

Uffington Parish Council

REPORT ON FLOODING - WINTER 2023 / 2024, PART 2

ACTION PLAN

Introduction

The months of October 2023 to early January 2024 were exceptionally wet by any standards, resulting in extensive flooding in many parts of the country, particularly around the times of Storms Babet (18 - 21 October 2023), Ciaran (1 – 2 November 2023) and Henk (2 January 2024 – the last one apparently the eighth named storm of the 2023-2024 storm season). Armagh Observatory and Planetarium has recorded October 2023 as the wettest month since daily rainfall measurements began in 1838.

Crucial to reducing the chances of flooding is the ability of the Uffington Brook (the stream which flows around Uffington, past the Uffington Sewage Treatment Works ('STW'), in a north easterly direction from The Wharf, under the railway line, to Moor Mill Farm, after which it joins the R Ock), to allow excess water to drain from the village. Since the actions taken after the serious flooding of 2007, this has happened quickly (within a matter of hours) as soon as the period of heavy rain ceases. BUT NOT this year. Particularly, local people do not recall severe flooding on the Fernham Road from the junction with the private road to Grounds Farm to The Wharf, where a considerable amount of water accumulated on the road to a depth of up to 30 cm. The pattern of flooding was identical in the three storms mentioned above.

In comparison with much of the rest of the country, Uffington was relatively lightly affected, albeit with extensive flooding on roads which threatened many properties and severely impacted vehicular traffic, and on surrounding farmland. Nonetheless, we are aware of at least four properties which were flooded:

1. The ground floor of The Wharf Farm, Fernham Road, SN7 7PS, was flooded on two occasions to a depth of c4 cm. Flooding was exacerbated by the 'bow wave' created by vehicles on Fernham Road, despite road signs showing 'Road Closed', placed by Thames Water.
2. The ground floor of The Willows, Packers Lane, Uffington SN7 7RT was badly flooded by Storm Henk. This was caused by excess surface water from the field and garden behind the property being unable to drain from the patio located outside the recent extension to the property.
3. The ground floor of The Craven, Fernham Road, SN7 7RD, was flooded to a depth of c5cm during Storm Henk.
4. Flooding of the ground floor of Shotover House, Shotover Corner SN7 7RH by Storm Henk was avoided by hard work from local residents; as it was, a limited amount of water penetrated the front door.

Other properties on the Fernham Road and at Shotover were very close to being flooded, again exacerbated by the 'bow wave' effect of passing vehicles.

Part 1 of this Report

In Part 1 of our report into this flooding, which was approved by Uffington Parish Council ('the Council') on 8 January 2024, we identified the principal locations where the flooding caused by Storms Babet, Ciaran and Henk occurred, the reasons, and recommended actions to reduce the likelihood of future flooding. The substance of this was to request relevant landowners to remove accumulated debris, fallen trees etc from three sections of the Uffington Brook to enable flood waters to drain from the village as quickly as they used to do. These sections were:

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1. From Wharf Farm, north east to the railway line – as at February 2024, the landowner is working on this.
2. From the railway line, north east to Moor Mill Farm - no information received, as at February 2024.
3. From Broadway/Shotover, west and north to Bridge Cottage (Woolstone Road) – this work has been completed.

We noted in this report that there are other areas in and around Uffington where the free flow of water is important, and that there was more work to be done in this respect.

Part 2 of this Report

Aim

The aim of this second part of the report is to publicise an Action Plan (see Annex A) for action by relevant organisations and individuals, to address:

1. The extent to which climate change and sewage pollution is now affecting Uffington, and,
2. Other problem areas ('pinch points') in the flow of water into, around and out of Uffington and other locations where flooding occurred.

Climate Change

As indicated above, the frequency and severity of extreme weather events (summer and winter) has increased significantly in recent years; the existence and impact of 'climate change' is now acknowledged by most governments around the world. The impact in UK appears to be that there will be hotter, drier summers and wetter, warmer winters than in the past. In recent years, there has been some enthusiasm at government level for improving defences against, for example, floods or snow, in the most critical locations, but not across the board; any such severe events were seen as '1 in 100-year events' which did not justify the additional expenditure required. It is the Council's view that this has changed. Rather than there being the occasional '1 in 100-year event', the UK has suffered from 10 named storms in the current season (to February 2024), 5 of which have had a major impact on Uffington in less than 3 months – Storms Babet, Ciaran, Henk, and more recently Storms Isha (22/23 January 2024) and Jocelyne (23/24 January). All of them would have been classified as '1 in 100-year events' in the past. The Council is asking all relevant organisations and entities, including landowners, to put in place the necessary improvements and infrastructure to safeguard the residents of Uffington and local villages. We note that this is a responsibility placed on owners by government legislation. (See the distribution list of this report on page 6).

