

## **Report from Watton & Saham Flood Action Group to the Annual Meeting of Watton Town Council on 19 April 2022**

### **Introduction**

1. At the Annual Meeting in April 2021, we reported that we became the Watton & Saham Flood Action Group (WASFAG) in November 2020. We became independent of the Town Council and began working even more closely with Saham Toney who suffer from the same flooding and foul sewer problems as Watton. We now have three new members in Saham, all of whom are Parish Councillors. The names of the group are listed at the end of this report.
2. We changed our name to the Watton & Saham Flood Action Group to emphasise that we are working for action with all the relevant agencies and to align ourselves more closely with other Flood Action Groups who are affiliated, like us, to the National Flood Forum.
3. The National Flood Forum (NFF) is a charity working to help flooded communities across England. During lockdown they held fortnightly Zoom meetings which I as Chairman attended on behalf of the Group. About 40 representatives have attended these from across England. The meetings have been a source of information and expertise about how to address flooding in local communities.
4. We now our own website which was set up by Todd Pitcher of Semibold, a local Watton-based business, and the costs were met by a donation from Watton Town Council. The website is a source of information and help for those at risk of flooding in both Saham Toney and Watton. There is a link to the site on both the Watton Town Council website and the Saham Toney Parish Council website. We are very grateful to the Town Council for the funding for the website. We are planning to put our Facebook page on the website page.
5. We work closely with both councils and both are in the process of setting up an Emergency Plan for flooding and any civil contingency. The Town Council has set up an Emergency Working Group which will include members of the public as well as councillors. We would welcome interest from residents who might be able to help by serving on the Working Group.
6. We now do have action in both communities as a result of our relentless pursuit of the various agencies to do something about the flooding and foul sewer problems.

### **Actions achieved for Watton**

**Work with the Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) at Norfolk County Council (also known as the Water Management Team)**

7. Watton and Saham were chosen in February 2021 as one of the first 16 areas in Norfolk affected by flooding to receive support from Lord Dannatt's Norfolk Strategic Flooding Alliance (NSFA). The County has put aside a sum each year to support works in these areas.
8. Norfolk County Council have commissioned WSP Engineering Consultants to undertake a study looking at potential options to reduce flood risk in Watton. WSP have completed phase 1 of the study where information was gathered to understand areas that have flooded in Watton as well as areas at risk of flooding from surface water in future events. Through collaboration with the Group and other partners they have identified 6 flood zones or hotspots where the highest number of properties at risk are located and where potential investment will have most effect. WSP are now investigating options to reduce flood risk in the town by coming up with a long list of mitigation options (Phase 2) and these will be scrutinised before going to options modelling of a short list to understand benefits and economics. It should be noted that the success of the scheme will likely depend on Norfolk County Council being able to secure funding from third parties
9. The officers from the LLFA plan to consult WASFAG towards the latter part of April on the long list of options and what they think are the goers for stage 3 (Options Testing). The long list has recently been reviewed to make sure they hadn't missed any opportunities at the 6 hotspot zones. WSP are now making those changes and once the plans are reissued the LLFA will send them to us and others for comments. The lead officer will then set up a signoff meeting for Stage 2 with stakeholders to go through each of the areas and agree which options we move forward with.
10. The Water Management Team at the County Council have been successful in gaining access to more funds from the Department for the Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra) and the Environment Agency. They joined with Suffolk County Council and they are one of only 25 regions across England to be given £6m over 6 years. The Norfolk project is "to work with rural settlements in Norfolk to capture and re-use flood water." The initiative is called Reclaim the Rain and we applied on behalf of Watton to try and secure £1m in funding to help with flood mitigation in the town.

### **Work with Norfolk County Council Highways Department**

11. We have also worked closely with NCC Highways department. They have improved the drainage in Jubilee Road by adding more capacity and ensuring that the outlet to the watercourse in the Wick Farm field is clear to run.
12. They have also helped us trace their drainage and other drainage in Swaffham Road from the roundabout to the bridge. As part of that they surveyed the system at the roundabout and discovered a large tank underneath the centre of the roundabout which was partially blocked by a

large piece of tarmac which they removed. When there is a significant rainfall, the Group will visit the roundabout to see how well the drainage is working.

13. They have jetted the culvert that leads from the ditch at the end of the Bridleway next to Swaffham Road to the Brook so that it now runs clear. They have also traced other culverts connected to this. With the help of local residents who have lived in Swaffham Road for many years, the Group have learned about ditches that have now been filled in and may also be contributing to the flooding on Swaffham Road.
14. The Town Council also gave us a donation to employ a specialist drainage consultant from Amazi Consulting in Ipswich to survey the row of cottages built in the 1700s which have flooded three times. She has written a report and the Group are still working with Highways, the LLFA and Anglian Water to work out what is best to do to alleviate the flooding in the road. The Group are very grateful to the Town Council for this donation which is to benefit all the residents of Swaffham Road and not just those in the terrace.

