

## **What Lessons Have Been Learnt from Storm Babet?**

After a summer of heatwaves and still officially in drought, 2026 has been a stark wake up call on the impact of the climate emergency on our way of life, our health and our food and water security. Meteorologists are predicting very significantly increased risks from storms and high winds with the El Niño weather event approaching. The severity of these impacts are significantly compounded by climate change.

Against this backdrop it is useful to reflect on what has been done in our own community to prepare for and mitigate against the impact of the type of flooding experienced in during Storm Babet in 2023.

### **Community Emergency Plan**

The Parish Council, led by Cllr Anne Brookes, have undertaken a huge amount of work to prepare for a resilient and organised approach to any future emergencies.

- community volunteers will monitor any future event with information shared and co-ordinated by the Community Emergency team
- the team will communicate directly with Suffolk County Council if support were needed
- the Memorial Village Hall has been designated an official rest centre with detailed plans and appropriate resources for providing support to impacted residents
- emergency parking for residents has been planned in the event of roads becoming impassable
- road signage has been purchased to advise motorists against travelling through flooded areas and compounding the impacts of flooding on homes and businesses
- a limited supply of flood mitigation equipment funded by the Environment Agency is available for residents to view and assess

The equipment would be available to the most appropriate residents during a flooding incident but it is recommended that each householder assesses their own needs and prepares as necessary.

### **Impacted householders**

In the few months immediately after Storm Babet, individual householders who experienced flooding received specialist advice and grant funding to prepare their homes as far as practicable against future flooding events. The Community Emergency Group has created a WhatsApp group to keep these members of the community in touch with one another in any future events.

### **Flood Mitigation**

Following our S19 Flood Report written by SCC, the lead flood authority for Walsham le Willows, the longer term emphasis has been on working with local landowners to look at ways to slow the water higher in the catchment area and upstream of flooded properties and roads. This flow of water during particularly prolonged wet weather or during very heavy rainfall causes a large volume of water to surge towards the lowest lying areas of the village, including the village centre. The Parish Council's role has been to help facilitate support for landowners from SCC and the Environment Agency. Individual landowners have also sought the advice of FWAG, an organisation which supports farmers, the environment and wildlife.

The message from all the agencies supporting landowners has been on the use of Natural Flood Management techniques to hold back water in a variety of ways on land around the village.

These include:

- leaky dams,
- bunds,
- wider field margins,
- use of contour ploughing
- trees and hedge planting,
- pond restoration
- and varied land use.

The recent creation of permanent pasture to the north of Palmer Street and to the north of Finningham Road will hold substantially more water than arable land. Several ponds have already been cleared by landowners and the Old Town Trust working with the Wild Woods Steering Group will be renovating the ponds along Fishponds Lane. A wide range of measures continue to be explored.

### **Stream Clearance**

Each November for the last four or five years the Parish council has engaged a contractor to clear vegetation including rushes from the stream along from Miller's Bridge to Rolfe's corner. This work is scheduled as usual for this November and is paid for by the community through the precept. Whilst it may be useful for water to flow freely in the centre of the village at times of flooding, the stream has a limited capacity to hold the hugely increased water volumes during a flood event such as Storm Babet and the road bridges themselves reduce the capacity of the stream too.

Our aim as a community is to be resilient and prepared and to learn from our experiences and the knowledge of others. In this way we can protect ourselves, adapt to our changing weather patterns and work to slow further climate and nature breakdown.