SAFAG-report to Shipston Town Council-July 2026

Normally, intervention inspection visits start to wind down as Spring turns to Summer. This is mainly due to the weather conditions bringing a significant increase in the undergrowth, much of which can conceal the location of the leaky dams. It can make access to them difficult and potentially risky. However, it remains a year-round task, and it's intended to arrange more as the opportunities arise.
The SAFAG team has already started on the minor repair and maintenance works identified during earlier visits. It's expected that these will continue until mid to late Summer, depending on access arrangements, weather conditions (not too hot) and volunteer availability.
In the meantime, Brian Cooper has been preparing for the next phase of inspection visits. Contact and access arrangements have been confirmed with the relevant landowners/farmers (7 locations), with just the inspection date to be agreed (this normally requires a few days' notice). According to the original master schedule, virtually all the interventions are leaky woody dams.
The advantage of establishing contact and securing access agreement in advance is that the visits can be planned in good time to coincide with volunteer availability.
SAFAG has a target to visit and assess 290 interventions over the period April 2026 to March 2027. So far, 56 have been reviewed (49 dams, 2 ponds, 3 bunds and 2 forested woodland retention areas).

SRT (Severn Rivers Trust) has now submitted a summary report to the landowner at Wyatts Garden Centre in Long Compton. This includes proposals which, if implemented, could 'slow the flow' on a watercourse which feeds into Nethercote Brook, on the eastern side of the village. These would benefit Long Compton as well as the downstream communities, Shipston included. If approved by the landowner, SRT will provide the required funding and make all the relevant arrangements, including consents and the appointment of a contractor.
This identified opportunity was the direct result of a SAFAG introduction but, despite the representations and efforts made by both Mike McCarthy and Tim Burridge (SRT), the
landowner has declined to proceed at the present time.

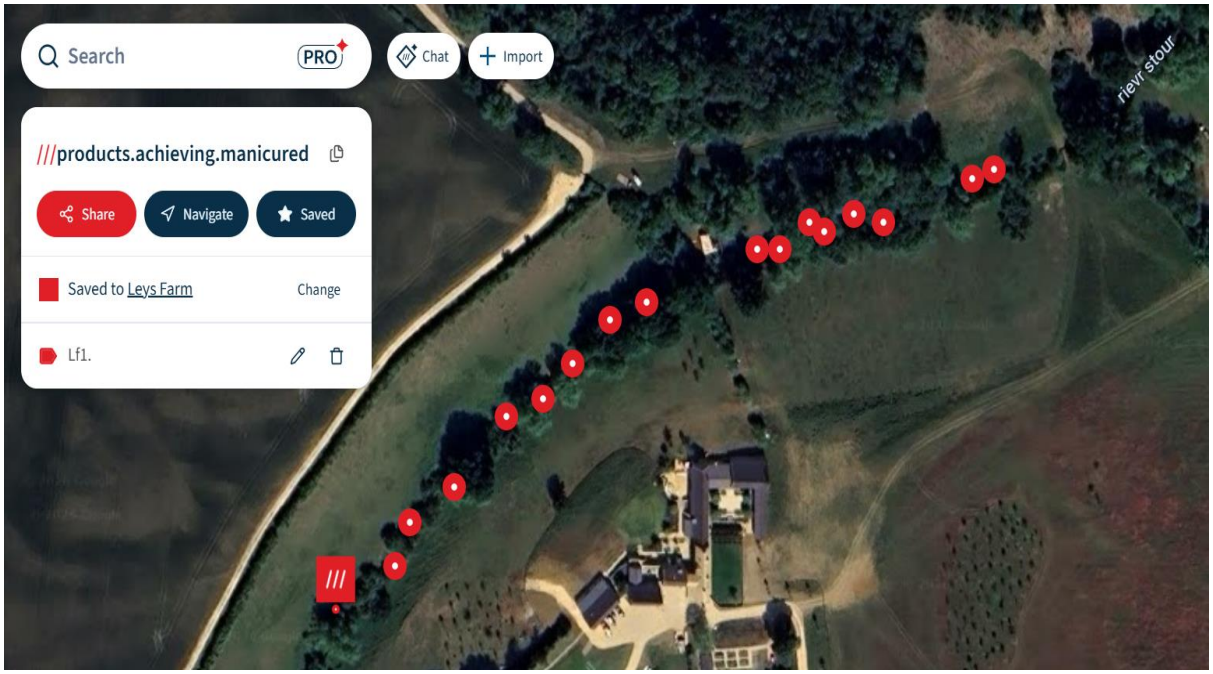
The first interventions arranged by SAFAG (3 clay bunds) were on Ditchfield Far Hill Farm in 2016. Because it is unlikely that these would've deteriorated, an inspection visit wasn't considered necessary. Instead, the landowner was contacted and has provided photographs of the bunds, together with a brief overview report on their operational effectiveness. The water run off from this location flows down to Knee Brook.
It's reported that the bunds work as planned during dry/normal periods, holding little or no water and operate as expected when there is exceptional heavy rainfall.
There is also an additional benefit as the bunds have enhanced the natural habitat.
This illustrates that flood mitigation, and environmental improvements, can work hand in hand so that everyone's a winner.

