

SAFAG-report to Shipston Town Council-April 2026.

On the afternoon of Thursday 26th February, John Dinnie and SDC Councillor Dave Passingham visited Northfield Farm to inspect the interventions on the last section of Brexit Brook east of the Fosse Way.

A Health and Safety briefing was undertaken and documented.

A total of 21 slatted dams were located and logged onto what3words by John Dinnie.

With 1 exception (leaning), all were in good condition and operationally effective. Some have large gaps under them and a number have a build-up of brash, which contributes significantly to slowing the flow of water but may also build up water pressure on the structures. There was evidence of overtopping.

Although there are no identified urgent repairs, a SAFAG workday revisit to remove some of the brash build up may be considered in the future.

Picture below-one of the dams, illustrating the brash build up.



Following the visit to Northfield Farm, it was a trip over the Fosse Way to Stretton, to complete the review of the remaining interventions on Brexit Brook-expected to be up to 14 leaky dams. The heavy rainfall generated over topping on many of the dams along this stretch of the watercourse over the winter period. Some scouring and erosion were also evident. John Dinnie recorded the position of the interventions on what3words. Early in 2025, 3 of the dams had been washed away/significantly damaged and weren't considered worth repairing. These were replaced in a new location on the same watercourse with very sturdily built upgrades.

Update-at the recent SAFAG core team meeting, it was decided that, because of the strategically placed and well constructed replacement dams, any repairs to the remaining interventions on this section of the watercourse weren't considered urgent at the present time. However, this will be periodically reviewed.

SAFAG received some further publicity in the March edition of the Shipston Forum, covering recent intervention inspections in the Long Compton and Ditchford areas and meetings with Long Compton Flood Action Group and STW (Severn Trent Water).

Mike McCarthy's local weather 'guru' has provided some further information on the rainfall statistics for the recent winter period.

Dec 2025, 77mm. 2nd wettest Dec in 11 years.

Jan 2026, 90mm. Wettest Jan in 11 years.

Feb 2026, 119mm. Wettest Feb in 11 years.

Monday 2nd March and a visit to Dunsden Farm (Todenham/Ditchford area). The team was John Dinnie, Brian Cooper and new volunteer Lesley Parker. A Health and Safety briefing was undertaken and documented.

The objective was to find the watercourse which flows north from Dunsden Farm and discharges into Knee Brook, close to Ditchford Friary. This was found by first locating the attenuation pond known to be upstream of the leaky wood dams. The watercourse was concealed, on both sides, behind extensive undergrowth, trees and brambles. Fences on both sides also significantly restricted access. Consequently, it was only possible to visually identify the location of 5 of the 9 recorded dams (logged onto what3words by John Dinnie), but the team wasn't able to get close enough to examine their condition. Because of the identified access difficulties, it isn't considered realistic to consider repair or replacement, as this would have an adverse visual and environmental impact on the border areas of the watercourse, which form the boundary between Dunsden Farm and the adjoining farm.

However, every cloud has a silver lining. The team had a chance encounter with the next-door landowner. The ensuing discussions identified an opportunity for the creation of a dedicated wetlands area, with possible associated tree planting, at the bottom end of the watercourse, close to its junction with Knee Brook. With the landowner being receptive, it was agreed that SAFAG would enquire with the EA and SRT to see if this could be supported as a future project. It represents a nature-based solution to help capture water before it reaches Knee Brook and offers a better long term flood mitigation measure than the dams which have a finite life span. *Update-John Dinnie has subsequently discussed this with SRT, who have expressed an interest. This is to be investigated further.*

