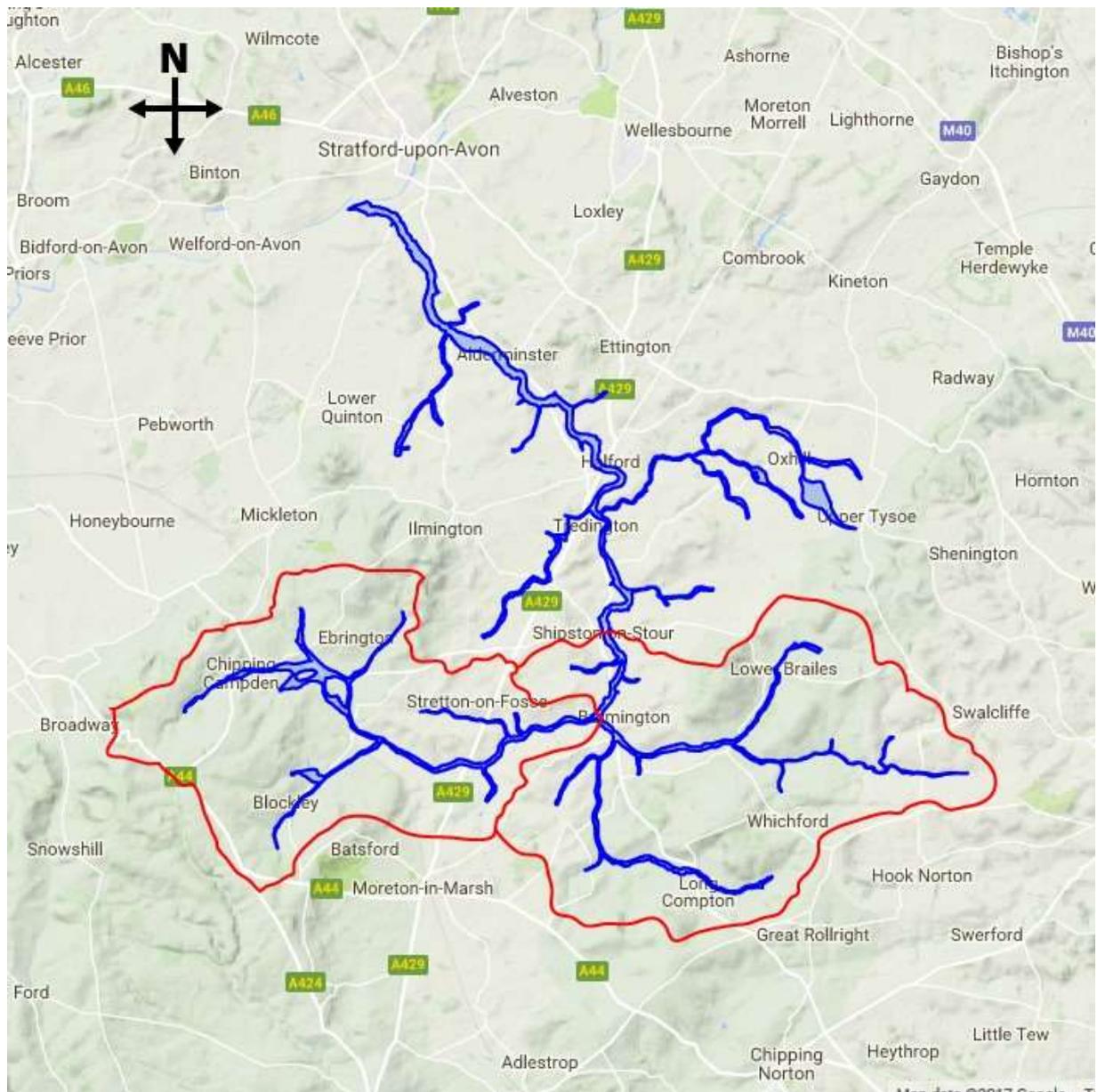


SAFAG-report to Shipston Town Council-January 2026.

The next 3 months will see an increased level of intervention assessments/visits/repair workdays, with the priority areas being identified and reviewed at the regular team meetings.

The map below shows the Stour catchment area covered by SAFAG-identified by the red boundary. It covers 187 square kilometres-encompassing parts of Warwickshire, Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire.

4 major sub catchments and 36 watercourses, with a total of 861 interventions.



SAFAG hosted a meeting at NCH- with Sally Eadon from WWT (Warwickshire Wildlife Trust) and Imogen Rutter from SRT (Severn Rivers Trust).

Representing SAFAG- Mike McCarthy, Brian Cooper, John Dinnie, and Vanessa Benjamin-Smith. SDC Councillor Dave Passingham was also present.

The purpose of this meeting was to lobby WWT and SRT for advice, support and possible funding to increase the flood resilience in the Stour catchment area (187 sq km), together with improving bio-diversity, habitat and nature recovery on the widespread farmland upstream of Shipston.

SAFAG's strategic policy going forward is to promote better farming practices and to 'catch the rainwater where it falls', an objective shared by WWT and SRT.

