

**Notes from the Public Meeting for Swilland and Witnesham residents affected by  
flooding from storm Babet 19/20<sup>th</sup> October 2023  
at 19:30 in Witnesham Village Hall on 11<sup>th</sup> January 2024**

The meeting was chaired by Richard Nicol – chair of the Parish Council, notes taken by Paul Sharples, alongside Jerry Hindle (Chair planning), and Simon Barlow (Vice-chair) – all Parish Council members.

Just over 45 residents and Parish Councillors were present.

County & District Councillors had been invited but were unable to attend.

Richard welcomed everyone to the meeting and explained that opportunity for residents to share what has happened, meet others affected, and discuss how to ensure such extreme weather events are not so destructive in the future

In addition the Parish Council have been invited to gather information to feed into the investigation being carried out by Suffolk County Council under Section 19 of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 which requires an investigation where over five properties have been flooded or a property flooded several times.

In Swilland and Witnesham, flooding was from various sources including rivers and fields, and the area is indicated as 18<sup>th</sup> in the list of Section 19 investigations planned (out of 42). Gathering the details and examining the contributory factors would enable a report to be produced to facilitate looking into addressing how the environment could be improved to help prevent future occurrences. This would feed into the overall Section 19 investigation resulting in a report of recommendations.

Contributions from the floor were invited, initially from those whose homes had been flooded, starting from the north end of the High Road Swilland:

Rose Cottage: Swilland Water came off the fields behind the property, backing up the drains and flooding the house. More recent heavy rains once again caused minor flooding in a similar manner.

Honeypot Cottage: Swilland Land drainage has not been addressed behind the property and the field regularly floods overflowing into the property. A ditch between the property and field could potentially alleviate many of the issues.

Upper Street Witnesham: Flooding of the kitchen appeared to be as a result of drains backing up and overflowing into the property. The house is at a higher level than the fields behind and so was not directly coming off the field. There are no ditches around the field and the council are aware. Hopefully Suffolk County Council are investigating.

2 Barley Mow Cottage: Around 18" of water came into the property. Much of the water had run off from the development behind the Barley Mow. The main water course did not have the capacity to cope with draining the water away. Manhole covers lifted and waters entered the property. Recent rainfall has demonstrated similar but not to the same extent and the waters have not entered the property.

1 Barley Mow Cottages: Some protection had been put in place due to earlier weather forecasts and rain however the rains on the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> October caused an overwhelming level of water flowing off the new housing development breaching the protection and flooding the property. They are now very concerned every time it rains – recent rains entering the porch to the property. The drainage measures installed after Storm Babet on the Denbury development have demonstrated a clear improvement but the main issue seems to be backing up from downstream of the main water course for drainage off the property development area. This land is much waterlogged, with an identified flood area behind the Barley Mow Public House and further downstream.

Simon Barlow - Blacksmith's Cottage: The property was overwhelmed with the flow of water running off the property development resulting in 9-10" water within the property. Whilst overland water along the PROW appears to more regularly affect Richard and Sharon's property (No 1) the more regular impact for Simon appears to be from the piped watercourse, and the backing up of water – which floods out of the gullies, adjacent to his property. Again, the measures installed by Denbury appear to have assisted.

Blockages and backing up from downstream is still compromising overall drainage, and causing flooding during heavy rainfall.

Jerry Hindle: Stone Cottages Tuddenham Lane, Two properties were flooded. The land adjacent is already saturated and water flowed off there flooding the properties. The ditch around the land couldn't handle the quantity and a nearby culvert is quite small, around 9", and regularly overflows causing flooding to patios and driveways.

Clearing of drains and ditches does help to keep water out of the properties.

Flooding in Tuddenham Lane causes drains to overflow and tends to come up to the houses. A bank has been built up behind the properties and does divert some water but very heavy rain still causes issues. A dialogue is desired with Suffolk County Council to encourage regular clearing of drains and working with local landowners.

