

SAFAG-report to Shipston Town Council-June 2026

SAFAG has offered to donate a 25k bag of flood bund mixed seeds to help with the ground restoration work at Cornmill Meadows. However, it appears that the existing grass is beginning to re-appear now that the weather has become more favourable. Consequently, the offer of the seeds won't be needed at the moment but will be reviewed again in Spring 2027.

A verbal report on SAFAG's activities was delivered by Brian Cooper at the Shipston Annual Town Meeting on 21st April. This covered the current round of intervention inspections (mainly leaky woody dams) and the move towards nature-based options, such as tree planning, wetlands, ponds and bunds. These are intended to capture the water where it falls before it reaches the watercourses.

The proposed meeting with WCC Councillor Dale Bridgewater and Jagjit Mahal of WCC Flood Team, arranged for 13th May, was cancelled. According to WCC, this was because the new national funding rules and guidance had not yet been fully released, and the scheduled training sessions for Local Authority officers had been cancelled. There's uncertainty about the transitional arrangements to the new funding framework. Once this has been resolved, the meeting will be re-arranged for later in the summer.

On St George's Day and Shakespeare's birthday (April 23rd), John Dinnie, Brian Cooper, Vanessa Benjamin-Smith and volunteer Dave Benton travelled over to the Foxcote Estate to review and assess the interventions installed in 2018 (2 ponds, 10 dams, and 2 designated Forested Woodland Retention Areas-FWRAs). For this report, the watercourse has been named Foxcote Brook-it eventually discharges downstream into Knee Brook. The cost of the original work was covered by SAFAG, although the Foxcote Estate did subsequently make 2 donations totalling £6,500. A Health and Safety briefing was undertaken and documented. The Estate Manager (Dan Hope) arranged for a long-serving employee (Greg) to guide the team to the first intervention (a pond), with all the others being downstream of that. Apart from the FWRAs, all were logged onto what3words by John Dinnie.

The dams were in good condition. A couple would benefit from additional banding, with 2 identified as having too large a gap between the bottom of the structure and the water level. The latter could be addressed with rebar or posts mid channel on the upstream side to retain the brash which helps slow the flow of water, supplemented with available on-site materials which could also be dropped in front of the dams to prevent further scouring of the watercourse.

The deflector channels linking Foxcote Brook with the attenuation ponds require some excavation to improve their operational effectiveness, with both ponds in need of de-silting. Unusually, they have vertical discharge pipes rather than the traditional horizontal versions. These will need to be checked to ensure they are draining the water efficiently back into Foxcote Brook.



Picture above-one of the off-line ponds at Foxcote Estate-in need of de-silting.

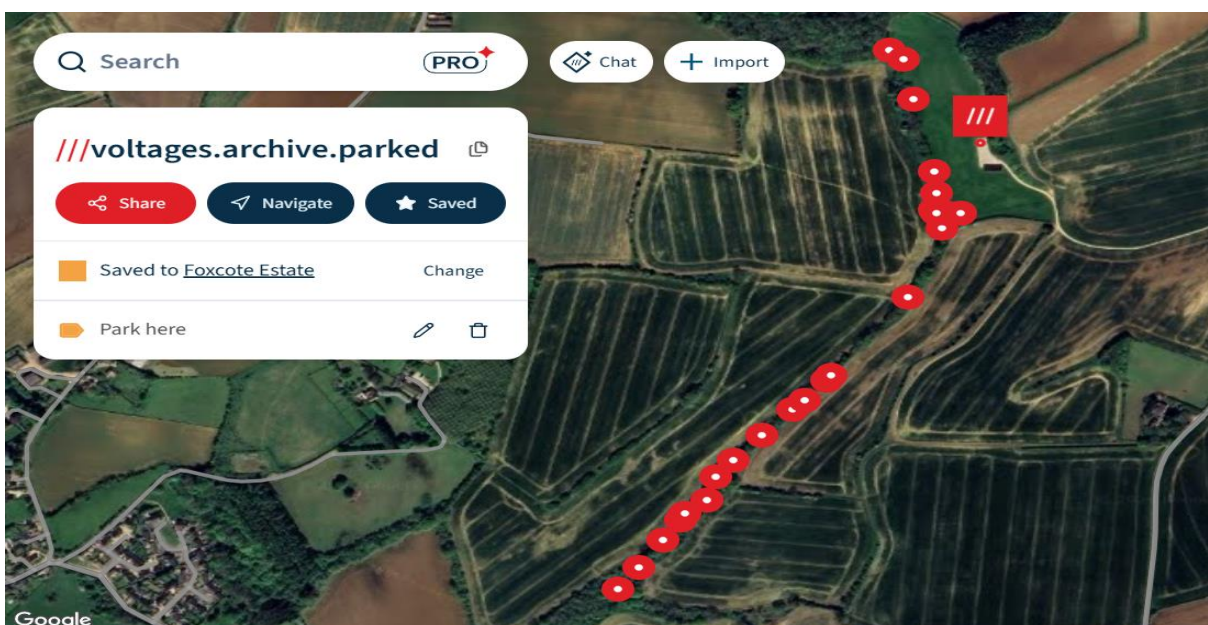
Picture below-John Dinnie inspecting the visible vertical discharge pipe from one of the off- line ponds at the Foxcote Estate.