Pictures- above and below, 2 of the areas at Ditchford Far Hill Farm. Note how the habitat and environment around the bunds are blending into the landscape.

It's understood that the landowner is considering making an SFI (Sustainable Farming Incentive) application. This provides for payments to manage land sustainably to benefit the environment and support food production.

On 9th June, the SAFAG team of Mike McCarthy, Brian Cooper and Paul Neal ventured over to the Hook Norton area with the intention of visiting 2 locations which share the same watercourse leading north to the River Stour. First up, Leys Farm. According to the records, 17 leaky woody dams were installed in 2022. Lovely sunny weather and all the very sturdy log dams were easy to locate, as the watercourse wasn't surrounded by extensive undergrowth. Paul Neal provided the technology skills and logged them onto what3words. Mike McCarthy had the foresight to bring along a supply of ratchet lashings, with one being used to give additional support to the only dam requiring some minor attention. The landowner has also been carrying out extensive tree planting, especially on the steep slopes leading down to the watercourse. This will help prevent erosion and reduce water run-off. There is the capacity for further interventions, but these would have to be discussed and agreed with the landowner.

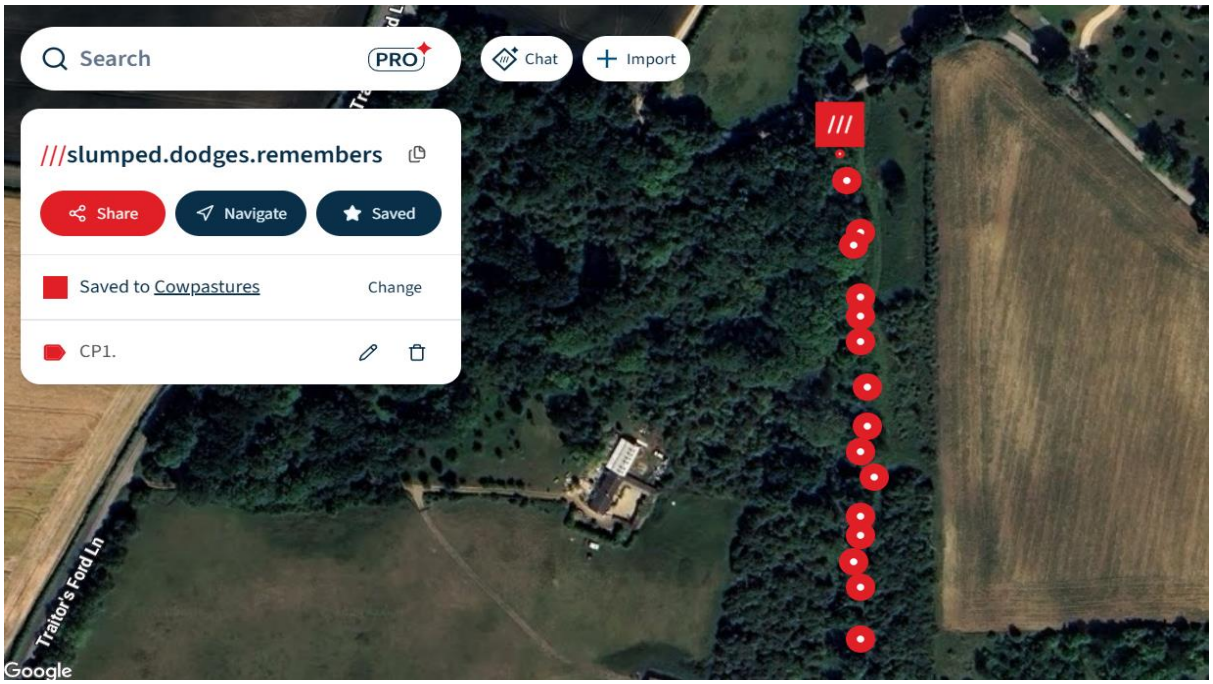
Map below-dams on Leys Farm as logged onto what3words. The watercourse joins the Stour (upper right).