Pollution

An unfortunate characteristic of much of the water circulating around Uffington, and particularly downstream of the STW, is sewage pollution. The extent of discharges of untreated sewage from Uffington STW is considerable, is monitored by Thames Water (TW) and is available on line. Instances of hydraulic flooding, usually in the lower sections of the village public sewage system, are reported by the Council to TW and the Environment Agency (EA). TW sometimes react quickly (e.g., to an operational blockage on the Woolstone Road on 4 February 2024), but the Council (and village as a whole) are very concerned that continuing and increasing pollution is now affecting previously clean parts of Uffington and populations of rare species such as water voles are increasingly at risk – or no longer visible. The EA is currently unable to supply testing kits for local usage by volunteers. See photos 8 and 9, at Annex C.

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This is a nation-wide problem involving most of the water companies. With regard to the Uffington STW, TW website indicates that they have a plan to improve the capacity to treat sewage, but information, openness, clarity and the timings are impossible to find. The Council urges TW to complete the planned works as a matter of urgency and to be more open and transparent with their customers.

Funding

For several decades, there has been a failure at government level to invest in maintaining or upgrading infrastructure, including in funding for the Environment Agency. The problems generated by the privatisation of the water industry, particularly as regards the treatment of sewage, are rehearsed in the national media on most days. We accept that funds are tight, but nonetheless, we believe that we must make the case as strongly as possible, for the residents of Uffington to be properly protected. Whilst in a few cases, limited Government funding has been made available to help pay for flood damage to homes and businesses and make them more resilient in the future, this does not address the wider need to adequately fund preventative measures to prevent flooding in the first place.

Pinch points

There are five adopted tarmac roads leading into Uffington, and each will be examined for pinch points restricting the flow of excess surface water. A list of Actions ('Action Plan') needed is at Annex A. A map is at Annex B, photos of recent flooding are at Annex C and a record of historic flooding at Annex D

Roads leading into Uffington:

1. Fernham Road – from the north.
2. Claypit Lane (from Longcot) and the road from Woolstone, which join c500m west of the village, on the Woolstone Road – from the west / south west.
3. Broadway – from the south.
4. Fawler Road – from the south east
5. Baulking Road (aka Station Road) – from the north east, which joins the Fawler Road at a T junction on the eastern edge of the village.

There are some factors common to all roads in and around Uffington which need to be addressed initially.

Common factors.

Roads on a hill, especially long, straight ones, (e.g. Broadway) carry a large volume of water which can be up to 30 cm in depth on occasions, particularly where there are banks and verges which restrict water to the road surface. Most of the roads around Uffington have ditches on one or both sides; these are maintained by landowners, some to an acceptable condition, and some, less so; all need regular attention. We accept that whilst the roadside ditches need to provide an obvious route for surface water, they should not be scraped totally clean – some natural vegetation will hold water back to permit a gradual release.

However, 'grips,' to channel water from the road into the ditch, are essential. We are aware of one landowner who voluntarily maintains the grips on parts of Broadway, but across the board, there has been no maintenance of grips by OCC Highways in at least the last ten years. We request very strongly that this should be re-instituted.

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Fernham Road – from the north

The principal cause of flooding on the Fernham Road was identified in Part 1 of this report as the Uffington Brook being partially blocked in many locations between The Wharf Farm and Moor Mill Farm. Landowners have been requested to undertake the necessary clearance before the autumn of 2024. (See progress report above.)

A section of guard rail embedded in a lump of concrete and part of the stream roadside wall fell into the Uffington Brook many years ago close to Uffington allotments and has been reported for repair several times on FixMyStreet. This partially blocks the stream, and the associated reduction in verge height allows flood water to back fill on to the road. The lumps of concrete should be removed and damage made good by OCC Highways, and the verge height reinstated. See photographs at Annex C.

The bridge leading over the Uffington Brook from Fernham Road into the STW and the agricultural bridge c20m upstream have been observed on occasions to be holding up excess water. Both should be checked and cleared at least annually by landowners.

Claypit Lane (from Longcot) and the road from Woolstone, which join c500m west of the village, on the Woolstone Road – from the west / south west.

Flooding on the Woolstone Road, from the 'Y' junction with Claypit Lane to Bridge Cottage, is a regular occurrence. We believe this is because the culvert under the road (north to south) is either partially blocked or is not large enough. Initially, the culvert should be checked and cleared of rubbish and weeds, and upgraded if of inadequate capacity for current and anticipated future volumes of flood water.