Picture below-Vanessa Benjamin-Smith (Chair of SAFAG) with Dave Benton and John Dinnie. Pond assessed, and moving on to find the leaky dams which involved a lengthy walk in very hot weather.



Below-what3words map of Foxcote Estate interventions. This includes the start and end points, together with some locations identified as possible future opportunities for additional leaky woody dams.



A journey over to the Batsford Estate at Aston Magna on 27th April for the SAFAG team of Mike McCarthy, John Dinnie and volunteers Paul Neal, Richard Harvey, John Fedorowycz and Katharine Rutherford. This was a follow up to a previous visit in March which located and assessed the operational effectiveness of the on-site interventions, with some improvement works identified.

A Health and Safety briefing was undertaken prior to work commencing. With the permission of the landowner, on-site materials were used (branches from the woodland area) and these were cut to size with a battery-operated reciprocating saw. 5 large dams were upgraded, raised and repaired and an existing natural one modified into a structured leaky dam. In addition, a new (replacement) dam was installed on the watercourse which leads to Knee Brook. Posts, banding and ratchet lashings were used, where required, to support the structural stability of the dams. With further workdays likely, this was an opportunity for the team members to learn or refresh the skills required to install/repair natural flood management resilience measures, all under the watchful guidance of the experienced Mike McCarthy.



Picture above-Katharine Rutherford working on the new (replacement dam). There are 2 water channels within the woodland area, with both converging into a single watercourse on the eastern side of the site.

Picture below-the team have just completed a repair/upgrade to an existing dam. From left to right, Katharine Rutherford, Richard Harvey, Paul Neal, John Fedorowycz and John Dinnie. Behind the camera, Mike McCarthy who organised and supervised the day.



The core SAFAG team extends a warm welcome to Paul Neal, a regular volunteer, who has now stepped up to become a contributor to the planning and organising of the team's activities. This will be of considerable help with assessment visits, especially as he is well able to use what3words.

The monthly meeting of the core SAFAG team took place at NCH on 7th May. Present-Vanessa-Benjamin-Smith (Chair), Mike McCarthy, John Dinnie and Brian Cooper who had to depart shortly after arrival due to a last-minute medical appointment.

The financial position had already been distributed prior to the meeting. Pending expenditure-Joe Dee's work on Brexit Brook (estimated £3,500 plus VAT) and SAFAG's revised website hosting arrangements being arranged by Ben Goren (£65). Access to STC's One Drive (SAFAG section) has been arranged and it's intended to store as much information as possible for easy team access and sharing. Some intervention inspections (what3words and pictures) have been added, together with all the monthly SAFAG reports to STC-March 2025 onwards.

Because the planned meeting with WCC Councillor Dale Bridgewater was cancelled (due to be re-arranged), WCC and STC Councillor Jo Barker intends to monitor and follow up as required, to ensure that any funds becoming available in 2027 from the RFCC (Regional Flood and Coastal Committee) can be considered to support SAFAG.

John Dinnie has sent Mike McCarthy a map of the Paddle Brook interventions, together with the what3words locations and projected work schedule. An on-site meeting with Joe Dee is to be arranged (*Update-this took place on 18th May*) to request a quote/estimate of cost.