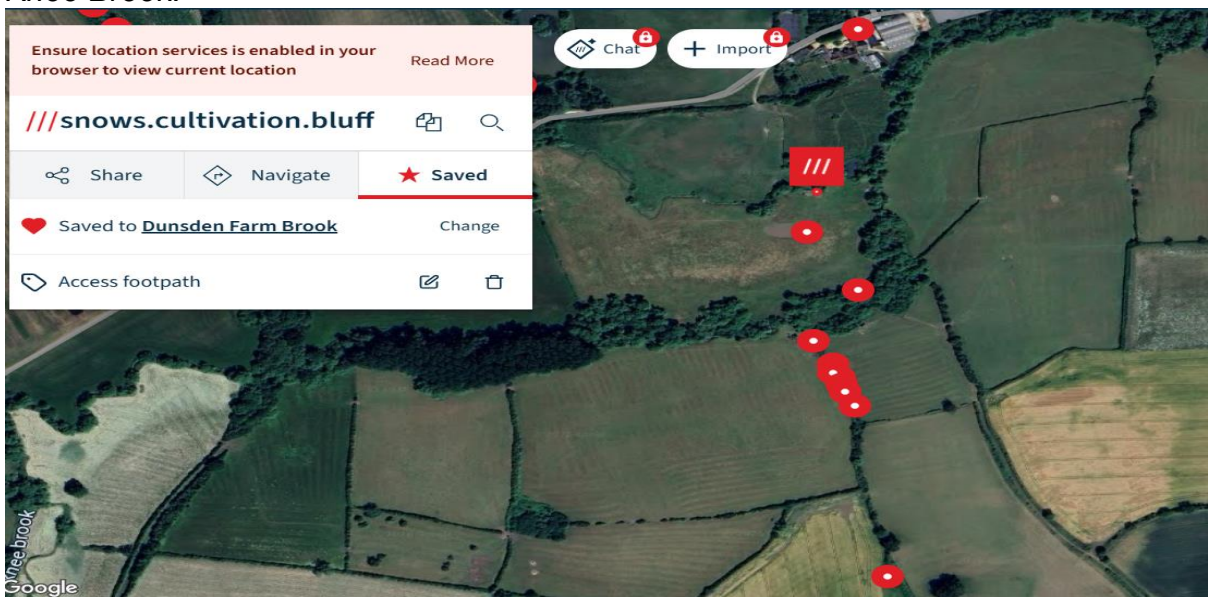


Picture above-new volunteer Lesley Parker and John Dinnie at the attenuation pond at the top end of the watercourse on Dunsden Farm, searching for (and finding) the exit pipe to ensure the pond was operationally effective.

Picture below-John Dinnie trying to get better access to a located leaky dam-with no success. The records (and some pictures) indicate that when the dams were first installed, there was very little vegetation on either side of the watercourse and no fences.



Picture below-what3words location map of Dunsden Farm-this will help with any future visits. The pond is at the bottom, with the dams on the stretch heading north to Knee Brook.



SAFAG continues to attend meetings and presentations whenever the opportunity arises. Recent examples are listed below.

Probus Club in Shipston. Because a guest speaker was unable to attend due to illness, it provided an opportunity for Mike McCarthy, as a Probus member, to step in and explain SAFAG's role, recent activities and future plans. It also resulted in 2 other members of the club offering their help and services.

Update-Mike McCarthy has since been contacted by one of interested parties who is a volunteer Footpath Warden. This group carries out work on footpaths, gates and footbridges in the AONB (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty), in the eastern part of the Stour catchment, and down to Long Compton. They are authorised to do so by both WCC and OCC (Oxfordshire County Council). All members are Health and Safety trained with the relevant insurance cover and have a wide variety of skills, with access to specialized equipment. They may be able to check the leaky woody dams within their operational location and even carry out repairs. This was discussed at the recent SAFAG meeting, and it was agreed to investigate further.

Hook Norton Flood Action Group. This was formed following the localised flooding which affected numerous homes because of Storm Bert in November 2024. This is a new group, and Mike McCarthy was invited to attend to offer help and guidance. They have already installed 12 leaky dams. The long-term benefits of nature-based solutions were explained, with the emphasis on catching water where it falls. Details of the various active local agencies and contact points were also provided, especially as some of these may be able to assist them with funding.

LCFAG (Long Compton Flood Action Group). The monthly meeting was attended by Mike McCarthy and revealed that the group has been making significant progress, with a number of plans also in the pipeline.

2 new ponds on Yerdley Farm (holding water), completed by SRT and a pond on Woodlands Farm partly finished at Crab Tree Wood, adjacent to the existing wetland area.