Next, a walk across the road to Cowpastures for the intrepid trio. The 22 recorded dams at this location were originally installed in 2019. As with Leys Farm, Paul Neal logged those found onto what3words. The undergrowth in most of the woodland proved to be very dense, resulting in only 16 of the dams being found. Some stretches of the watercourse couldn't be accessed. The team also endured a short period of heavy rainfall, including hail. A revisit will be required to search for the remaining dams and carry out some of the more significant identified repairs, including rebuilds. There was evidence that some of the original structures may have been washed away. With several of the dams, the original nylon banding had deteriorated, with ratchet lashings being used to carry out on-site repairs to re-secure the structures. A schedule of the remaining tasks has been prepared, ready for the next visit.

Picture below-Mike McCarthy and Paul Neal using a ratchet lashing to carry out an on-site repair to one of the dams on Cowpastures.

Below-map of Cowpastures. Dams that were found logged onto what3words. It looks like the missing dams may be due south, as the team couldn't proceed any further because access was obstructed by significant dense undergrowth.



The visit to Leys Farm and Cowpastures brought to the fore an on-going identified problem with the previously installed nylon banding, used to help secure natural log dams across a number of locations, usually in conjunction with rebar and/or wooden posts.
There have been an increasing number of cases where the banding has become loose and has deteriorated to the extent that replacement or additional support has been required.
This became more evident with the dams at Cowpastures. As well as a couple of simple rebuilds, other dams needed the additional support provided by the ratchet lashings to replace missing/damaged nylon banding. With more visits in the pipeline, a further order of 20 ratchet lashings was ordered via STC- at a total cost of £35.08 (no postage)-under the £50 pre-approval required limit.
This will be costed against the SAFAG designated bank account (Maintenance Fund).

The June edition of the Shipston Forum delivered further coverage of SAFAG's activities, under the heading of 'Dam fine work'. This featured a SAFAG work team (with picture) visiting the Batsford Estate at Aston Magna to carry out identified upgrades. The height was raised on 5 of the dams, with appropriate repairs where required. An existing natural one was modified into a structured leaky dam and a new one installed.
The Forum also referred to LCFAG (Long Compton Flood Action Group), who intend to publish a newsletter to keep village residents informed of the local flooding issues and proposed solutions.

The monthly meeting of the core SAFAG team took place on 10 June. Present- Vanessa STC councillor Benjamin-Smith (Chair), Mike McCarthy, John Dinnie, Brian Cooper, Paul Neal and STC and WCC Councillor Jo Barker.
The following matters were reviewed/discussed, for actioning where required.

- The financial position, including details of pending transactions, was distributed by Brian Cooper ahead of the meeting. No identified issues. STC's annual grant (£5,500) has now been received. There are funds available to continue the current maintenance programme.
- Ben Goren has arranged for the switchover to SAGAG's new website provider to take place on 29th June. This will include the automatic re-direction of any website enquiry form to a member of the SAFAG team.
- The use of what3words continues to be rolled-out to record the location of interventions (courtesy of John Dinnie and Paul Neal) and this allows the creation of an overview map and record which will be of future use during inspection visits.
- WCC Councillor Robert Gisbourne is the new portfolio holder for Fire, Rescue, Community Safety & Flooding, replacing Dale Bridgewater who has been redeployed. It's understood that the latter will be providing guidance and support during the phase in period. Jo Barker will continue to follow up the potential financial support from the RFCC (Regional Flood and Coastal Committee's funding pipeline-due to commence in 2027.
- There continues to be a problem with the re-cip saw. It's likely this will require a new set of batteries. This is still being investigated. In the meantime, Paul Neal has access to a range of power tools which can be used on SAFAG work days.

