

Flooding and Storm Babet 20th October 2023

Flood Response Group

Report Summary:

- Walsham le Willows experienced its worst flooding for over 50 years
- The Parish Council has set up two working groups to respond to the flood- the Community Emergency Planning Group and the Flood Response Group
- At least 12 residential/business properties suffered internal flooding
- Many local roads were impassable or difficult to use due to flood water including three of the four routes in and out of the village.
- By reporting the impact of Storm Babet accurately and fully, the Parish Council is seeking to establish our parish as a Priority 1 area to qualify for greater support from Suffolk County Council and other responsible bodies
- The Parish Council's role is to advocate for our community to support access to short term help and to seek longer term investigation
- Advice and support for protecting vulnerable properties will be sought
- Advice will be sought on the management of the stream
- Pinch points along the stream will be mapped
- Blocked drains, culverts and ditches will be mapped
- Areas with excessive water runoff will be mapped
- Advice on any practical mitigations will be investigated

Contents:

1. Introduction
2. Damage to Property
3. Roads and Infrastructure
4. Impact on health and wellbeing
5. Timeline
6. Weather Context
7. Topography
8. Key Concerns for Community Emergency Plan
9. Actions for The Flood Response Group



///footsteps.unopposed.rollover

037 Aerial view of The Street at Wattisfield Road Junction

1. Introduction

After the worst flooding in the village for over fifty years, the Parish Council have set up two working groups to respond to the issues raised.

One group is working to complete a Community Emergency Plan which will be adopted as soon as possible. This will cover how members of the community can best support each other in a range of potential emergency situations giving a chain of command and communication and practical strategies for local resilience. Responding to flooding will be one part of this plan.

The second group, The Flood Response Group, will continue to look at flooding in particular.

The Parish Council's role is to accurately report on the impact of Storm Babet on residents and businesses in the parish and to advocate on their behalf with the main authorities responsible for dealing with the flood response. They will also continue to liaise and support residents impacted by flooding.

This report has been drawn up by the Flood Response Group as a first step and its purpose is to record an accurate picture of events throughout the day; show the scope of flooding impacting properties, particularly internal flooding and highlight areas of the road network which were impassable/ difficult to pass as a result of flooding.

To learn from the consequences of Storm Babet, this document will also identify some key problems that were encountered before, during and after the flooding event.

Suffolk County Council is the Lead Local Flood Authority whose role includes providing financial and practical support to those impacted by the flood. In the case of areas

experiencing more than 5 properties flooded, Suffolk County Council will provide longer term investigation and advice on mitigating further flood events. Our County Councillor, Cllr Jessica Fleming, is the Suffolk Flood Risk Management Scrutiny Sub Committee Chair.

2. Damage to Property

Properties Flooded Internally (residential living areas): The Parish Council are aware that at least 12 properties suffered internal flooding. All owners/ residents or tenants of flooded properties are being contacted by the Parish Clerk and encouraged to register with Suffolk County Council to access help and support. Several residents have had to leave their properties and move into temporary accommodation whilst damage is repaired. Others are living in the upstairs areas of their home whilst properties dry out. Many others narrowly avoided internal flooding. If the rain had continued or if any other critical tipping points had been reached, significantly more homes could have flooded. It is important to note that properties away from the stream were flooded by runoff water and that some properties were flooded by storm drainage being unable to cope with the volumes of water. The stream itself was clearly unable to cope with the volume and speed of the water flowing into it.

3. Roads and Infrastructures (impassable or requiring repair)

- West Street
- Finningham Road
- Wattisfield Road junction
- The Street
- Palmer Street/ Grove Road
- A143 at Wattisfield Road junction
- Top of Palmer Street at Causeway end residents unable to walk in and out of their properties.

Road surfaces, road edges and banks and verges as well as timber flood walling to the stream, paths and bridges have all been damaged by the flood water. As these are reported, SCC are working through the necessary repairs. This task is ongoing. In some cases, roads remained flooded with some reported issues such as the overflowing storm drain on the Street by Clarkes being advised as unresolvable despite the regular hazard and inconvenience. It took more than a month for the drains to be cleared at the junction of Palmer Street with Grove Road on this urgent occasion, but this same blockage had been reported on multiple occasions prior to 20/10, also always after heavy rain. This was always advised as too low a priority with no immediate action to be taken.