Update-on 12th March Mike McCarthy had a meeting at Yerdley Farm with Nicola Edgar (EA) and Imogen Rutter, her boss and a new starter Tim (all SRT). Their visit was to inspect the work carried out on the 2 newly created ponds-see photo below. Because they were due to look at 4 other sites that day, it wasn't possible to visit Wyatts Garden Centre area to consider other NFM opportunities identified by SAFAG.

Mike McCarthy visited the lake which is fed from Wyatt's Hill-see photo below. It's substantial, with the possibility of holding even more water. Further research required.

It appears, from the conversation with Nicola Edgar (EA), that the WEIF (Water Environment Improvement Fund) funding is being reduced across the board, so efforts to secure additional financial support may be dependent on CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) and other external sources.

This may include WCC, with whom the SAFAG team has a planned meeting at Shire Hall on May 13th.



Picture-one of the new ponds adjacent to Nethercote Brook at Yerdley Farm, Long Compton.



Picture-large lake fed from Wyatts Hill, Long Compton.

Contact is being sought with a farmer further upstream on Nethercote Brook in Long Compton about future flood mitigation measures. The new owners of the land next to Shawnbrook have been identified but attempts to establish contact have so far been unsuccessful.

The team continues to investigate the funding for a flood hydrology modelling of the village. LCPC (Long Compton Parish Council) has agreed to contribute £10k towards the projected cost of £30k+. WCC Flood Team are hoping to find the funds to help pay for this, probably within the next 12/18 months.

SDC have given LCPC a £3K grant from their Climate Emergency Fund and Stour Valley Lions have been approached for a donation of £1K to produce a Flood Guidance Leaflet, similar to the one prepared by SAFAG.

When ground conditions improve, further bunds and ponds are planned. Gulley clearances in the village have still not been actioned by WCC.

SAFAG's consumables, materials and tools are retained at the WCC Depot on the Brailes Road. The majority are stored in a locked room, with an on-site key readily available. However, if this were to be lost, mislaid or otherwise unavailable, the SAFAG team would be unable to retrieve anything from the room for any of its activities. It was decided to pre-empt this possible situation by arranging to have 2 additional keys cut. One will be available at NCH (in the key safe), with the other retained by Brian Cooper who periodically carries out a visual audit check of the materials/consumables and reconciles the 2 stock control records (1 is left on-site, the other stored off-site). As the cost of the 2 keys was £9.98, and under the £50 expenditure limit agreed by STC, these were obtained locally and a reimbursement invoice will be submitted. The cost will be allocated to the SAFAG designated bank account (General Fund).

Under the heading of 'Living with Water and Rivers; now and into the future', an event was held in Stratford on Friday 13th March to which SAFAG was invited. John Dinnie attended and was able to deliver a short presentation about the group's current activities and objectives. Other notable attendees included the EA and SRT. The following day, the SAFAG team (John Dinnie, Brian Cooper, Mike McCarthy and volunteer Paul Neal) were out supporting the International Rivers Day event in Shipston. With a stand at the Bridge Car Park (display material and flyers available), it was a chance to engage with residents and visitors to explain SAFAG's role and future challenges. The event also resulted in the recruitment of another volunteer.

Picture below-SAFAG stand at the Rivers Day event. A chance to use the desktop display unit.



SAFAG's consumables, materials and tools are retained at the WCC Depot in Shipston. On 16th March, Brian Cooper carried out a periodic visual audit inspection to reconcile these with the on-site and off-site stock control records. Most items are secured in a locked room, with the remainder (primarily the wood products-stakes, posts and logs etc) being stored at the rear of the yard (there is a security camera). There were no identified issues or concerns.

The SAFAG core team met on 19th March at NCH. Present-Chair STC Councillor Vanessa Benjamin-Smith, Mike McCarthy, Brian Cooper, John Dinnie, SDC Councillor Dave Passingham and STC/WCC Councillor Jo Barker. Some of the matters raised are not included within this overview, as they are recorded as updates in other sections within this report.