### **Work with Anglian Water**

15. Anglian Water are committed to removing surface water from their foul sewers as this causes problems at the pumping stations and then residents' toilets and showers back up. They are working with both the LLFA and Highways on this as partners and have input into the WSP project. We are waiting for confirmation of significant investment in their infrastructure over the next few years.

## **Actions achieved for Saham Toney**

### **Work with the LLFA at Norfolk County Council (also known as the Water Management Team)**

16. Twenty leaky dams have now been installed on land above Saham Hills as a result of collaboration between several landowners and Norfolk County Council. This is split between the two watercourses that head South towards Saham. Landowners supplied materials for all of the leaky dams. Seven of the leaky dams were installed by the landowners with installation of a further thirteen funded by Norfolk County Council. These leaky dams are designed to slow the flow and gradually store a proportion of runoff during heavy rainfall events. These features will help reduce the frequency of flooding in Saham Toney downstream but further intervention will be needed to complement them.
17. Thus, Norfolk County Council are now working on Phase 2 of the project exploring options to attenuate water in the mid catchment region just upstream of the village. WSP have built a hydraulic model to test the Phase 2 basins to see their potential and what standard of protection they will afford to those downstream in the village. The options currently consist of large ponds/wetlands and the aspiration is that they are multi-faceted i.e. provide biodiversity net gain but others could be added if feasible. Any construction

will be dependent on obtaining funding from the Environment Agency and on landowner agreements.

### **Work with Norfolk County Council Highways Department**

18. The officer leading the work wrote:

*“Norfolk County Council teams have been working on all the flooding issues that accrued across Norfolk in these unprecedented times. Due to homes being flooded we had to prioritise accordingly.*

*Norfolk County Council have committed a lot of time and resource to Saham Toney. We currently have three large schemes underway. We have just finished Ploughboy Lane and are about to finish Pages Lane. Next week we are finishing work off at Richmond Road to eliminate the ongoing flooding issue. These three schemes come to a total of £140,000. We have been working with your County Councillor, the Parish Council and also the Watton & Saham Flood Action Group response to the flooding from last year.*

*We are working with all the mentioned groups to encourage more landowners to keep their ditches clean.*

*As you will understand this has been a terrible year for flooding throughout Norfolk. We have had to look at each request individually and prioritise accordingly.”*

### **Work with Anglian Water**

19. Anglian Water have jetted and cleared all their foul sewers and installed non-return valves for residents where appropriate. Residents should report to the Parish Council when they experience problems as the Flood Action Group can have these investigated in the context of the AW network in the whole village.

### **Work with landowners responsible for ditches and watercourses**

20. The Parish Council with support from the agencies have been persuading landowners to clear their ditches and watercourses. Much has been done, but there are still more to be cleared.

## **Actions relating to both communities**

21. As appropriate, the Group make representations on Planning applications where there is a risk of flooding and we also speak at the Planning Committee. We are unable to stop such applications if the Lead Local Flood Authority approves the applicants' drainage strategy. But we follow up with the developers when they present their drainage plans for the relevant planning condition to be discharged and we now follow up to see if what was planned is actually what is put in place. So for the Barrett's site on Thetford Road we

have seen the size of the culverts to take both the Highway water and the property surface water to the ditch system on the west of Thetford Road. The attenuation ponds next the A1075 should contain water and when they reach a certain level, then a hydrobrake is released to allow the water to flow to the ditch on the western side of the A1075 and to then make its way to the Watton Brook. If these ponds do overflow, then the Flood Action Group should be informed as they can get action quickly. In future we plan to monitor all the Sustainable Drainage Systems to make sure they are appropriately maintained which is critical to reducing flood risk.

## **Future Plans**

22. The Group also talked about the need to become more active when floods threaten. We think we need to have volunteers to act as flood wardens who will visit vulnerable properties with residents who do not access social media or the internet. There are alternatives to sandbags (which the Environment Agency no longer consider OK) which are called floodsacs and we think we need a store of these. For all of this we need our volunteers trained and appropriate insurance in place which the NFF have advised us about.
23. We should be clear that if we have other storms like those of the past, no-one can guarantee that there will not be flooding. What we hope to do is create more resilient communities with more resources to reduce the risk.
24. We also need eyes and ears around the streets of the village and the town. We have some volunteers already in place in Watton in Jubilee Road, Brandon Road, Langmere Road and Monkham's Drive but we need more. We need people to alert us when Highways drains are flooding in moderate to heavy rain and when foul sewers spew their sewerage on to the roads and gardens. We also need people to let us know when any of the agencies turn up and do work. So, if you have time, think you have skills to offer and are interested to join us please get in touch via our website or by phoning the town or parish council.

Liz Whitcher

Chairman and resident of Watton since 2010

On behalf of

Cllr Kathy Avery, Saham Toney Parish Council

Cllr Trevor Bunce, Saham Toney Parish Council

Cllr Nick Creek, Chairman, Saham Toney Parish Council

Cllr Keith Gilbert, Watton Town Council and Breckland District Council

Alan Nichols, resident of Watton who has lived in Watton and Saham all his life