8 x bulky and heavy timbers forming flood defence walling to stream lifted and washed away. Some of these have been identified resting against a fallen tree further downstream




Left – 045-Swan Path. Already potholed had large parts of tarmac washed away.
Right – 046-School bridge dislodged bricks.

4. Impact on health and wellbeing

It cannot be underestimated how significant the impact of flooding of your home can be. It is practically very difficult to manage with basic facilities damaged and ground floor accommodation wet and unusable. Further rainfall creates feelings of anxiety and leaves those who experienced flooding and those who were in danger of flooding feeling vulnerable.

5. Timeline

6:45am	The District Councillor observed that the stream was already quite full and flowing quickly with run off from the surrounding fields. There was some surface water but no significant flooding on roads leading into and out of the village.
07:30-08:30	Resident in vicinity on Ixworth Road, subsequently reported that at this time everything wet outside, not yet flooded at this time
10:00am	<p>The Parish Clerk was contacted to advise that West Street was already flooding on the road and that at least one householder believed flooding of property was likely to occur. As it happens, this property did not flood internally on this occasion.</p>  <p>///arrival.animals.saved</p>
10:30	<p>The stream had burst its banks on Ixworth Road and was flooding land close to residential properties that later flooded.</p> <p>Resident on Ixworth Road subsequently confirmed that at this time water from The Stream half way up lawn to front (this can happen in 'normal'</p>


	periods of heavy rain.
11:15am	Cllr Bartholomew advised that ditches in the Finningham Road, Upper Meadow area of the village were full, flowing fast and carrying debris. He judged that the Stream would burst its banks.
11:30am	The Primary School contacted parents to inform them that they could collect children from school as conditions on local roads were worsening.
12:00	Properties on Ixworth Road were flooding internally from the burst stream and field runoff to the rear. Run-off flooding from fields at back of house has never happened before not even in 1968.
12:00	Large areas of Finningham Road upstream from the village were experiencing significant flooding and the road was becoming extremely difficult to pass. Water was pouring onto the road from surrounding fields and flowing down towards the village.



///obviously.earphones.forkful



In tandem, runoff from land on either side of Wattisfield Road was pouring down the road towards the junction with The Street.

	
	<p>The stream was unable to contain the water flowing downstream and the huge quantities of additional water which were running off the land towards the road and the stream from either side.</p>
	<p>The storm drain outside Clarkes was gushing water as it could no longer cope with the quantities of rain water - this does often happen at this point with even normal heavy amounts of rainfall</p>
<p>12:30pm</p>	<p>The stream burst its banks and The Street and Finningham Road, the Street and the stream were in full flood. Swan path was not flooded initially.</p>



	Clarkes delivered sandbags to homes along the path in danger of flooding.
1:00pm	The school informed Suffolk County Council and parents and carers that the school was going to close
Early Afternoon	MSDC declared a critical incident
ongoing	Multiple vehicles in varying locations were abandoned or stuck in flood water. Residents returning home had to leave their cars on higher ground and wade to their homes

	 <p>///records.shot.narrowest</p>
ongoing	Local people with tractors or suitable vehicles ferried people to their homes or evacuated those flooded out of their homes







ongoing	Main roads including the A143 and A140 became extremely difficult to pass
3:00pm	Staff left the school once all pupils had been collected and drove out of the village towards higher ground but their journey was extremely difficult.
ongoing	Floodwaters continued to rise and at the lowest point in the village (///gushes.sandpaper.comet) water from the street and water from the stream converged with a strong force



///uncle.slipped.undercuts



///polished.lavished.sparrows

	
<p>16:30</p>	<p>Cllr Mecrow lifted drain grids on Summer Road the following day to allow flood water to disperse.</p> <div>  </div>
<p>18:30</p>	<p>The water began to subside and further flooding of properties was averted by a very narrow margin.</p>

	
21/10/23 7:00am	The flooded street and stream had largely subsided. Flood water continued to lie on property and farmland particularly in the Finningham Road area (///heartened.social.store) and in a few lower lying stretches of road

6. Weather Context

Previous to October 20th the area had seen significant rainfall and the clay soil surrounding the village was waterlogged.

The Cam and the Little Ouse and Lark were listed by the Meteorological Office as two of twelve river catchments with the wettest October weather conditions since 1871 when records began. The first of these areas includes the Sapiston of which our village stream is a tributary arising above Sunnyside Farm on the Finningham Road.