The financial position was reviewed by Brian Cooper. No significant outstanding transactions yet to be processed. With identified major works required on leaky dams at Paddle Brook and Brexit Brook, there is the need to obtain a contractor's quotes/estimates as soon as possible to have the expenditure approved by STC, in good time for the better weather and ground conditions. Mike McCarthy will liaise with SAFAG's primary contractor about this, after the planned visit to inspect the interventions at Batsford Estate on 30th March. These can be added to the list if there are identified remedial works required at that location.

Enquiries in relation to the use of what3words continue, driven by John Dinnie. It has been established that, for each team member to have individual access to the version of the App which incorporates features of use to SAFAG, it will require a subscription-currently £29.99 per annum per person. An option now being considered is the use of a tablet by the intervention inspection team, which would have a single user log in and password, known to all those authorized to use it. Only 1 annual subscription of £29.99 will be required. It's understood that STC may have some spare tablets which are not currently in use, so Vanessa Benjamin-Smith will enquire with STC whether one could be used by SAFAG for this purpose.

Flood Sense has approached SAFAG about their advanced remote flood monitoring technology. It was decided that this was not worth pursuing at the present time.

SAFAG now has access to a part of STC's One Drive. This provides the opportunity to share folders/files between the team.

SAFAG will be at Shipston's Annual Town Meeting on 21st April to deliver an update on current activities and objectives.

A Volunteer Training Day is under consideration. Although it's likely to be an induction for the newer members, it could be extended to include the existing volunteers to enable up to date information and procedures to be explained. The objective would be to achieve 'Qualified Volunteer' status, thereby eliminating the need to record the Risk Assessment/Health and Safety briefings at each visit.

To spread the tasks around the team, Vanessa Benjamin-Smith will, with effect from 1st April, take over the task of communicating with the volunteers.

Update- Brian Cooper has passed over the contact details for the volunteer team and has also updated them with details of this change.

It was disappointing that the proposed meeting with the South Warwickshire Farming Group on 19th March had to be cancelled at short notice, especially after all the hard work from Mike McCarthy to help arrange it. The number of farmers/landowners due to attend was too low for it to be viable to proceed, probably due to the good weather

conditions which would've been a welcome bonus to the farming community. This was the second time the event has been cancelled/postponed and, although it could be rescheduled for the autumn, it has been decided that an alternative meeting, arranged solely by SAFAG may achieve better results. This would be targeted at those farmers/landowners, already known to the team, who may be willing to consider additional flood mitigation measures on their land.

A re-scheduled visit to Blackdowns Farm near Stretton on the afternoon of Thursday 26th March. Brian Cooper, SDC Councillor Dave Pasingham and new volunteer Neil Davis went to check the interventions on the upper section of Paddle Brook. A Health and Safety briefing was undertaken and documented. The records from a visit in 2021 indicated a total of 19, comprising 2 ponds, a wetlands area and 16 leaky woody dams, with some requiring major repair works which were completed in 2022. The team was accompanied by Cameron (Farm Manager) who, based on personal observations, was able to give some feedback on the operational effectiveness of the interventions. With the exception of the 2 dams on a secondary watercourse feeding into Paddle Brook, all the others were easily found from the woodland side of the brook.

14 dams (12 log and 2 slatted) were located. An overview report on their condition has been prepared, and SAFAG will consider what repairs/upgrades will be deemed necessary and cost effective to implement. It may also be beneficial to consider a few more to replace those previously washed away and not reinstated. Landowner's consent to any works will be required. There is only 1 large pond on-site, as confirmed by Cameron. The existing wetland within the wooded area bordering the watercourse seems to be effective.

Of particular interest was what seemed to be a natural bund feature, encompassing a large wetland area, adjacent to Paddle Brook at the lower end of the site and close to the existing pond. This could be better utilized by creating a diverter dam on the brook to feed excess water to this area.

Picture-Cameron (Farm Manager), Dave Pasingham and Neil Davis-viewing a dam.





Picture above-slatted dam which is leaning slightly but remains operationally effective.

Note the significant accumulated brush/debris which helps slow the flow but will contribute to the water pressure on the structure.