Witford - bungalow adjacent to the Bridge near Street Farm. Severe flooding of the property and immediate neighbour.. Around 07:00 on 20<sup>th</sup> October, the river Fynn was around 6" from breaching. The Environment Agency has been against doing anything saying that they "...must let their property flood". Nothing has been done on the drains for over 18 years. Debris has collected by the bridge and has not been cleared.

In the last week, highways have been to clear gulleys but there has still been around 4" of water on their driveway. A stream of muddy water was coming down Mow Hill – reported to the council who responded that they could do nothing about it.

Many years ago, ditches were dug between fields and properties to help manage draining water from fields and away from properties. It is believed that Richard Stennett holds details of these.

Rose Bennett to the rear of Witnesham telephone exchange experienced some flooding.

Dominic: (Tanglewood) The property had been protected by some strategically placed straw bales diverting water down the road. Downstream backing up appears to be the main risk. Their drains have recently been rebuilt and more recent rain has been handled by those drains.

Near to Giles Way, a few weeks prior to storm Babet, a piped watercourse was blocked and ruptured by a build up of silt and debris. The drain is now by-passed and water now floods gardens and garages. The new development can only add to the overall problem.

There is an outstanding question as to the ownership of this watercourse, as there is a suggestion that Highways may have some responsibility.

Kate Adams asked about the locations and ownership of drains. Near to her, there is confusion over two pipes feeding into the River, it seems that the one not on SCC's records carries the most water.

Parish Council comments

The Parish Council had established a dialogue with Denbury prior to Storm Babet, to deal with issues around the development, eg Road Closures, Public Open Space, footpaths and ongoing responsibilities. On Babet, whilst Denbury were helpful in providing sand bags, pumps etc

immediately following Babet they deny responsibility for flooding and any damage to properties. A meeting with them that day indicated that they would be willing to assist in determining the cause of and remedies for the surface water draining issues from their site down to the River. The precise nature of the help on offer is unclear, however confirmation of the principle has since been given to the PC from James Hopkins Chairman & main shareholder.

SCC Highways appear to be missing information regarding drains in the area but recognise that landowners should have details of the drains on their property. This information should be consolidated to improve the knowledge. There should be a willingness to explore this to understand who owns what.

The Street Farm development application for 20 homes is still underway, ESC are re-examining drainage designs in the light of Storm Babet. The Parish Council are opposed to the current proposals and actively in dialogue with planning officers.

A question came from the floor about how we can ensure that when plans for developments are approved that things are done correctly.

It was noted that the council planning department have significantly improved after the Parish Council raised serious complaints regarding the Mow Hill development issues such as closures of the main road.

The Environment Agency provides maps of flood plain areas – for the Street Farm development it shows that the proposed properties are situated outside the floodplain, but that a basin to handle SW water drainage is located within that floodplain. The Parish Council are questioning how it will operate if it is already full of flood water.

The flood plain maps may well be re-assessed and updated following the flooding from storm Babet, as the models used to predict that flood risk area may now have been superseded by actual flooding events.

The meeting closed around 21:00, after which Simon Barlow discussed some of the challenges faced by the homeowners in Swilland

### **Further Information from Colin Hendrey - one of our District Councillo**

The Head of Environmental Strategy for Suffolk County Council informs us that over 700 (since confirmed as 750) homes across Suffolk had been reported as flooded, and well over 50 flood investigations were already underway. This compares with the 2 or 3 a year during the past ten years.

Heavy traffic through small villages was identified as a particular problem, as motorists tried to avoid blocked roads including the A12, which was flooded near Farlingaye School. People reported incidents of motorists: driving too fast, causing unnecessary spray; ignoring barriers erected by residents to prevent cars driving along blocked roads; and even attempting unsuccessfully to drive through very deep water, such that immediately to the west of Boot Street Bridge.

