

SAHAM TONEY PARISH COUNCIL FLOOD MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY THE 19TH MARCH 2024 AT THE WELLS-COLE COMMUNITY CENTRE

62 parishioners, 8 parish councillors and District Councillor Ms. H. Crane and County Councillor Mr. E. Connolly, Mr. S. Halls from the LLFA and Ms L. Whitcher from the WASFAG were also present.

Mr. J. Baldwin, Chairman of the Parish Council, opened the meeting. Mr. Baldwin said the aim of this meeting is to inform parishioners in attendance of what has been done or will be done throughout the village with regard to flooding. The Chairman introduced Steve Halls from the LLFA and Liz Whitcher from the Watton and Saham Action Flood Group who will both be giving presentations.

There will be a chance to ask questions and this is the only time you will be able to speak. Please do not interrupt the meeting when other people are speaking.

1. Apologies for Absence received from District Councillor Mr. P. Bate and Mr. T. Bunce.

2. Update on the Flood Work in the Parish. Mr. Halls introduced himself and Mark Ogden from the Flood and Water Management Department at Norfolk Council. Slides were shown throughout the presentation to illustrate the schemes. Phase 1 of the work is now complete and Phase 2 will go ahead this year dependent on timescales and funding. Phase 1 is split into 2 catchments – Saham Hills catchment and East Ashill catchment. Phase 1 has been completed working with local farmers to slow, store and filter water and this has done a really good job in slowing the flow.

Phase 2 will cost between £300 - £400,000, the main cost being muck away which is due to the land being clay and needing to be removed from site. Because it involves a lagoon on farmers land, it will not be carried out until after harvest this year. Funding will come from the Government and Environment Agency and bids are currently being submitted. The benefits of the scheme have to outweigh the cost as it is taxpayers' money. No Planning Permission is required.

Parishioners asked questions as follows: -

- A parishioner from Hills Road asked about the junction of Hills Road with Ploughboy Lane pointing out that water comes down Hills Road and Bridge Lane and creates flooding in front of his property. Mr. Halls replied that part of the scheme is to make sure the ditch is cleaned out and maintained and is working as best as it can at this junction. The blocked culvert will be cleared when work is carried out on site in the summer
- A parishioner from Cley Lane said she would like to thank the farmers for their part in helping with the flooding problems and asked why not all the farmers asked had engaged with the scheme. This question could not be answered due to confidentiality.
- A parishioner from Coburg Lane said that landowners do not want to be responsible for maintenance. The water that comes down Coburg Lane comes from Ashill and asked if there were any plans for Coburg Lane. Mr. Halls replied that there are currently no plans for Coburg Lane.

- A parishioner from Cley Lane said they had made a 50m x 30m x 2m holding ditch on their land and asked if that was going to be of any use. Mr. Halls said this would have no impact on the main run and is happy to visit the parishioner and see the work that is being done. Regarding the ditch in Cley Lane, Mr. Halls is not aware of who piped it, but the gas main runs on this verge and to replace the small pipe with a larger one would require an easement.
- A parishioner from Cley Lane said that when the pipe was installed in Cley Lane by Norfolk County Council some 15 years ago, the Parish Council did comment that it was totally inadequate. Also, while water is being held back there is nothing being done in the Watton bridge area. Mr. Halls replied that there are no plans to do anything on Swaffham Road at the bridge area.

3. Watton and Saham Flood Action Group – Liz Whitcher, Chairman of WASFAG gave a presentation :-

- Group started in July 2017 as Working Group of Watton Neighbourhood Plan
- Late in 2017 Nick Creek joined
- I became Chair in 2018
- November 2020, we decided to separate from the NP and became WASFAG supported by Watton TC and Saham Toney PC

• Members currently are

For Saham – Cllrs Kathy Avery, Nick Creek, Daniel Freeman, ex-cllr Trevor Bunce, and resident Amanda Reeves who has been flooded

For Watton – Cllr Keith Gilbert also a District councillor, Alan Nichols resident of Watton Green, Andy Turner resident of Brandon Road flooded in garden and nearly into house, John Whitehouse, flooded internally 3 times on Swaffham Road, Trevor Ancelet, gets raw sewage in his front garden and myself who has not been flooded.

I have recently made contact with ex-Highways Engineer Dave Barley (tarmac expert) who has to know about the drainage. I think he would be a good addition to our Group as lots of the flooding is from Highways Drains.

- The work Steve Halls has told you about and 3 projects in Watton to lessen the impact of flooding are the result of the work of our Group. I will return to the projects in Watton in a moment.
- We have concentrated on gathering evidence and making good working relationships with officers from the LLFA like Steve, Highways and AW.
- We have held multi-agency meetings on site to see the problems and one in Saham in 2021 led to Highways agreeing to culvert the ditch in Pages Lane which otherwise would never have happened.
- The Group is affiliated to the NFF and during Covid they held fortnightly Zoom meetings on topics related to flooding such as insurance, planning and riparian responsibilities and rights.
- These responsibilities are vital to lessen flood risk and I have leaflets here produced by the NSFA which explain responsibilities as well as rights. Can't emphasise enough that those of you with these responsibilities need to fulfil them.
- And it is always important to report flooding. People don't do that because of insurance concerns and not being able to sell their home but you should do so. I have met two

people in Watton who were not told of the internal flooding until they moved in and neighbours told them.