Mike McCarthy presented an overview of SAFAG's activities to date and the objectives moving forward. The current financial situation was covered, especially the need to secure long-term funding for the on-going intervention maintenance programme, as the leaky woody dams still have a role to play until nature-based alternatives can replace them. SAFAG isn't likely to be able to fund new projects and will be looking for SRT and the EA to lead with the funding and management. Of particular interest to SAFAG is the promotion of WFAs (Whole Farm Appraisals) which encompass much of the shared objectives.

Sally Eadon comes from a farming family and has an in-depth knowledge of the problems facing that community. WWT already has an established link with the South Warwicks Sustainable Farming Group, as does SAFAG.

It was agreed that SAFAG's evolving role is to identify areas which are likely to be affected by higher risk water flows and to introduce the various agencies (WWT, SRT and the EA) to landowners/farmers to promote the benefits of better farming practices. These can incorporate appropriate flood mitigation measures which, in some cases, can include grant funding, especially for nature-based solutions.

There are various maps which can help with the identification of priority action areas, and the link to these has now been sent to SAFAG by WWT.

There was agreement that having a Project Officer/Co-ordinator would benefit the locally active agencies, as evidenced by the success achieved by Herefordshire County Council with the Rivers Wye and Lugg.

On the afternoon of Thursday 4th December, Mike McCarthy and John Dinnie assisted Matt Byrne (SRT) with the 1st phase of the tree planting at Church Farm, on the Sutton under Brailes side of Brailes Hill. On the day, the SAFAG pair's contribution was 55 whips, a mixture of oak, silver birch, hazel and hawthorn.

The same intrepid duo returned on Monday morning of the following week to help Matt Byrne with the next phase, now joined by SRT colleague Imogen Rutter. SAFAG's contribution on this second day was 100 plus mixed whips. The main block of planting has now been completed, with Matt Byrne and Imogen Rutter left to work on a new uphill planting block. It's anticipated that the final total will be 400 plus whips, all of which include stakes and protector tubes. This project will help reduce both soil erosion and water run-off, before it reaches Sutton Brook. It will also deliver environmental/wildlife benefits.

It's an example of the nature-based flood mitigation measures being promoted by the various agencies/organisations active in the Stour catchment area, including SAFAG.

The pictures below give an indication of the extent of tree planting and the steep slope of Brailes Hill.



As requested, SAFAG has submitted comments to SDC (under reference SCOPE/00044) in relation to the Scoping Report for the proposed planning application for the land at Fell Mill and Leasow Farm. The representations/observations were prepared by John Dinnie and Brian Cooper.

Because of work commitments, Ben Goren (Communications Officer) has decided to step down from core SAFAG activities but will continue to manage and update the website-free of charge. His efforts to support the team have been much appreciated and it's hoped that he may be able to rejoin in the future should circumstances permit.

Mike McCarthy attended the Gloucester Multi Agency/Public Flood Meeting at Bourton under Water, hosted by the local MP, Geoffrey Clifton-Brown and his team. Attendees included many agency staff.

The MP placed pressure on the relevant agencies to deliver their agreed commitment. Moreton in Marsh Flood Action Group delivered a short presentation (Batsford Estate is a shared interest) and SAFAG's success was acknowledged.

Bledington Flood Action Group are dealing with serious flooding issues and have secured 'in principle' funding support from the RFCC (Regional Flood and Coastal Committee) during 2026/2027. This will allow the construction of a major bund next to a main river, but progress has been delayed and deferred until finance can be found to cover the costs of on-going safety and maintenance checks.

Of particular interest to SAFAG were the comments from several academics and agricultural experts who reinforced the need to control water retention via upstream farmland initiatives-soil management and improved farming practices-all in line with the approach now being advocated by many agencies and organisations-including SAFAG.

Such meetings are an opportunity to network with other flood action groups, agencies and councillors, who are active in areas bordering the Stour catchment.

Paddle Brook watercourse (east of the Fosse way), which feeds into Knee Brook, has a total of 37 interventions recorded. Most (35) are leaky woody dams. John Dinnie and SDC Councillor Dave Passingham visited to check the condition of these but were only able to cover the first section due to time constraints.

17 were located and these have been logged onto what3words. At least 4 have suffered significant damage (*rebuild required-see pictures at the end of the report*) with others requiring minor works.

Because it's more costly for a contractor to repair one or two dams in isolation, this work will be deferred until the remaining leaky dams on the eastern section of the watercourse can be checked. An appropriate schedule of repairs can then be completed and a contractor's quote obtained.

WCC Councillor Dale Bridgewater is the Warwickshire representative on RFCC (Regional Flood and Coastal Committee). Following representations, he will be visiting SAFAG and LCFAG (Long Compton Flood Action Group) on Tuesday 20th January 2026.

This will include visiting some interventions in Long Compton.

A comment posted on the SAFAG WhatsApp Group page indicates that, with one exception, all the leaky woody dams on Stretton Brook overtopped during the mid-December rainfall events.

These will need to be re-visited to determine what remedial action may be required.

Severn Trent Water (STW) have recently appointed, within their Water, Quality & Environment Team, a Community Flooding Officer (Rachel Woodward) for Warwickshire and Coventry.