It seems unlikely, from the monitoring carried out by the Environment Agency, that Martlesham Sluice on the River Fynn, which closes automatically at high tide, had any impact on the flooding

Community Self Help Schemes such the installation of depth gauges along roads which are particularly prone to flooding might help to deter motorists from driving along flooded roads.

The SCC Highways Reporting Tool (search 'Report a Flood in Suffolk') should be used for all flood related issues affecting roads and footpaths, regardless of the cause of the problem. This can include reporting heavy traffic trying to get through flooded villages and motorists speeding through flooded water etc.

Everyone who might be affected by flooding should sign up to flood warnings and alerts.

Flood Resilience advice - doors make better barriers than sand bags. Better still are Floodsax which are sandless bags, which are stored flat until they are activated by pouring water on them. They will then last for about 3 months .

FloodSax <https://www.floodsax.co.uk/> are available from most builders merchants.( Travis Perkins, Anson Road, Martlesham can order them for you) Or via the internet. Expensive but last for months.

Further advice can be found in publications such as 'Property Flood Resilience', accessible via the EA Home page and Homeowners Guide to Flood Resilience accessible via the internet on several websites.

## **CLAIMS FOR PAYMENT**

**Anyone who has experienced flooding to their property as a result of Storm Babet needs to:**

1. Visit: <https://highwaysreporting.suffolk.gov.uk>
2. Click on: 'Report It'
3. Then click: 'Drainage and Flooding'
4. Then click: 'Flooding inside residential / non-residential property'
5. Please include as much information as you have, there is also an option to upload photos.
6. Once your report has been submitted, Suffolk County Council officers will contact you to gather further information and prioritise those locations that meet the criteria for an official investigation.
7. Someone from the district or borough council will then contact you to arrange payment, if eligible.

For those who aren't able to submit their report online, please call 0345 606 6171.

## **OTHER USEFUL INFORMATION**

### **Suffolk County Council Report a Highways or Flood Problem**

Visit: <https://highwaysreporting.suffolk.gov.uk>

If there is an inadequate response, contact our County Councillor direct at [elaine.bryce@suffolk.gov.uk](mailto:elaine.bryce@suffolk.gov.uk) or via your parish council and she will pursue the matter. In either case, it is important to quote the unique reference number which is generated at the time of the report.

**Environment Agency website links :**

Document explaining the responsibilities and rules to follow for watercourses (other than Main Rivers) on or near your property, and permissions you need to do work around the watercourse. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/owning-a-watercourse>

Information on Main River (Fynn and Lark) permits: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/flood-risk-activities-environmental-permits>

Enquiries regarding Main River permit enquiries [psa.eastanglia@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:psa.eastanglia@environment-agency.gov.uk)

**To sign up for Flood Warnings and Flood Alerts** telephone: 0345 988 1188/

Textphone: 0345 602 6340 or [www.fws.environment-agency.gov.uk](http://www.fws.environment-agency.gov.uk)

If you experience any issues when trying to sign up please

email [ens\\_fwd@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:ens_fwd@environment-agency.gov.uk)

### **If you had problems?**

#### **Firstly,**

Did you report your initial problem on the SCC Highways reporting tool? Did you get a report number?

#### **Secondly,**

Have you telephoned the ESC customer service desk ( 0333 016 2000) 9-5, or [customerservices@eastsoffolk.gov.uk](mailto:customerservices@eastsoffolk.gov.uk) and explained the situation and asked them to help you with this query. They should put you on to the right department that is dealing with these queries now. Customer Services have been dealing with flood queries for some time now.

#### **Thirdly**

Sandbags are not much good as they only last a couple of hours before they themselves become waterlogged. Try Modern sandbags (eg FloodSax <https://www.floodsax.co.uk/>) are available from most builders merchants.( Travis Perkins, Anson Road, Martlesham can order them for you) Or via the internet. Expensive but last for months.

7).We also have a range of useful information online: [www.eastsuffolk.gov.uk/storm-babet](http://www.eastsuffolk.gov.uk/storm-babet),