SAFAG-report to Shipston Town Council-August 2026

SAFAG was requested to host the quarterly meeting of the Warwickshire Avon Partnership CaBA (Catchment Based Approach) in the Shipston area, albeit at very short notice. SAFAG regularly attends these meetings which tend to be arranged at different locations around the Warwickshire area. It's an opportunity to network with the many organisations active within the Stour catchment and beyond. In addition to the sharing of best practices, the availability of relevant funding sources is usually identified and discussed.
The meeting was at NCH on 6th July. No lunch was provided, as attendees were requested to bring their own food. **Refreshments (tea/coffee/biscuits etc) were purchased by STC, with the cost of £15.10 being reimbursed from the General Fund of the SAFAG dedicated bank account.**
Notable attendees included SRT (Severn Rivers Trust), EA (Environment Agency), Severn Trent Water, NFU (National Farmers Union) and Wellesbourne Flood Action Group.
The primary matters for discussion were the issues and future works relating to the existing River Basin Management Plan.
Mike McCarthy delivered a PowerPoint presentation about SAFAG, its achievements, current workload and objectives.
Of particular interest to delegates was a briefing about the proposal to release 15 pairs of beavers, probably next year, in an area not too far from the Shipston catchment.
In the afternoon, there was an arranged site visit to the Compton Scorpion Estate, to view the range of interventions (ponds/bunds) installed by SRT in late 2025. The very hot weather meant that most of these were dry. SAFAG originally inspected these on 4th February 2026 (covered in the March 2026 report to STC).

On 9th July, the SAFAG core team meeting was devoted to an information session for SAFAG volunteers and STC Councillors.
This was hosted by Vanessa Benjamin-Smith (STC Councillor and Chair of SAFAG), Paul Neal and Mike McCarthy.
STC Councillors who attended-Vivien Walden, Hilary Kelly and Chris Howarth.
SAFAG volunteers-John Fedorowycz, Trevor Bradnam and Katharine Rutherford.
Invited guests- Heidi Ellis and Dick Faithfull.
Mike McCarthy delivered a presentation on SAFAG's history, current activities and on-going objectives.
For those who were able to make it, there followed a visit to Woodlands Farm in Long Compton to inspect the range of interventions at that location (leaky dams, ponds and a wetland area).
The landowner is also a prominent member of the Long Compton Flood Action Group and a long- standing supporter of SAFAG.
Picture below-the visit to Woodlands Farm in Long Compton.
Left to right-Trevor Bradnam, Dick Faithfull, Mike McCarthy, Hilary Kelly, Heidi Ellis, John Fedorowycz and Paul Neal. Behind the camera-Vanessa Benjamin Smith.

There are occasions when there are timing difficulties in respect of seeking approval for identified maintenance work on interventions. These tasks are generally targeted for early Spring through to early Autumn, when the weather and ground conditions are most favourable. This is in addition to securing access permission from the farmer/landowner. Whenever possible, a quote/estimate is included in the STC meeting agenda for prior approval. However, there are times when the contractor is available, ground and weather conditions are ideal and access permission has been secured, with a quote/estimate obtained, but there isn't time to get this pre-approved by STC. In those cases, the work has been allowed to proceed, if payment of the invoice is recorded as a recommendation on the next available STC meeting agenda.

From the perspective of the landowner/farmer, the ground and weather conditions are perhaps the most important, to avoid significant damage to the soil surface caused by heavy machinery which is likely to be used on major repairs/upgrades. Why is this important? Devotees of the TV programme Clarkson's Farm will recall an incident (Series 1-episode 4) where Jeremy Clarkson used heavy machinery on wet and unsuitable ground, causing it to become badly churned up. Result-his Land Agent (Charlie Ireland) took him to task by explaining that there are soil regulations to be observed. The result was that Kaleb Cooper (farming contractor) was required to make good the damage.

This is being brought to the attention of STC's councillors, so they can appreciate why there are, from time to time, some timing issues which can disrupt the preferred procedure of pre-authorising quotes/estimates.