“North-east, central and east England all recorded exceptionally high rainfall and October rainfall totals for England as whole were also exceptionally high.” The Meteorological Office However, whilst this context has been unusual with the last serious flooding occurring in 1968, it is generally agreed that we should expect more extreme weather events in the future. The National Trust, for example, is calling for a Climate Resilience Act to look at ways the countryside can be protected from the impact of climate change in the future.

7. Topography

Walsham le Willows is a rectangular shaped parish with a tributary of the Black Bourn dissecting the parish from east to west draining the parish westwards. The course of the tributary follows Finningham road in the east, through The Street before cutting across at The Avenue to follow Grove Road and finally Ixworth Road in the west. For the most part, the village settlement sits either side of the tributary.

The soil types in the Parish are largely clay to clay loam base and relatively deep they are listed on the UK Soil Observatory as:

- Slightly acid loamy and clayey with impeded drainage
- Slowly permeable seasonally wet slightly acid loamy
- Loamy and clayey floodplain with naturally high ground water

Land use in the parish is largely in arable rotation with some permanent grassland and woodland.

The topography is gently undulating with local high points at 69m (Crownland Road) 60m (Sports Centre)

<https://en-gb.topographic-map.com/map-kb57/England/>

The most serious impacts of the flooding occurred through Finningham Road, on Wattisfield Road, at the lowest point of the Street near the bridge opposite Rolfes and near the brook on Ixworth Road. Most of these sites correspond to the lowest land levels in the area sitting below 50m above sea level. The flooding may have been compounded by river narrowing or bridge restrictions.

IMAGES (others are available on request including some short videos)



053 Centre of village looking east around the time of floodwater high mark



055 Centre of village near flood water high mark, stream in between railings.



040- Ixworth Road West Street (this was first report at approx. 10:00)



///rapid.officials.noble

006-Finningham Road at Sunnyside



029_Looking down the street from Finningham road approach at the junction with bottom of Wattisfield Road



003 and 004 stranded vehicles on Finningham Road



Left 048 Palmer Street at junction with Grove Road..

Right 025 The Street a few hours before flood reached its high point.



Left 017 Swan Path at Clarkes of Walsham entrance

Right 028 The Street



015 Grove Road at Causeway Junction near bridge. Was at least 3 feet deep.

Referencing the Parish Online data set, the elevation above sea level in the following locations are:

001	Sunnyside House and Cramner Lodge ///eaten.lifestyle.apply	49.1m
002	Cramner Cottages ///sprouts.deploying.energetic	48.5m
003	Bottom of Townhouse Road ///expand.preparing.puncture	47.2m
004	Bank House and The Chestnuts ///sandpaper.chest.identity	45.5m
005	Memorial Hall ///fats.luck.opened	48.1m
006	Blue Boar ///barstool.bride.plodding	49.6
007	Church Rise Cottage ///system.distorts.stunts	46m
008	Brook Farm Cottages ///decorator.take.prime	42.5 m (extrapolated)
009	Crossroads at Six Bells ///shipped.passenger.florists	50.4m

8. Key Concerns and Actions

Community Emergency Planning

- There was no flood warning for our area given prior to the flood occurring- the Meteorological Office apologised for not issuing a red alert for our area in the days following the event
- Early signs of flood potential- what could they be/how could they be communicated?

- There was no local system for warning householders to prepare for flooding once it became evident there was a high risk of flooding
- In the event of further flooding, vulnerable people would need to be identified- how would this be done and by whom and when; if in advance how would this be kept up to date?
- There was not clear advice or emergency contacts clearly visible on SCC website
- The school and local businesses had not been advised to close early in the day
- Impact of flooded roads and vehicles upon properties- heavy vehicles including lorries and SUVs continued to drive through deep flooding creating wash and further damage and distress for the residents of affected properties
- Should roads be closed? or how can it be provided quickly in an emergency situation?
- Identify where to set up safe, warm space/food for anyone displaced

Actions to be initiated by The Flood Response Group

- Identify culvert and road drain blockages- Log locations of major drains – What3words
- Identify possible mitigations and work with responsible bodies to evaluate their impact and suitability
- Sfi 2024 - 2025 will cover water management grants
- Review the management of the stream
- Check the performance of the Suds serving The Acorns development - Photographic evidence shows this held a large amount of water coming to within 30 cms of the top – Without this the flooding at the bottom of Wattisfield Road may have been worse.
- How did the topology of the area impact the flooding? Can this inform planning for the future
- The Parish Council has a record of known flooded properties and their reporting reference numbers.

22/11/2023 (completed 02/01/2024)