- Mike McCarthy had a Teams meeting with Tim Burridge of SRT (Severn Rivers Trust), who is likely to be invited to a future SAFAG core team meeting, to discuss possible identified warm leads from SAFAG, including further intervention opportunities. Of particular interest to SAFAG is the gap on Nethercote Brook between Long Compton and Mitford Bridge. At his request, he has been given an introduction to LCFAG (Long Compton Flood Action Group) to review and discuss with them the flooding issues affecting their community.
- A previously arranged dedicated meeting, organised by SAFAG, with the South Warwickshire Farming Group was cancelled, at one day's notice, because the low expected attendance didn't make it viable. SAFAG has been approached about re-arranging this, but the preference is to join in one of their regular meetings to avoid the time and cost of a separate one.
- Mike McCarthy had a Teams meeting with Jenny Phelps of FWAG (Farming Wildlife Advisory Group), who offer a consultancy service but at a projected cost of £600 per day. FWAG anticipate that their work could generate finance for identified projects, but examples of their reports and funding successes will need to be provided and checked to substantiate these claims.
- In the early days of SAFAG, a Coventry University PHD student, Tom Lavers, was employed to provide the specialist support to the team, and he identified and led the start of the intervention installation programme. The contact point at the university at the time was Sue Charlesworth, who is still in place. The possibility of using another PHD student was discussed and this may be an option, depending on any succesful negotiations.
- A Brailes resident is proposing an ambitious scheme to divert water around the village. If this were to proceed, it's likely that this would increase the flood water flow to Shipston. Vanessa Benjamin-Smith is in contct with Jagjit Mahal at the WCC Flood Team and this will also be raised at a Brailes Parish Council meeting.
- Vanessa Benjamin-Smith and Jo Barker are currently reviewing STC's Emergency Plan (includes flooding). It's hoped to designate the Ellen Badger Hospital (Hub) as a place of safety.
- Access control to the One Drive link is to be transferred to Emily Booth, as Debbie Hardiman is shortly due to leave STC.
- The next core team meeting is planned for 9 July. It's hoped to extend an invitation to the SAFAG volunteers to come along to a brief presentation, followed by a visit to Long Compton to inspect the various interventions which border a public footpath at Woodlands Farm.

On 18th June, Mike McCarthy and John Dinnie re-visited the secondary watercourse feeding into Sutton Brook at New Barn Farm (Sutton under Brailes). An earlier inspection in January 2026 revealed that 5 leaky woody dams required attention, due to the large gap between the bottom horizontal plank on each of the slatted dams and the water level in the ditch. This would render the dams ineffective during periods of heavy rainfall/spate conditions. The problem has been made worse after the farmer recently cleared the silt from the ditch, effectively increasing the gap still further.

Picture below-one of the leaky dams after 2 vertical planks had been attached. Note the gap between the lowest horizontal plank and the bottom level of the watercourse.

The addition of the vertical planks closes this gap and should also help to capture debris/brash as it's washed down the watercourse. This will further help 'slow the flow'.

Access permission to inspect the various interventions and, where identified, arranging for any repairs/upgrades, is important to maintain the goodwill of landowners and farmers. SAFAG has tended to rely on a contact book, created by

Phil Wragg, which is currently stored in the interview room at NCH, together with other records. It's not readily available and some of the details have proved to be incorrect and/or out of date.
Brian Cooper has been collating and validating the key contact details, and this is being recorded on a spreadsheet which will be distributed to the core SAFAG team. It will be easy to update as and when required. This is an on-going process, although most of the intervention locations have now been included.

The July edition of the Shipston Forum included another article about SAFAG's activities-under the heading-'SAFAG calls for rain!' Following the major works undertaken by a contractor on Brexit Brook, the SAFAG team of Mike McCarthy, John Dinnie and volunteers John Fedorowycz and Trevor Bradnam visited to carry out some minor repair upgrade tasks on 4 of the dams (raising the height and securing with ratchet lashings). The article included a photo. The reference to the rain was because it was too dry to re-seed the watercourse banks-this will be actioned when the weather conditions are more favourable, including rainfall.