

Salisbury Flood Event - Saturday 6th January 2024

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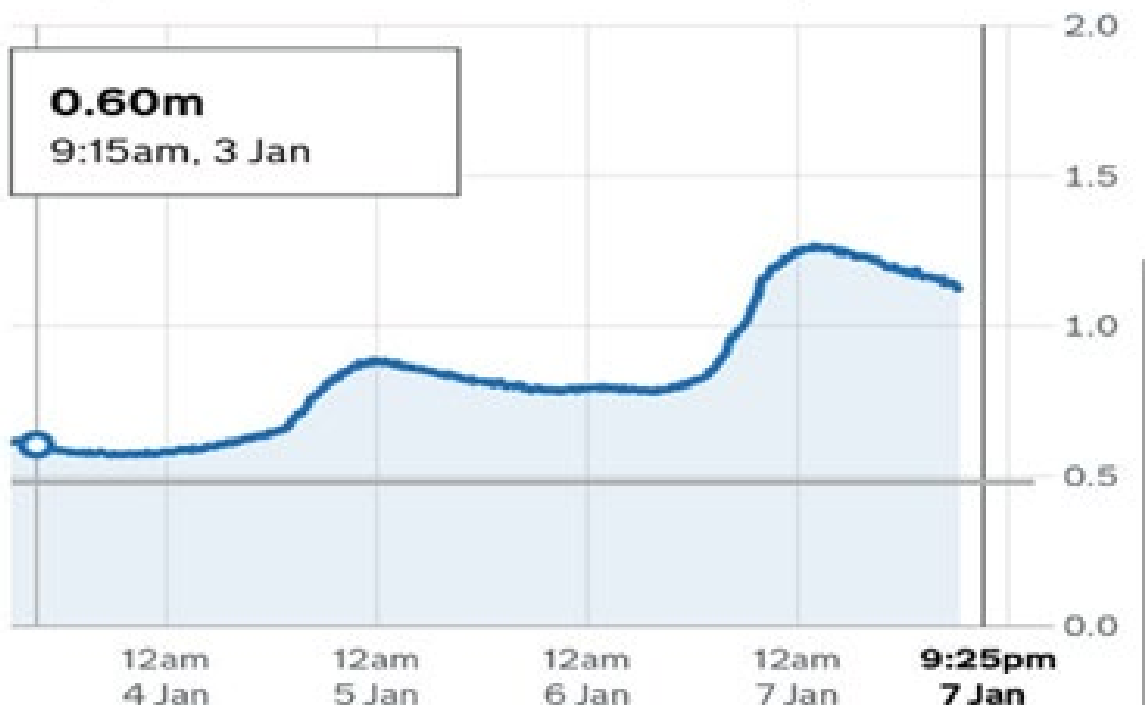
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1. Introduction

This is a summary of the flooding events that occurred over the weekend of 6th / 7th January including a report from the local Flood Warden for each affected site and any recommendations and actions that might be taken for future. It is not intended to ascertain blame, but to find ways of improving and developing a more robust plan should similar subsequent events occur.

The last significant rainfall in Salisbury area was Thursday 4th January. Ashley Road monitoring station showed peak level on the 5th January at approx midnight being 0.8mts then slowly falling over the next 18 hours to approx 0.5mts. Levels then began to increase again at mid afternoon Saturday 6th January rising rapidly to approx 11:00pm. I became aware of the impending incident at 8:00pm through a random check on the Salisbury Flood Wardens WhatsApp group.

Height in metres over the last 5 days



We take measurements more often as the risk of flooding increases.

[↓ Download data CSV \(12KB\)](#)

2. Site Reports

2.1 Ashley Road

Cllr Sven Hocking – Salisbury Flood Warden Co-ordinator

Possible flood incident initially raised at about 5:30pm in Ashley Road by local resident of “The Retreat” Saturday 6th January. Water began to rise rapidly from mid-afternoon / early evening until levelling off at 8:00pm for approx. 30 mins, then rising again until 9:00pm, levelling off for another 30 mins then climbing again until approx 11pm when last reported peak was at 1.25 mts. Note this is significantly lower than the highest recorded level, 1.36 mts 6th Jan 2014, and significantly below the 1.93 mts where according to the EA website info “property flooding is possible”.

