

# **Report from Watton & Saham Flood Action Group (WASFAG) to the Annual Meeting of Watton Town Council on 9<sup>th</sup> May 2023**

## **Introduction**

This report will focus on actions being taken to mitigate flooding in Watton and on the plans for having a Community Emergency Plan.

## **Actions to mitigate flooding:**

**Reclaim the Rain (RtR) There will be a table at the meeting with information and an officer to answer questions.**

The main news is that in July 2022, we learned that Watton was one of four communities in Norfolk to be chosen by the Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) in conjunction with the LLFA in Suffolk (which has chosen three communities) to be part of the Reclaim the Rain (RtR) project. The others in Norfolk are Merton, Thompson and Boxford.

There is £6.4m of funding already allocated from the government's Flooding and Coastal Resilience and Innovation Programme (FCRIP). The project will run until 2027 and the Senior Officer reports regularly to the Environment Agency who are in overall charge of the 25 projects all over England.

The Reclaim the Rain project is designed to persuade the Environment Agency and the Department for Food, the Environment and Rural Affairs (Defra) that saving rain and flood water for reuse during times of drought will work in small rural communities that do not receive funding currently.

There is a Local Working Group consisting of a Town Councillor, myself as Chairman of the Flood Action Group, three residents who have been flooded, a representative of the Rotary Club, two local farmers and the Head of the Infant and Junior Schools.

The whole community of Watton are invited to take part and you may already have seen and completed a questionnaire on Facebook or completed one on a Wednesday Market-day in February. We decided to start with Facebook as we wanted to target younger people and those with families before finding ways to engage with those not on the internet.

As of the 9<sup>th</sup> May, we are starting to knock on doors in areas that have been flooded to talk about the project and ask people to fill in another questionnaire about how they might contribute to the project, a Wish List. There is a QR code for phones. You will be asked to choose from six options of physical things you can do to help and six options for helping to monitor the flood risk such as watching out for highways drains or ditches that are overflowing while you are out walking.

Those of you with children or grandchildren at the Infant and Junior Schools will know that there is a lot going on there. As well as the QR code work, the RtR team have managed to obtain extra funding (£120k in total) for Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) in all the schools in the project. The amounts to each school will be allocated on the basis of the flood risk, ages and number of children, ease of access and egress etc. There are also educational programmes for the children.

EDI Surveys from Ipswich are contracted to look at the watercourses, sewers etc to map their depth and the Finished Floor Levels (FFLs) of properties adjacent to them. They will be around from 9<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> May.

JBA consultants did a walkabout and placed monitoring equipment in various watery places to get data on soil types, groundwater levels etc to help the project determine what sort of attenuation features make sense and where these attenuation features will be best placed. Once we have all that data, we can start putting together the wish list data with this and the EDI data and start making decisions about what should go where.

But at each stage, the community will be consulted.

It would be helpful if any of you hearing this report or reading it online have any suggestions about how best to involve the community. We plan to have a large banner on the Queen's Hall railings. What sort of event would attract a large number of people?

### **Anglian Water**

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 (see below).

More significantly, they are joining with the RtR project to remove surface water in the High Street and funding is available for this.

We are also waiting for confirmation of significant investment in their infrastructure over the next few years.

### **WSP Project**

Watton and Saham were chosen in February 2021 as one of the first 16 areas in Norfolk affected by flooding to receive support from the Norfolk Strategic Flooding Alliance (NSFA). The County has put aside a sum each year to support works in these areas.

One of these is in Watton where Norfolk County Council have commissioned WSP Engineering Consultants to undertake a study looking at potential options to reduce flood risk. Through collaboration with the Flood Action 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. These are

Lovell Gardens, Watton Green, Brandon Road with Langmere Road etc., Jubilee Road, Aircraft Drive with Saham Road and as far east as Nelson Court and the High Street. WSP have completed their investigations and are working on the cost/benefit analysis of any works ie will the number of properties protected outweigh the cost of any installation. For any such works, the LLFA will have to find funding partners so work will not begin immediately.

### **Community Emergency Plan**

WASFAG works closely with both councils, and both are in the process of setting up a Community Emergency Plan for flooding and any other emergency. The Town Council has set up an Emergency Working Group which includes members of the public as well as councillors. We would welcome interest from residents who might be able to help by signing up as volunteers when there is an emergency. There is an information leaflet and a form to fill in if you can offer your skills or equipment as a volunteer. It would also be helpful to know if you consider yourself to be vulnerable and needing help when there is an emergency. We all remember how fast everything happened last summer with the fire in Ashill and many local people helped as they could. Having a firm plan and known volunteers would facilitate quick action in any future emergency. If we don't have volunteers, there won't be a Plan.

### **Website**

We have 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 in 2021. The website is a source of information and help for those at risk of flooding in both Saham Toney and Watton. When we are alerted by the Flood Forecasting Centre that there is a risk of flooding, we will post the information there as well as on social media. These warnings are more accurate than those provided by the Environment Agency. 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 (and Saham Toney Parish Council) for their recent donations so that we can keep it updated and provide links to the RtR project and other relevant sites. We are also planning to put our Facebook page on the website page.

### **Representation on Planning Applications**

As appropriate, the Group make representations on Planning applications where there is a risk of flooding, and we also speak at the Planning Committee. In recent months we have influenced the Planning Officer with regard to single developments and those with less than 10 dwellings such that drainage plans have been altered and in one case the application refused.

### **Future Plans**

1. 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.
2. Breckland District Council is updating their Local Plan which forms the basis of where future housing and business developments will be allocated. WASFAG and both councils are busy making representation on behalf of our communities by answering questions in the various consultation documents put forward by BDC. WASFAG has successfully lobbied BDC so that we are assured that there will be a new Strategic Flood Risk Assessment Map with all the areas which have been flooded by surface water located on it. This will be a huge improvement when it comes to planning applications of whatever size.

On a personal note, I would again like to thank the Town Council for nominating me to the Royal Voluntary Service for an award as a Coronation Champion for my work with the Flood Action Group. I am one of 500 people from across the UK chosen from 5,000 nominations and have received a certificate signed by the King and Queen and a pin to wear.

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 Daniel Freeman, 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.

Andy Turner, resident of Watton

John Whitehouse, resident of Watton