Following the visit to the Foxcote Estate, Brian Cooper will send an overview report, with conclusions and recommendations, to the Estate Manager for due consideration. (*Update-this was sent on 15th May*). The dams are in good condition (a few minor upgrades) and a couple of deflector dams to channel water into the existing wetlands would be beneficial. These can be done by the SAFAG work team.

The major work relates to the attenuation ponds (de-silting), divertor channels (need excavating/clearance) and the vertical discharge pipes (need to ensure these are working correctly). It's hoped that the landowner will agree to action and cover the cost.

The upgrade work at Butlers Road Farm (Long Compton) remains outstanding. To reduce the impact of scouring, it's planned to install rebar, mid channel, on the upstream side of the dams to catch the brush and debris and enhance operational effectiveness. Problem is that the area around the watercourse can be very overgrown, making it difficult to find and access the dams. John Dinnie and Vanessa Benjamin-Smith intend to re-visit the location to determine whether the dams can be safely reached. If so, a SAFAG work team can be organised to complete the proposed work.

In January, an inspection visit was undertaken at Northwick Business Park to review the interventions on Marbrook. Some upgrade/improvement works were identified which can be actioned by the SAFAG team. Vanessa Benjamin-Smith will contact the volunteers to see if any are interested in attending a workday.

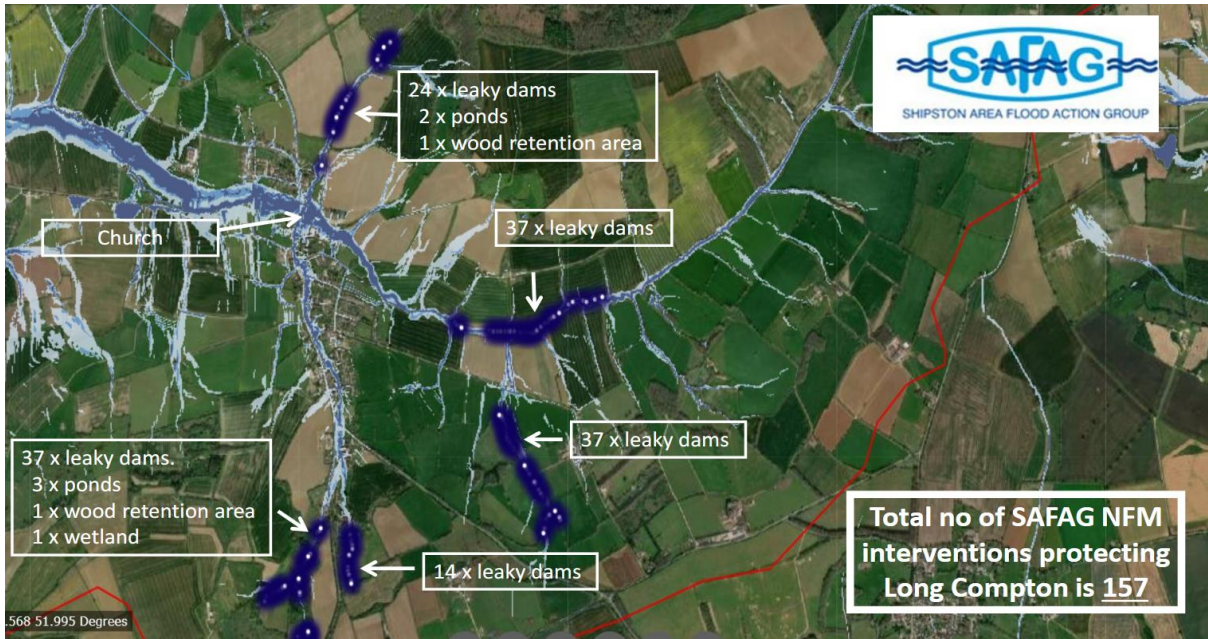
SAFAG has received an offer of help from the local Footpath Wardens Group. This is likely to include reporting any identified intervention repairs, or help at an occasional maintenance day. Mike McCarthy will follow up and monitor.

Following some problems with SAFAG's website, Ben Goren is changing the host provider. This will deliver a cheaper and more flexible arrangement.

A proposed deflector dam on Pig Brook at Cornmill Meadows is likely to require consent, which may prove to be time consuming to arrange. Mike McCarthy will discuss this with Imogen Rutter (SRT) and Nicola Edgar (EA).