The role will focus on supporting communities across Warwickshire and Coventry in understanding flood risk, promoting resilience and facilitating approaches to flood mitigation. It will also involve working with local authorities and other stakeholders.

STC recently received a communication from Rachel Woodward seeking to establish contact to discuss local priorities and projects.

This was referred to SAFAG and Mike McCarthy has arranged a meeting at NCH with Rachel Woodward, and other members of the SAFAG team, on 29th January 2026. The intention is to

explain SAFAG' s local role/projects/objectives and consolidate what could be the start of a multi-agency approach to flood mitigation in the Stour catchment area.

There has been some recent local media coverage about the Shipston on Stour and Stretton on Fosse Habitat Banks, which are being promoted by Environment Bank.

These have been created in response to the mandatory requirement for a 10% BNG (biodiversity net gain) on all new developments. Where this can't be achieved on-site, it can be satisfied on another (separate) location.

Collectively, both sites (on Tidmington Farm) total 78 acres and are adjacent to each other, with Pig Brook forming the northern boundary.

To better understand the proposals, John Dinnie, Mike McCarthy and SDC Councillor Dave Passingham had a 'Teams' meeting with Matthew Sharp, Senior Ecologist with Environment Bank.

The land will be managed as a habitat bank for the next 33 years. Arable farmland and neutral grassland habitats currently present will be converted to species rich wildflower grassland, scrub, woodland, hedgerow and pond habitats. This will benefit a wide range of wildlife and help to slow the flow of water across the site as the soils will become better able to intercept rainfall and surface flows. The species rich grassland will develop diverse root systems and associated soil biodiversity which will bind the soil together and make it more permeable.

Scrub and woodland habitats will have similar positive effects. The ponds will be located in an area of the site where surface water and river flooding is expected. They will capture flood water and act as an important wetland feature. The proposed woodland is in the path of a significant surface flow across the site, and this should help to slow the flows entering the watercourse around the county road path that divides the northern and southern sections of the site.

Woody debris could also be added to any surface flow paths that appear in the woodland to further mitigate the surface flow rate. Additionally, glades could be located within the scrub areas close to Pig Brook, to add water storage capacity and to reduce the risks of shrubs being killed by waterlogging.

It's intended to investigate whether any field drains are functioning on site to establish whether these may be blocked

Note- a copy of the Habitats Proposal map is shown at the end of the report.

The River Stour peaked at 2.94m on 16th December, after 25mm of rainfall. Both figures are at the lower end of the flooding problems in Shipston, where levels of 3m plus are becoming more frequent. *The pictures below, taken from River Way, show the extent of the flood waters over the proposed Fell Mill development site.*





The CaBA (Catchment Based Approach) team has recently distributed the latest 5-year Catchment Plan for the Warwickshire Avon, including reference to the River Stour. It aligns with SAFAG's current vision and objectives, especially rainwater capture and reducing flooding, water run-off and pollution.

It advocates sustainable farming practices, to ensure that communities and the environment are water resilient. It includes promoting advice and possible financial support to farmers for NFM (Natural Flood Management), with slow the flow now a recognised strategy. SAFAG, as an active food action group, was mentioned in the plan.

The River Stour is identified as a priority Sub Catchment Area, with the main challenge being flooding.

SAFAG regularly attends the CaBA meetings, being represented by Mike McCarthy and, on the last occasion, by John Dinnie.

Key players include SRT, WWT (Warwickshire Wildlife Trust), the EA, WCC, STW (Severn Trent Water) and the NFU, and this collaboration demonstrates the move towards a multi-agency approach, which would benefit from a Project Officer to co-ordinate the various parties/agencies and projects.

It's intended to consider this plan in more detail at the next SAFAG team meeting.

A review of pending minor repairs/upgrades to leaky dams has revealed a shortage of the sturdy posts required to enhance structural stability.

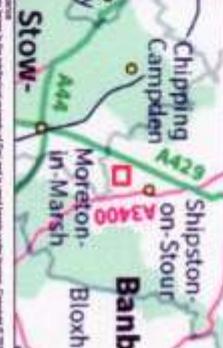
Recommendation-that STC approves the purchase of a further 25 posts(1.8m) from Batsford Timber at a cost of £149.25 plus VAT. For collection, so no delivery charge. This will be costed against the SAFAG designated bank account (Maintenance Fund)

EM-F01a
Proposed Habitats Plan

Legend:

-  Site Boundary
-  Lowland Meadows
-  Modified Grassland
-  Other Neutral Grassland
-  Mixed Scrub
-  Other Broadleaved Woodland
-  Pond (Priority Habitat)
-  Species-rich Native Hedgerow with Trees
-  Other Rivers and Streams
-  Proposed Individual Rural Tree
-  Excluded Habitat
-  Excluded Hedgerow

Stiveton-on-Fosse and Shipston-on-Stour Habitats Bank



Scale 1:10,000

Scale Code	STR12303	Scale	BK	Revision	TS
Scale	27/11/25	01			

Scale at A4: 1:5,000





The pictures (above and below) show 2 of the leaky dams on Paddle Brook which have suffered significant damage and will require rebuilding to restore their operational effectiveness.

