection will be in March 2026.

The booklet on STC's website 'Shipston on Stour, Tredington and Newbold on Stour Emergency Advice' was reviewed again at the recent SAFAG meeting. This document primarily covers the impact of flooding. STC has yet to decide on the location(s) of any Emergency Rest Centre(s). It has been decided to defer the completion of an updated document until this information can be provided. A new booklet will be required as the existing one can't be modified. Ben Goren has quoted £90 to prepare this, which can be actioned when the Emergency Rest Centre(s) details are known. Any proposed expenditure will require prior approval from STC and it's intended to cover the cost from the designated SAFAG General Fund.

There are approx. 860 interventions over the Stour catchment. It's planned to commence a 3- year rolling programme to inspect these to identify where repairs/upgrades will be

needed- a challenging target of approx. 290 per annum. It's Leaky woody dams have a finite life span, with many having been installed over the period 2016 to 2018. The structural stability of these is frequently reliant on the posts which are weakened when in water and this can affect the holding strength. In addition, the soil erosion of the watercourse banks is now a regular occurrence. difficult to predict the condition of the interventions prior to any inspection, but it's considered likely that an increasing number will require significant repairs. This will place an additional strain on the available funds, and this will be carefully monitored.

STC will be kept updated.

Recommendation-that STC approves the payment of £137.70 to Mike McCarthy to cover mileage expenses for the period April to September 2025. This expenditure will be costed against the SAFAG designated bank account (General Fund).

Updates

From the August report. The comprehensive minutes of the meeting in Cherington on 11th July about the local (Cherington and Stourton) sewage and flooding issues have finally been distributed. Since July, there has been a lot of work undertaken, primarily by Severn Trent Water (STW), with a total of 22 items to be completed by the end of January 2026. It's then intended to arrange a further meeting to obtain a detailed update from the relevant parties.

From the August and September reports. SRT intends to plant around 500 native trees at Sutton under Brailes (Brailes Hill area) in November or December, but this will be dependent on when they will become available from the nursery. Brian Cooper has a list of potential volunteers to help with this task, but their availability can't be confirmed until the proposed dates(s) are known.

From the September report. As the dams repaired by Simon Healey on Stretton Brook are in a wooded area, it's been decided that re-seeding won't be necessary. On Nethercote Brook, the landowner intends to carry out this task- half a bag of seeds (approx. 12.5kgs) has now been delivered.

Mike McCarthy took advantage of the recent favourable weather and ground conditions to visit Pig Brook to complete the re-seeding in that location.

From the September report. The orders for rebar and seeds have been received and delivered to the WCC Depot on the Brailes Road. The on-site record has been updated.

From the September report. Mike McCarthy visited Kettles Barn at Draycott to inspect the repairs/upgrades carried out by Joe Dee to the leaky woody dams on Blockley Brook. The landowner has already arranged for the de-silting of the on-site ponds and will use his own seeds to complete any re-seeding work required around the affected areas.

See pictures at the end of the report which shows one of the de-silted ponds and the dam built to replace the one washed away.

From the September report. Reference was made to SRT's work at Tidmington Farm, which included ponds and extensive tree planting, with their Facebook page (entry dated 3/4/2024) including a short aerial video footage of the tree planting only. A longer video (9

mins) has been sent to SAFAG, which shows the true scale of this project, especially the ponds and includes more extensive coverage of the planted areas (a total of more than 3,000 native trees). These flood mitigation measures are far more effective than leaky dams, with minimal maintenance required.

If anybody is interested in viewing the extended video, please contact Mike McCarthy (mike.mccarthy@safag.org) or Brian Cooper (brian.cooper@safag.org) who can forward the e-mail with the relevant link.

De-silted pond at Kettles Barn-Draycott. Borders Blockley Brook.



Replacement dam-Kettles Barn-Draycott. This also required some work to reconstruct and stabilise the banks of the watercourse due to water erosion.