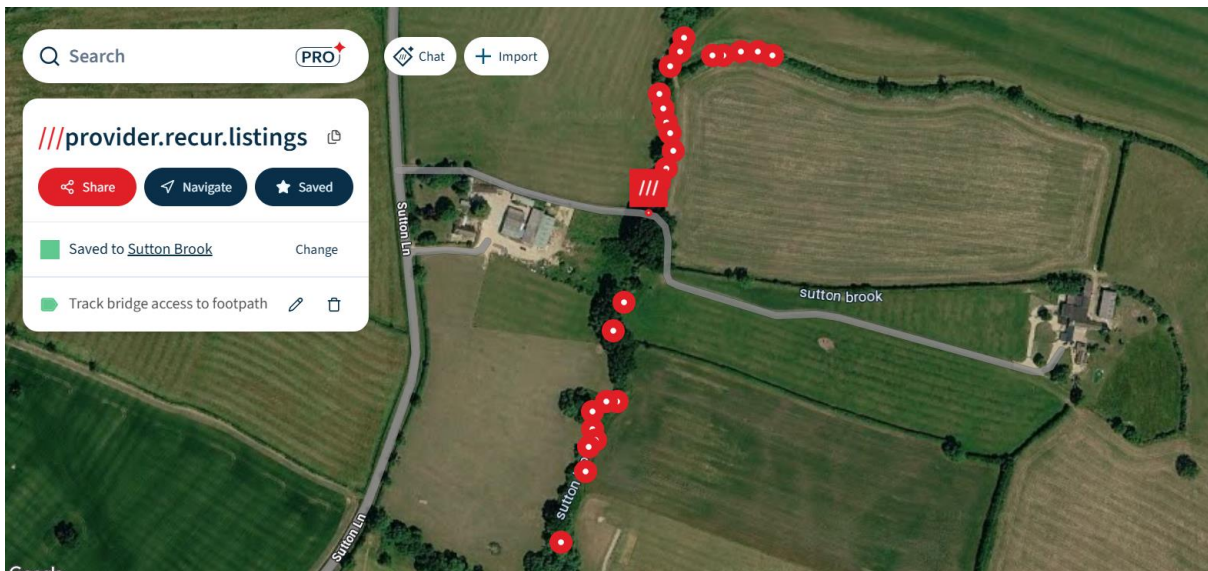
Mike McCarthy usually represents SAFAG at the monthly meeting of LCFAG (Long Compton Flood Action Group) and will be requesting that they take over the assessment and maintenance of the various interventions within the parish boundary (a total of 157).

Map below. This was taken from the website of LCFAG and details the interventions installed within the Long Compton Parish area. The interventions to the east of the main road have already been inspected. This leaves those on the west side (Shawnbrook). See lower left on map (Ashby Farm and Kingstone Hollow in SAFAG's records).



Never one to miss an opportunity, John Dinnie took advantage of the Brailes 3 Hills Walk to locate 5 of the recorded 6 slatted dams on the secondary watercourse feeding into Sutton Brook at Sutton under Brailes. These have now been logged onto what3words.

The map below shows the dams on this section of Sutton Brook, as recorded on what3words. On the top right are those found on the secondary watercourse which are likely to be reinforced on a future SAFAG team workday.



With further SAFAG workdays in the pipeline, some additional materials will be required. 20 ratchet lashings (used to secure leaky dams-£37.98) and 2 x 2.4m lengths of timber (to be used for upgrades on the slatted dams on the watercourse feeding into Sutton Brook-£10.84).

Individually and collectively (a total of £48.82), these fall under the £50 agreed expenditure limit, which doesn't require pre-approval from STC. In accordance with current procedure, these orders have been processed by STC, with SAFAG reimbursing the cost.

Until required, these will be stored at the WCC Depot on Brailes Road.

This expenditure has been allocated to the SAFAG designated bank account (Maintenance Fund).

Further publicity for SAFAG in the May edition of the Shipston Forum, under the heading of 'Co-ordinated flood action'. The article covered the 3-year rolling program of intervention inspections, with the period April 2025 to March 2026 achieving 338 against a target of 278. Reference was also made to the planned meeting with WCC, which has since been cancelled and is due to be re-arranged for later this year.