20 m downstream of this culvert, the stream crosses under the Woolstone Road again, from south to north. The entrance and exits to / from this culvert are breaking down, and will shortly increase the risk of flooding on the road. This has been reported to FixMyStreet. As above, the capacity should be upgraded if required.

Broadway – from the south

Flooding in the Shotover area, at the junction of Broadway and Woolstone Road, is a regular occurrence after a period of heavy rain. This was particularly severe during Storm Henk, when Shotover House was flooded – see above. Overnight 2/3 January 2024, flood water unable to get away from the culvert under Broadway and the closely adjoining culvert under the garden of Stonehaven, was flowing strongly on the road back towards the Broadway junction with Woolstone Road (Shotover) and westwards on Woolstone Road to Bridge Cottage, at a depth of more than 30 cm. The likely causes are:

1. The pipe / drain under several access drives from The Severalls at Shotover Corner to Garden Cottage (all on the east side of Broadway) is partially blocked or has insufficient capacity. This should be checked, cleared, and upgraded if of inadequate capacity for current and anticipated future volumes of flood water.
2. The culvert under Broadway (east to west) and the adjoining culvert under the garden of Stonehaven is partially blocked or have insufficient capacity. Both should be checked for any blockage, cleared and upgraded if of inadequate capacity for current and anticipated future volumes of flood water.

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Fawler Road – from the south east

The Fawler Road approach to Uffington was flooded several times in the October to January 2024 period to a depth sufficient to impede most private cars, in the area of GR315887; this was caused by a blockage in the culvert which takes a stream under the road, in a north to south direction. This culvert should be checked for any blockages, cleared and upgraded if of inadequate capacity for current and anticipated future volumes of flood water.

Baulking Road (aka Station Road)

No flooding issues.

Individual Properties

Whilst most of the flooding in Uffington has been restricted to the roads in and around the village, a few unfortunate properties have suffered from flooding to some extent. A historic flooding record, including 2023, is attached at Annex D. The actions recommended above and in Part 1 of this report should address those incidents where flood water from the highway is forced into homes due to natural flows and by inconsiderate motorists driving too fast and/or ignoring 'Road Closed' signs. Some of the other issues reported include:

1. Surface flood water running off gardens and/or adjacent fields and into properties especially where the entrance (doorway) is below the level of the surrounding land.
2. Water overflowing from ditches (not necessarily connected to flowing watercourses).
3. Water backing up through drains caused by excessive water in the sewers (hydraulic or sewer flooding).
4. Water overflowing from gutters and drains.
5. Groundwater flooding where the level of the water table rises above the lowest point in a property.

Given the range of situations and solutions it is imperative that homeowners who know or think they are or might be at risk of flooding of any type consider the risks and act accordingly BEFORE the emergency arises. Excellent advice is given the guide 'Homeowners Guide to Flood Resilience' downloadable from [FloodGuide_ForHomeowners.pdf \(oxfordshirefloodtoolkit.com\)](https://www.oxfordshirefloodtoolkit.com/FloodGuide_ForHomeowners.pdf).

And finally

There is a further issue concerning insufficient water reaching Uffington once flood waters have dissipated. The stream which flows around the village from 50m south east of the Craven Common entrance on Fawler Road until it joins the Uffington Brook behind South Paddock House SN7 7RE, via the pond on the Jubilee Field and both Broad Street and Woolstone Road, is sourced from a spring behind the Uffington Sports Club grounds – see point 9 on the map. This stream seldom dries up totally, but the route to Craven Common blocks up with silt and vegetation, which should be cleared periodically.

The stream which continues from Craven Common round to the Jubilee Field Pond and then down the eastern side of the High Street and then along Woolstone Road past South View Farm is a vital part of the natural ecosystem. This stream and the pond are much prized by residents as an amenity and a visual attraction, but also as a habitat for water voles and other rare species.

Landowners involved are Compton Beauchamp Estates, Uffington Sports Club, J Mildenhall, the Parish Council and riparian landowners.

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Conclusions

The extent of flooding in and around Uffington in the winter months of 2023 / 2024 has not been seen since the exceptional events of July 2007. The Council is of the opinion that the reasons for this are:

- Lack of maintenance of critical infrastructure over an extended period.
- Lack of maintenance by landowners as identified in Part 1 of this report, and summarised above.
- Partial blockage of pipes, drains and culverts (due to lack of maintenance), and questions as to their capacity to cope with the effects of climate change. These are thought to be the responsibility of OCC Highways, as itemised in Annex A attached. This should be addressed in the light of climate change and the very high number of '1 in 100-year events' now being experienced regularly in UK. (To us, this means that the capacity of all relevant systems must be increased).
- The increasing amounts of sewage pollution in all waterways is well known nationally and linked to the increasing effects of climate change on the volume of water. It is of great concern in Uffington. Government and local authorities must exert great pressure on the water companies, to ensure much quicker and more comprehensive solutions and that current Uffington STW maintenance / improvement plans are completed in a timely manner, as well as communicated to residents.
- Insufficient measures taken by some homeowners in high flood risk areas.