During the course of the evening, Police, Fire Service, Wiltshire Council, Salisbury City Council and Environment Agency were all notified/contacted for assistance.

Police initially declined to attend as no “threat to life” and response to residents request to close the road to prevent traffic creating bow waves into property being this was the responsibility of WC Highways. Initial road closure enacted by residents using cones taken from the adjacent construction site.

Fire and rescue attended, but as no “threat to life” and advising pumping water out of the houses would be ineffective, left the scene.

Wiltshire Council had no one available to attend though a road closure was ultimately enacted by a Member of Wiltshire Councils Asset Management Team who attended as lives adjacent to the location.

Salisbury City Council accessed their Harnham Depot to provide sandbags but didn’t have a delivery vehicle. Fortunately, a local chap from “Spire Removals” used his van to collect and deliver to the site.

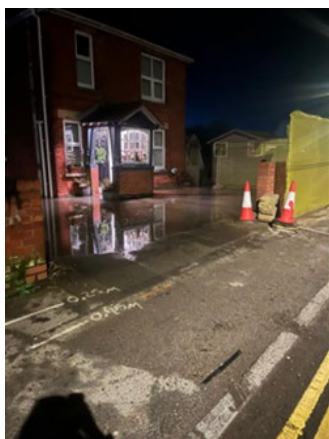
EA advised they might be able to provide a couple of people, but it would be “several hours” before they could attend, though, given there was no threat to life, “is it a priority?” That said, good support from the EA’s Flood Incident line chap who provided 15-minute real time water level updates via text message.

The only constant point of contact from a local government / agency perspective dealing with some fifty plus residents were myself and Cllr Sam Charleston.

Several residents and relatives assisted a disabled lady in her wheelchair out of her property (and on to a hotel) which had flooded and lost power. Another provided makeshift sandbags utilising building materials from his garden. Another discovered a stack of sandbags in Waitrose car park and delivered via shopping trolley.



8:00 pm



8:15 pm



10:00 pm

Other observations: -

- 1) Drainage system worked where the gulleys were not blocked, those that were pushed the water further up and across the road threatening the properties on the south side of the street.
- 2) Distinct smell of sewerage from about 10:00 pm for approx 10 mins thereafter.
- 3) Water levels behind the new retaining wall within which lies the property "The Retreat", were higher than on the Summerlock Stream side.

Once water levels seemed to have settled Cllr Charleston and I left the scene at approx 2:00 am Sunday morning.

Post Event – (Sunday 7th January)

At 9:30 am water receding, all affected properties bar the bungalow behind "Fontwell" were "feet dry". A few residents still quite distressed, but all helping each other out with carpet disposals and other damage assessment underway.

Donations of logs for fire / wood burners and for dehumidifiers posted on social media and of which some had been delivered.

WC arrived with gulley clearing equipment.

Report from Local Member Cllr Sam Charleston of properties affected on Ashley Road and in the immediate vicinity as follows: -

Ashley Road

The Retreat

The Haven

The Nook

Fontwell / The Bungalow Around the back

Homestead

Jalna certainly had ingress into their garage but I think the house was ok

All postal addresses "xxxxx", Ashely Road, Salisbury, SP1 7DD

Avon Terrace

1 Meadow View, SP2 7BX

2 Meadow View, SP2 7BX

I thought someone on Avon Mews came round on Saturday night and said they had ingress – no one has since been in contact, but John Glen and I had a walk round and it looked dry

Avon Mews, Flats 1, 2,3,4, Avon Terrace, Salisbury SP2 7BX

Middleton Road

Sheds round the back of Rose's of Salisbury – these are workshops that are owned by Rose's but rented out, and include Babey's Carpentry.

I think you're aware of how I feel everything went. Was glad to see WC being proactive on Sunday morning and getting the drains done.

Biggest takeaway of course is why the EA didn't knock on everyone's doors at 4PM when they thought it was imminent.

Thanks

Sam

2.2 The Cathedral Close

Tony Wheeler, Close Manager

A brief breakdown on the impact of the excessive rain last week on the Cathedral Close.