The published pictures showed team members inspecting a pond (Dunsden Farm) and a leaky woody dam (Batsford Estate).

Mike McCarthy and Vanessa Benjamin-Smith had an on-site meeting at Brexit Brook with SAFAG's primary contractor, Joe Dee, to review the repair work required on some of the leaky woody dams, following an earlier assessment visit. The site constraints made it difficult to estimate the cost, as it could take from 5 to 7 days to complete. Including materials, it's likely to be up to £3,500 plus VAT. The contractor scheduled the work for early May, to take advantage of favourable weather and ground conditions. As it was too late to seek STC pre-approval at the April TC meeting. Vanessa Benjamin-Smith, (STC Councillor and Chair of SAFAG) consulted Ian Cooper, Chair of the Finance Committee. It was agreed that the work could proceed, and that the invoice/payment authorisation was to be included as a specific agenda recommendation for the June meeting of STC.

In the interests of cost effectiveness, it was subsequently decided that the contractor would only be required to carry out the significant repairs (re-builds and erosion issues) and that the SAFAG work team would complete the remaining minor/maintenance issues-this is covered later in this report.

Pictures below-re-build works undertaken on 2 of the dams on Brexit Brook.





On 14th May, Mike McCarthy represented SAFAG at a meeting of the CaBA (Catchment Based Approach), hosted by the Heart of England Forest at Middle Sernal Farm, Warwicks. Attendees included the regular contributors- EA (Environment Agency), SRT (Severn Rivers Trust), Warwickshire and Worcestershire Wildlife Trusts, STW (Severn Trent Water), WCC Flood Team, Natural England and Wellesbourne Flood Action Group.

There was a visit to the on-site river restoration work. This is the 're-wiggling' of a straight ditch across a very large field. This will help slow the flow of water. It's not something SAFAG has yet considered but may do so if a suitable opportunity and location were to arise.

NFM (Natural Flood Management) funding may be available from the EA later this year, although it's likely to have defined criteria, such as targeting homes at risk within 5 kilometres. The case for Long Compton was raised (26 homes flooded). It's expected that decisions will be forthcoming at the next CaBA meeting in July.

An invitation to attend a SAFAG meeting was given to Nicky Jameson of FWAG (Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group), who can give guidance/information on the benefits of alternative farming practices, including grants and funding opportunities. This may help when discussing flood mitigation measures with landowners and farmers.

Rachel Woodward (SRT-Water Community Officer) was reminded that SAFAG is yet to receive a response to the questions raised during her local visit last year.

Imogen Rutter (SRT) was asked to notify SAFAG when she is next due in the area so that a visit can be arranged to Dunsden Farm, where wetland and tree planting opportunities have been identified (a SAFAG introduction).

SRT is currently looking at the potential at both Whichford Mill and the Wyatts Garden Centre area at Long Compton. The latter (a SAFAG introduction) follows an on-site meeting with Mike McCarthy, and SRT representatives Imogen Rutter and Tim Burrige on 23rd April. The options include woody dams and possibly tree planting. A report is due to be completed shortly, for discussion with the landowner. A SAFAG update was given to the meeting, covering the progress on the current intervention assessment and repair programme.

With the leaky dam rebuild works completed on Brexit Brook, a SAFAG work team, comprising of Mike McCarthy, John Dinnie and volunteers John Fedorowycz and Trevor Bradnam, re-visited the location on 22nd May to carry out the identified minor maintenance/upgrade tasks. On what proved to be a very hot day, 4 dams were raised in height and strengthened, using on site materials and ratchet lashing where required. Some re-seeding will be required, but this will have to wait until more favourable weather conditions (rainfall).

A manual saw was used to cut the wood to the required size, in place of the battery-operated reciprocating saw. Where work teams are split into smaller groups, the lack of sufficient saws will make the tasks more time-consuming and difficult.