At the June meeting of STC, the estimate from Joe Dee (£3,090 plus VAT) for the rebuild works on the dams at Paddle Brook was approved. The actual invoice submitted was £1,830 plus VAT.
A total of 14 dams were repaired. A further 2 couldn't be reached as the nearby trees would've damaged the cab of his tracked vehicle. At least 4 dams have been desilted and ratchet straps used to secure others.
Some minor maintenance work remains for the SAFAG team-additional ratchet straps where required and re-seeding of some areas of the watercourse banks This will need to be actioned when the weather conditions are more favourable-namely when rainfall is forecast.
Pictures below-examples of the rebuilt dams on Paddle Brook. Note the areas both sides of the dams which will need to be re-seeded.

As a result of a warm lead given some years ago, SRT have recently completed some NFM (Natural Flood Management) work at Whicford Mill. This consisted of 11 moderately sized water retention scraps, all of which will assist in flood water attenuation.
SRT obtained any relevant consents and arranged funding and contractors.
Picture below-arial view of one of the scrapes.

Mike McCarthy visited Belle Isle Farm (upper Stour area) on 21st July to inspect the various interventions at that location. The general undergrowth was dense, so locating and logging all the 12 leaky dams was very difficult. The 5 which were found were in good condition after 5 years, with only debris build up.
The farming family (landowners) are happy with the existing NFM (Natural Flood Management) measures which thy had installed, with support from SAFAG, EA (Environment Agency) and SRT (Severn Rivers Trust) and have requested another 100 plus tree whips.
Although both the 2 ponds on site are working well, one has could to be enlarged to increase capacity.
An adjacent upstream field, owned by Berks, Bucks and Oxon Wildlife Trust has SAFAG installed diverters into a wetland. There is further potential identified, including the possibility of ‘re-wiggling’ of the brook. This is to be investigated.

Pictures below
Top-picture of one of the ponds at Belle Isle Farm which demonstrates how effective these interventions are at holding water and is in keeping with the broad approach of trying to capture rainfall before it reaches any of the primary watercourses.
Lower picture-one of the leaky woody dams inspected. It demonstrates how debris/brash and assist with slowing the flow.

On 23rd July, Mike McCarthy, John Dinnie and volunteer Heidi Ellis visited the Sibfords area (Upper Stour) to action some intervention inspections.
First up, West Town House on the Sib watercourse which runs south and confluences with the Stour at Temple Mill (upstream of Traitors Ford). Although there are only 12 leaky dams on the master record, a total of 14 were identified. It's understood the landowner built an additional couple. All were logged onto what3words by John Dinnie.
Permission has been given for a SAFAG work team to revisit shortly to carry out work on the 3 dams identified as requiring repairs, once the appropriate materials have been obtained.
While in the area, the team visited Lady Mays land. The 2 ponds on site were bone dry, and it was agreed that these need to be monitored in spate conditions to determine their operational effectiveness. There are no known leaky dams at this location.

Picture-what3words map of the dams at West Town House, identifying the location of the leaky woody dams.

At the April 2025 meeting of STC, permission was given to SAFAG to spend up to £50 for supplies/materials, without pre-authorisation being required. The recent increase in team and volunteer maintenance work on dams has shown that this limit needs to be increased to ensure the right materials are obtained in good time to meet scheduled/planned visits.
Recommendation-that STC approves the request to raise the limit of expenditure (not requiring pre-approval) for materials from £50 to £100.
Any expenditure will be costed against the SAFAG designated bank account.

The recent round of maintenance repairs carried out by the SAFAG work teams is a better cost option than constantly using contractors. This does require a regular supply of key materials, especially wooden posts and sawn timber, which are used to secure the leaky woody dams. Via STC, an additional order was placed with Batsford Timber, the intention being to restrict the cost to the £50 limit which doesn't require pre-approval from STC. Unfortunately, the number ordered has resulted in an invoice from Batsford Timber for £77.06, as the final price wasn't known/confirmed at the time the order was placed.
SAFAG apologies to STC for this communication error, and requests post order approval to pay the submitted invoice. It's expected that the request to raise the authorised limit from £50 to £100 should prevent this from occurring again.
Recommendation-that STC approves the payment of £77.06 To Batsford Timber for the ordered posts and sawn timber required by the SAFAG work team.
This will be costed against the SAFAG designated bank account (Maintenance Fund).