Southwestern corner - Both river overflow and groundwater in the **South Canonry (71)** garden caused a localised electrical fault in the front of the Canonry which has now righted itself. The houses to the North of the Canonry, **West Walk House, and Nos 71a,b,and c** (post code for all properties **SP1 2EN**) had both garden and driveway flooding again no ingress into any of the properties. All of these are receding. This and SSM are the areas you provided sandbags for last January.

Sarum Saint Michael complex (see image below)- Both groundwater and river overflow causing backup in the flats lavatory flushing systems. The Managing Agent Angus Shield sourced temporary portable toilets which are still in place. Up to eight residents have decided to vacate temporarily This morning Angus and I raised the drain covers and the water has dropped considerably and the water free flowing meaning normal use of facilities toilets washing machines etc. can commence. Long term Angus talked of raising the river bank 18” to stop the ingress of water into the Northern SSM car park and subsequently into the drainage system and possible upgrading of the SSM drainage. A costly undertaking.

Marsh Close - Groundwater has come to the surface but is now receding.

Cathedral School (SP1 2EQ) - Groundwater in the pupils dining area which is a depressed basement necessitating the serving of meals on a first-floor area until the basement dries out.

Rack Close - This area to the South of the Cathedral car park normally used by Leehurst Swan school as a playing field acts as a flood plain to the river passing to the south of the Close is also beginning to recede.

In conclusion the areas that have been affected are those first expected due to the topography and past recorded flooding trends. The current cold dry weather has been a blessing and hopefully another week or so will see things return to normal. The only flood warnings I received were in relation to the Lower Avon towards Ringwood and Christchurch!



2.3 River Bourne (Milford Mill Road)

John Baber - Flood Warden, Milford

Sven, down in Milford three houses had a problem, firstly two Mill Houses ([“The Mill House”](#) and [“The Granary”, Milford Mill Road, Salisbury SP1 2RT](#)) which had flood water into the garage and right across their entrance driveway. The second is the house beside the traffic lights on the medieval bridge ([7 Milford Park, Salisbury, SP1 2RZ](#)), their garden flooded which would not be a problem except for the idiots who drive so fast through the standing water that the bow wave forces the water over or through their fence, which is now in danger of collapse. Hence my observation would be that we need to close Milford Mill Road as soon as the flood covers the road. The second reason for closing the road at that time is the inconsiderate nature of most drivers who drove so fast into the standing water that they flooded those cars static in the opposite direction at the lights. Besides that lots of near misses but it's now receding thank God!

Aye

John

2.4 Stratford Sub Castle (Lower Road)

Duncan Hopkins - Flood Warden, Stratford-sub-Castle

To date I only know of one property which was flooded. This is **The Old Laundry, Stratford Road, Salisbury, SP1 3LB** which is located just opposite Castle Keep. See attached photo. The water level was approximately about 0.5m below the Castle Keep houses floor level.

The left side of the road by the Old Laundry and further in direction to Salisbury on the bend near Castle Keep was well covered, so houses on this stretch would have required wellington boots to access their property, these houses on higher land.

I have had one report of sewer levels being high, from a property further up the road, for which the occupants were very careful to minimise water use,

I hope this is useful.

The WhatsApp group was very useful.

Kind regards
Duncan Hopkins
Stratford-sub-Castle



2.5 Central Car Park - Millstream Approach

David Noble – Flood Warden, City Centre

Hello Sven, I had inspected this part of the Avon on Saturday earlier in the day and there was no evidence that it was going to flood although the volumes running down the “new river park” were substantial and had swamped all the new soft landscaping and planting on the car park side. These photos were all taken on Sunday at around 10 am and again I attach a Google Satellite with indications of where the photos were taken from.

The property (National Probation Service offices) whose car park flooded north of the Millstream/Rowlands Pharmacy building did not appear itself to have flooded.



Unfortunately, I am attending a Charity Board meeting in London on the evening of the Council meeting otherwise I would have attended to hear what the EA and the two Councils had to say about the preparedness and response to the flooding. But you will cover all that I am sure:

- Sandbags – access to them and when released/distributed
- What went wrong with the current engineering works at both the Ashley Road end of the EA River Park and in the new Millstream/Central Car Park area?

Also as a more minor issue - whose idea was it to do all the soft landscaping and planting of riparian plants in the central car park area of the project in the weeks before bad weather usually comes (December-March)? That planting is not so time sensitive as trees such that the grasses needed to be planted in cold/wet months – so this was a complete waste of money.

