MEETING REPORT

Mark Main (Chair of Cary Moor Parish Council) and Helen Cleaveland met with Henry Hobhouse (local ward County Councillor) on 4th August 2026 in Alford.

1. The Government has made funding available to Somerset for flood resilience work. After sums already allocated to Bridgewater, about £50m remains. This Flood Resilience Fund is not grant allocated but will pay for additional work to be managed by the County Council (James Duvall, specifically, working with the Environment Agency). Parish Councils and others in Somerset can apply to the Resilience Fund to have specific flood resilience projects done. The effective deadline for applications is 23 September 2026 (and earlier applications will have de facto priority as any work done must be finished within two years). Applications will be prioritised using the cost benefits principles in the Government's Green Book (2026).

2. In theory, the funding would be available for flooding resilience work to protect the buildings in Lovington that have been repeatedly flooded recently. In practice, this is likely to be difficult because: (a) as relatively few homes have so far been impacted compared with other areas, and (b) we would need to have a credible and specific plan ready to be put into action within the 2 year period.

3. Henry was more optimistic that we could get funding for a river levels monitor on the River Alham so that we can start gathering data on whether high flood flows down the Alham are exacerbating the issue on the Brue, allowing better targeting of possible remedial work. There is no flow or levels data collected on the Alham. There are two potential routes to getting a river monitor added to that river. One is via a Resilience Fund application. A preferable route is by applying to the Somerset Rivers Authority to install one. The SRA have funding to install monitors each year and Henry though we had a good case and this is a well-trodden path. He suggested Becky contacts the parish clerks of Queen Camel, Marston Magna or Podimore for tips on application. All of these PCs have successfully applied for river level monitors from the SRA. He did not think it would be a problem if we separately apply to the Resilience Fund as a fall-back, but that would be an additional and separate process.

4. Incidentally the monitors installed by the SRA are connected to a flood alarm and data collection system called PEGEL Flood alarm. Individuals can download the PEGEL app and set an alarm based on a river level of their choosing. Historic data on levels is also available at a more granular level that via the Government monitoring site (but at a cost of £16.99 per year if you want to access the historic information).

5. We also discussed the pluvial flooding on the B3153 and Church Lane in Alford. Henry thought we might be able to make a green book case to get support from the Resilience Fund to commission some research on the specific sources of surface water on our roads and the specific pinch points causing the flooding. We need to show economic damage resulting from the road closures and damaged vehicles (and we may already have enough information to do that). This would be a useful first step to lobbying for some remedial works to be done.

6. It is likely our rainwater pipes from road culverts cannot cope with the intensity of rain we now get (although rainfall levels have not increased overall it falls in shorter more intense periods). This "too small pipes" issue is the case all over Somerset. Henry is trying to get more information on the issue from John Nicholson who visited Alford to ascertain the situation but has since moved to another area. John had previously told us that we are far more likely to get allocated funding to help with this problem if we commission some research on the specific sources of the surface water on our roads e.g. large areas of hard surface run-off, increased flow under the railway line from Dimmer following recent works, agricultural run-off (especially from maize fields which are not under-planted as recommended) etc.

7. We walked down to the reed bed with Henry as he is concerned it is not functioning properly. The outflow really stank (unusually) and I measured the phosphate at close to 1000ppb which is very high and may explain the uncharacteristic duck weed infestation on the Brue around the discharge from the Parsons Ditch (which is where the reed bed discharge flows into the river). The reed bed itself is also full of nettles which may be impairing its operation. Henry suggests we send photos and our phosphates reading to the Environment Agency and, separately, a letter to Wessex Water with this information with our concerns that the reed bed itself is not working properly. Henry is awaiting some further information from his contact at Wessex Water which we would, if time allows, like to review before sending them a letter from Carymoor. I am happy to draft the operative part of that letter for Becky to put into Carymoor style in the meantime.

8. As a related exercise we are trying to work out where the storm outflow is. The Rivers Trust sewage map shows two outlets from the reed bed in Alford but we only found one – the vegetation was pretty impenetrable. Henry is trying to get details from Wessex Water.

9. A related fact we gleaned. The Brue river bottom may be contaminated with heavy metals from the schools at Bruton (query Ansford?). This is a common problem arising from historic disposal of chemistry lesson materials. There is no longer a disposal issue but the legacy remains. This is why works involving any removal of silt etc. from river beds is licensed by EA as it is important to avoid contaminating other areas with heavy metals.

Duckweed by the Parsons ditch outlet on the Brue.

Nettles in reed bed