Approved by Uffington Parish Council on 12 February 2024

List of Annexes:

- A: Summary of Actions needed
- B: Map
- C: Photos
- D. Historic flooding locations map

Distribution:

Action:

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Thames Water – CUSTOMER.FEEDBACK@THAMESWATER.CO.UK FAO Chris Weston, CEO
Landowners around Uffington

Information:

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Vale of White Horse District Council:

- Cllr Bethia Thomas Bethia.Thomas@whitehorsedc.gov.uk
- Cllr Sue Caul - sue.caul@whitehorsedc.gov.uk

Parish website

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ANNEX A

Action Plan - Summary of Actions Needed

Serial	Summary and Location	Action required
	PREVIOUSLY AGREED WORK – LOCAL LANDOWNERS	
1	Clear Uffington Brook from Wharf Farm, north east to the railway line. Map: A to B	(Landowner working on this)
2	Clear Uffington Brook from the railway line, north east to Moor Mill Farm. Map: C to D	(No information)
3	Clear stream from Broadway/Shotover, west and north to Bridge Cottage on the Woolstone Road. Map: E to F	(Completed)
4	Fernham Road. Bridges into STW and 15m upstream may be partially blocked. Map: Point 1 and 2	Landowners to check and clear annually.
	THAMES WATER	
5	It is essential that the increasing pollution of all water in and around Uffington is dealt with promptly.	Identify and eliminate sources of pollution; Complete planned improvement to Uffington STW; Keep Parish Council / residents informed.
	OCC HIGHWAYS	
6	Many roadside ditches are blocked / overgrown.	To be cleared annually, (but not scraped clean, to hold back water).
7	Many 'grips' are blocked, thus retaining water on the roads.	Re-institute annual maintenance / clearance.
	Fernham Road	
8	Obstruction and bank damage to Uffington Brook at Uffington allotments. Map: Point 3.	Remove obstructions and make good.
	Claypit Lane (from Longcot) and the road from Woolstone	
9	Culvert at 'Y' junction is partially blocked; capacity in doubt. Map: Point 4	Inspect and clear as required, and upgrade if capacity is insufficient.
10	Next culvert (20m downstream) is breaking down on both sides of the road. Map: Culvert entrance at Point 5	Inspect and repair as required; upgrade if capacity is insufficient.
	Broadway – from the south	
11	The pipe / drain from The Severalls at Shotover Corner to Garden Cottage (all on the east side of Broadway) is partially blocked or has insufficient capacity. Map: Entrance at Point 6	Inspect and clear as required; upgrade if capacity is insufficient.
12	The culvert under Broadway (east to west) and the next culvert under the garden of Stonehaven are partially blocked or have insufficient capacity. Map: Point 7	Inspect and clear as required, upgrade if capacity is insufficient.
	Fawler Road	

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13	The culvert in the area of GR315887 is thought to be partially blocked. Map: Point 8	Inspect and clear as required; upgrade if capacity is insufficient.
	LOCAL LANDOWNERS	
	Stream around the village	
14	The route from south west of the Sports Club to Craven Common blocks up with silt and vegetation. Map: Source: Point 9; route: G to H.	Needs clearance periodically
	PARISH COUNCIL	
15	Various locations	Maintain pressure on external agencies listed above.
	Stream around village from Craven Common, outside/alongside property	Needs periodic clearance.
	RIPARIAN OWNERS	
16	Stream around village outside/alongside property	Needs periodic clearance.
	PROPERTY OWNERS	
17	Carry out a flooding risk assessment of their properties	Adopt relevant preventive measures.