Picture below-a dam where some of the logs have become displaced. Still operational.



A journey over to Aston Magna on 30th March for Mike McCarthy, Brian Cooper and volunteer Paul Neal. This was to inspect the interventions on the Batsford Estate. The watercourse at that location (called Batsford Brook for ease of reference) eventually discharges into Knee Brook. According to the records, there were a total of 12 interventions (2 ponds, 1 wetlands area and 9 dams).

A Health and Safety briefing was undertaken and documented. The locations of the interventions were visible, despite considerable undergrowth which hampered access.

All were operationally effective, but some of the dams would benefit from further banding/posts and the insertion of additional logs to reinforce the structure. There is ample material on site to action this, albeit with the consent of the landowner. All the interventions were logged onto what3words by Paul Neal.

In addition to the dams installed by SAFAG, there were some areas where logs have been dropped across the watercourse, as well as some naturally created dams. The ground in the wooded wetland area is littered with timber and branches, all of which will help to control the surface water flow.

Because these works can be carried out by the SAFAG team, with volunteer assistance, Mike McCarthy will prepare a schedule of the identified tasks, together with a note of the materials/tools required.

Brian Cooper will liaise with the Batsford Estate Office to secure their agreement to the proposed leaky dam improvements and the use of any materials on site.



Picture above-A dam on Batsford Brook (middle of the picture in the background). The undergrowth illustrates the access difficulties, although it didn't prevent the team from locating any of the interventions and reviewing their condition.



Picture above-Mike McCarthy and Paul Neal viewing an unusual dam on Batsford Brook. It was constructed using a redundant telegraph pole, rather than natural logs.

Re-cycling at its best!

Picture below-parts of the wetland area bordering Batsford Brook are reasonably clear of dense undergrowth. Whether by accident or design, there's timber and branches scattered across the ground which help control the flow of water in spate conditions.



As part of a rolling 3- year program, SAFAG set itself a target of visiting and assessing 278 interventions for the period April 2025 to March 2026. The number achieved over that period was 338 (307 dams, 9 ponds, 3 bunds, 5 wetland areas, 11 sediment traps, 1 tree planted area and 2 minor course changes to a watercourse).

The target for April 2026 to March 2027 is 290, although this will be monitored and reviewed to reflect the availability of the key core team members.

There is only one leaky woody dam within the built-up area boundary of Shipston. At the bottom of a watercourse leading from Hanson Hill to the Oldbutt Road green space. This protects a closed culvert, to prevent the build up of debris which has historically contributed to localized flooding. Although originally installed by residents, SAFAG repaired and rebuilt it a few years ago following significant damage. Brian Cooper visited on 1st April to carry out a periodic inspection-no identified issues.

Picture below-leaky dam at Oldbutt Road.



The Mayor's column in the April edition of the Shipston Forum included an acknowledgement of SAFAG's contribution to the flood mitigation measures which have helped protect the town during the very wet winter period. There was also a feature article under the heading 'SAFAG-flood residence in action' which included photos of some of the current range of interventions and included a picture of one of the dams on Pig Brook 'slowing the flow' in flood conditions. The publicity also resulted in another enquiry about becoming a volunteer helper.

Mike McCarthy regularly travels to meetings and events representing SAFAG and, every 6 months, submits a mileage reimbursement claim. For the period October 2025 to March 2026 this amounts to £199.35, plus £9.98 for the cost of cutting 2 spare keys for the locked room at the WCC Depot-a total of £209.33.

Recommendation-that STC approves the expenses claim for £209.33 from Mike McCarthy-mileage reimbursement (October 2025 to March 2026) plus the cost of 2 spare keys.

This expenditure will be allocated to the SAFAG designated bank account (General Fund).

Updates

From the February report. STW have provided an update to an enquiry made about their new satellite technology. SAFAG had asked whether it could be adapted to help monitor flooding in the catchment area-with a view to early flood warnings being issued. It's still in a trial phase, but won't initially be used to monitor pluvial or fluvial flooding risks or events. However, it could possibly be developed for that purpose in the future.