- As a result of contact with the NFF, I now receive flood alerts from the Flood Forecasting Centre and have to decide whether or not to put out alerts on social media and by phoning those who are vulnerable but not on social media. We also get warnings from the County and District.
- What we need in both communities is an Emergency Plan which will go into action when we think there is a risk of flooding. We need volunteers to help with that. If we have a well thought out plan the Environment Agency will give us up to £1800 in funding to buy necessary equipment.
- Since Storm Babet and the wettest February on record, it is proving difficult to get help from the agencies as they are struggling to cope with the volume of work and not enough staff.
- This is especially true of Anglian Water. People say to me but they are a private company and it is their job. I say to them that they need to complain to the highest level in the company as they decide how many workers are on the ground trying to keep us clean and safe.
- There are 3 projects in Watton and one of these is called Reclaim the Rain. This is one of 25 projects in England given money by the Government's Resilience and Innovation Fund. The aim is to hold back rain and flood water for re-use while at the same time lessening flood risk. These 3 aspects all need to be met. We have been frustrated because the project needs to show evidence that in small rural communities that suffer from surface water flooding and currently are not eligible for funding, that such measures are a cost-effective answer. So, lots of measuring going on before we can get action. But we now know what we want to do in Watton:
- A farmer will build a reservoir taking water from a watercourse that can end up flooding the Bridle Way that runs on to Brandon Road and causes flooding to homes in the area.
- We plan to see if a pond in the Bridle Road play area taking water from the watercourse that causes flooding to properties further to the west would be workable while also being safe for children to play in. Currently they block up the watercourse when playing there and that is not helpful.
- As we all know Swaffham Road floods at the bridge over the Watton Brook and we are looking at what might be done to stop that.
- There are separate projects at the schools with separate funding from the Department for Education where the children will learn about water scarcity, flooding and grow food like apple trees and other crops.
- The fourth Reclaim the Rain project is a joint one to lessen the amount of surface water going into the foul sewer in the High Street. All the rainwater from the roofs goes into the highway and into the drains and then into a surface water sewer that does not have the capacity for these storms and even very heavy rainfall. Anglian Water have pulled out of designing and building what could help because we understand that Ofwat has told them they have to designate capital spending that will make more of a difference. Fortunately, there is another company that do that kind of work and they gave a presentation to the Town Council about it last week to gauge the council's willingness to support that sort of work. For example, where the pavement is widest near the Triumph bike shop they could make underground storage pits for water and plant trees to drink the water while making sure other services are not disrupted. The water from the surface water sewer could then

go into those pits. The Council welcomed the idea so we now will plan to work with the company to reach a suitable design.

- Then, the County Council officers like Steve are working with WSP a national company that works with local authorities on flood matters. They are looking at 4 areas of Watton – Watton Green, Lovell Gardens, Jubilee Road and Gough Place to see what measures might lessen the flood risk to properties in those areas. They are carrying out the cost/benefit analysis to see whether the benefits outweigh the costs. We should be hearing soon about that but I am a bit pessimistic about the outcome.

Parishioners asked the following questions: -

- A parishioner who lives near the Mill Corner crossroads said that her property has never been flooded but the ditch in front of the property disappears under water during heavy rain. It runs to a culvert across the road and this is either blocked or not big enough to take the quantity of water. Will Phase 2 help with the quantity of water flowing down Chequers Lane? Mr. Halls said they have to focus their energy on where they can have the best effect and if there is a maintenance issue, please report it.
- A parishioner from Chequers Lane asked who is responsible for the drains and said the drain outside her house floods onto the road and into her garden. Mr. Halls replied that the scheme will reduce the amount of surface water going into the foul system which causes this problem.
- A parishioner from Chequers Lane said the stream works well but the culverts outside her house do not work. They would be prepared for culverts to be put in their garden but have never been asked about this. Mr. Halls said they don't promote culverts and prefer open channels.
- A parishioner from Cley Lane said that just before Christmas in 2019, there was a human tragedy when a 92-year-old lady was flooded in her home from the front to the back and in the last year of her life had to move into rented accommodation. The parishioner would like to thank all those involved in helping in this situation. The parishioner also thanks all for arranging this meeting and will welcome a follow-up meeting in due course.
- A parishioner from Cley Lane said that the gulleys had been blocked as traffic had been diverted along Cley Lane recently due to Watton Road being closed. Lorries and buses had churned up the verged causing sediment to block the ditches and suggested that after a road closure Highways should check the ditches. Mr. Halls replied that this was a valid point.
- A parishioner from Cley Lane said that her property had been flooded 4 times with sewage water and this had caused considerable stress and financial worries and she just doesn't know what to do about it. Mr. Halls will speak with the lady after the meeting.
- A parishioner from Chequers Lane said that as riparian owners, they keep their ditch clear but are taking their lives in their hands due to the speed of traffic on Chequers/Cley Lane – someone could get killed whilst clearing their ditch.

Mr. J. Baldwin thanked both Mr. Halls and Ms Witcher and the parishioners for attending and he hoped that the meeting has been informative and shown that we are all doing our best with what is available to us. It will always be a constant battle with water but parishioners can help by keeping their ditches clear. If you receive a letter from the Parish Council, as a riparian owner, please don't take offence as we are only highlighting what should be done for the benefit of the whole parish.

The meeting closed at 8.50 p.m.