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ANNEX B

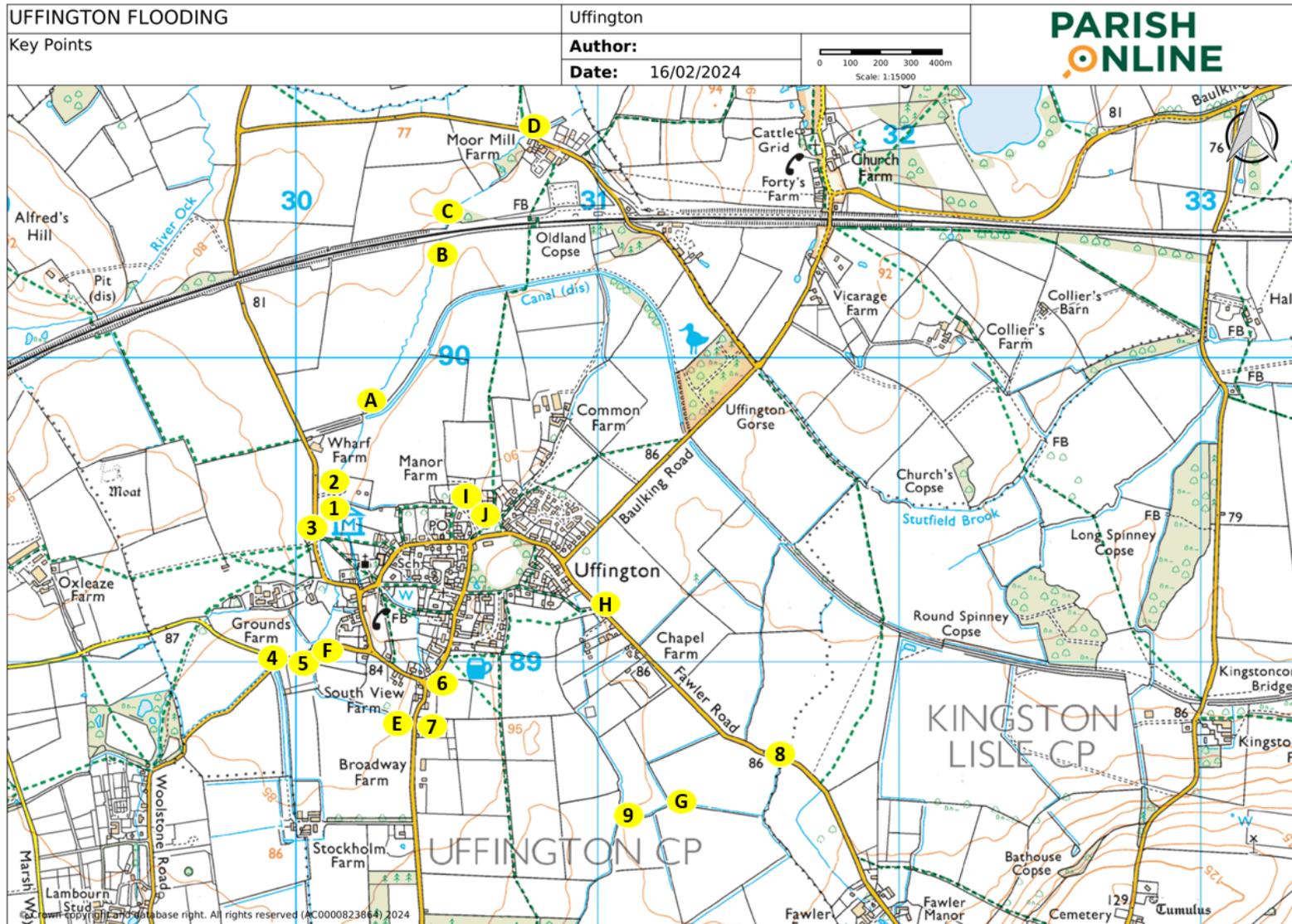




Photo 1. Broken rail and lump of concrete in Uffington Brook, at allotments, Fernham Road



Photo 2. Damaged verge (at allotments) allows the stream to overflow onto the Fernham Road.

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Photo 3. The Woolstone Road, flooded again on 18 February 2024



Photo 4. Flooding at the Claypit Lane / Woolstone Road 'Y' junction on 5 January 2024. (The entrance to the culvert under the road - north side to south - is in front of the tree).

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Photo 5. The second culvert under Woolstone Road – south to north – is disintegrating, on both sides of the road.



Photo 6. Flooding at Shotover on 18 February 2024 (Stonehaven on the right), showing flood water back-filling on to the road, unable to get away, as below.

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Photo 7. Entrance to the second culvert close to Stonehaven on 18 February 2024 – overloaded, and water unable to get away promptly.



Photo 8. Pollution in Uffington Pond – 5 January 2024

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Photo 9. Pollution in the stream alongside Woolstone Road, at The Old Police House - 4 February 2024.



Photo 10. Hydraulic flooding from the main sewer, polluting the Uffington Brook outside Field House SN7 7RD on 18 February 2024.

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ANNEX D

Historic flooding locations - map