- What are the plans for the “pinch points” in the scheme/project such as the road crossings at Ashley Road and Avon Approach where clearly the massive flows now coming down those western channels of the Avon meet constrictions at bridge abutments?
- For Flood Wardens – I have to say that the “training” we received in the Shire Hall some months ago was not really relevant or practical for the sort of issues we actually encountered on the ground and the absence of any equipment (a vest/arm band etc.) made me feel rather exposed when wondering around inspecting – people assumed I was a “flood tourist”. Also explaining our role made people wonder what was our purpose as we couldn’t solve anything (absence of sandbags, contact with the EA or fire service for pumps etc.)

Kind regards,
David Noble

2.6 Harnham

Tom Blanchard – Flood Warden, Harnham

Main points to consider, I think, are:

- Easy availability of sandbags, for the different areas. Perhaps some strategic depots in vulnerable areas around the city.
- It might be worth distributing a flier to inform residents whose homes are prone to flooding, to keep a supply of sandbags handy, how to make your own, and to provide guidance on other methods to minimise flooding. I'm uncertain how many residents realise that sandbags are not just handed out?
- I try to imagine what we would have done if we'd had a Flood Warning here in Harnham? It might well have been necessary to house to house call, in which case we would first have had to access our Flood Warden kits from the Guildhall. Walking along the flooded Town Path, maybe in the dark, to collect the kits, would in itself have been hazardous. Could we keep the kits in our homes please for the flood 'season' and perhaps hand them back for servicing in the spring/summer?
- Being a relative newcomer, I'm still trying to ascertain exactly which properties, and residents, are most vulnerable. But I think we all agree this knowledge is an absolute ESSENTIAL part of the role. I'm glad to say that I am not aware of any properties flooding in Harnham this time round.
- It would be helpful if the WhatsApp group was streamlined to mark which Warden is responsible for which area, so we know what area is being referred to during the WhatsApp stream?

I hope this is helpful. I'm certain other points will come out, but this is a start.

Best regards

Tom

3. Conclusions

Bar Ashley Road and surrounds the city's flood defences worked as they should and those properties that were under threat were all known, and there were no surprises.

At Ashley Road there was flooding in properties despite the water levels being lower than in 2014 and 2023 when said properties were unaffected, noting the EA website states an even higher level before properties become at risk, all of which suggest that something different happened this January.

Had there been proper advanced warning around the rate and height of water flow and levels, measures may have been put in place to organise temporary defences thus potentially mitigate some the effects.

"Out of Office" hours added a whole new level of complexity.

The Flood Plan per-se is probably suitable for a major event where all emergency services are engaged, and the Flood Wardens fulfil their primary function to update and advise as any event unfolds. It is not however a workable document for a more localised event when there is no "threat to life" and when emergency services decide not to attend, and / or whatever local Authority body does not have the capacity to attend.

4. Recommendations and Actions

1. At the point when flooding can realistically be expected, perhaps at the issue of a “flood alert”, 24 hr direct lines of communication need to be established by / to the relevant local authority / agency / service areas.
2. Flood Wardens have their place, they ought not be the first, last and only on-site representation from local agencies. Clarity is required around who is responsible for what and when, and at what level the threshold of intervention from each agency should be.
3. The reason behind the flooding at Ashley Road needs to be investigated, reported and acted upon to give residents confidence that they will not be subject to a similar event at some point in the future.
4. As the event unfolded the public were clearly expecting “the Council” / EA / Fire to deliver sandbags. There needs to be a protocol/process/agreement/pr campaign around sandbags/gel sacks and how/where/if they are stored and how they are then accessed by the public and or relevant agencies.
5. Residents / business owners whose properties are / may be at risk to be engaged with and given advice and assistance on measures that they can take to prevent flooding to their premises.
6. Gulleys adjacent to areas subject to flooding to be identified and prioritised for clearing at the point a flood alert is issued.
7. Flood Plan to be redrafted accordingly and then tested by way of a local flood event exercise.
8. Flood Plan to be updated.

End

R S Hocking
Cllr Salisbury Harnham East
Salisbury Flood Coordinator

25/1/24