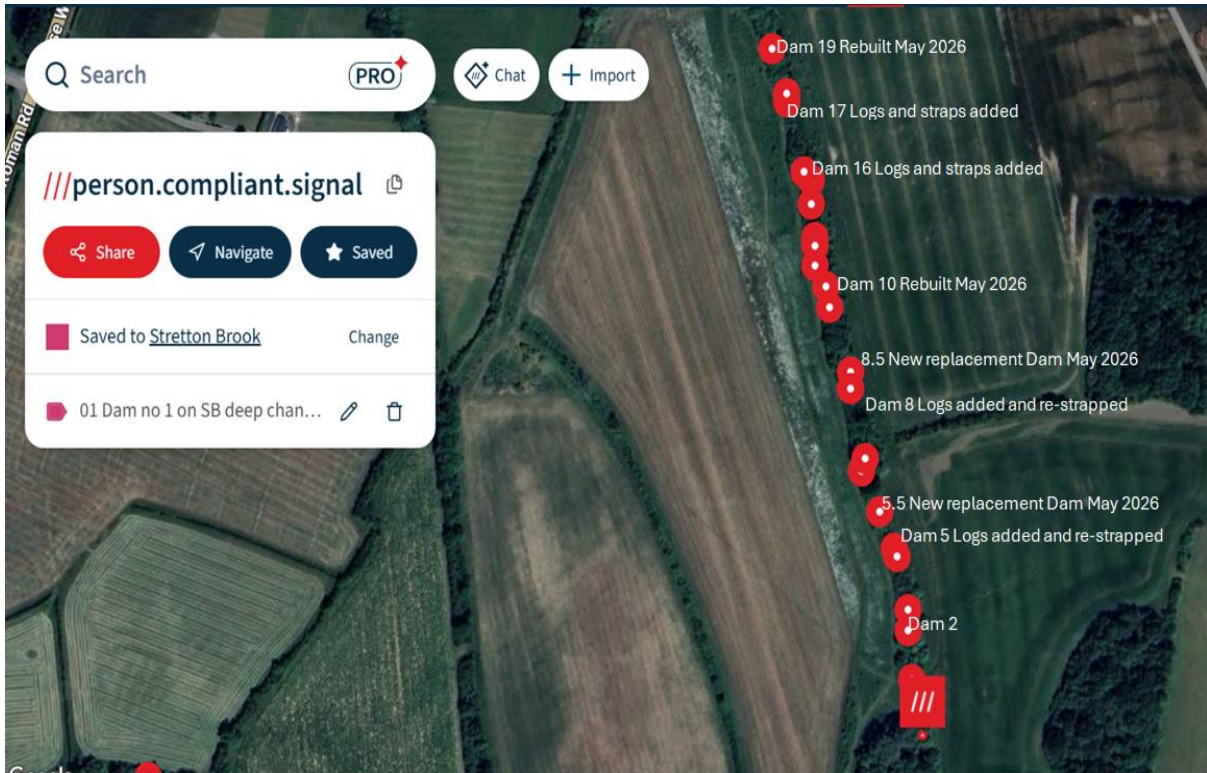
Consequently, a bow saw (£12.99) and a pruning saw (£18.98) were ordered via STC, together with a further supply of ratchet lashings (£17.09). The total cost (including postage) was £49.06, under the £50 limit agreed with STC, so no prior approval was required.

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

Picture below-a leaky dam on Brexit Brook-height raised and strengthened. Left to right-Mike McCarthy, John Dinnie and Trevor Bradnam.



Picture below-map of Brexit Brook with the work carried out on the various dams explained, courtesy of John Dinnie's technology skills. This section is now complete, except for the re-seeding.



As detailed earlier in this report, the contractor's work on Brexit Brook was allowed to proceed before a quote/estimate had been pre-approved by STC. With the SAFAG team completing the minor maintenance tasks at this location, and the contractor's work not taking as long as expected, the invoice received was much less than the projected maximum cost of £3,500 plus VAT.

Recommendation-that STC approves the payment of the invoice from Joe Dee for £1,830 plus VAT (total of £2,196) for the works carried out on Brexit Brook.

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

Mike McCarthy had a recent on-site meeting with Joe Dee to review and confirm the repair/upgrade works required on the Paddle Brook leaky dams. This location has access constraints and it's difficult to accurately determine the time it will take to complete the required tasks. It's expected to take, worst scenario, up to 6 days so the estimate reflects the maximum likely cost.

Recommendation-that STC approves the verbal cost estimate from Joe Dee, for the works required on the Paddle Brook dams-£3,090 plus VAT.

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

The SAFAG team takes this opportunity to thank STC for the recent grant of £5,500 which has been credited to the Maintenance Fund.