

# Help and Advice on Flooding

This document is intended to provide help and advice related to flooding in the area of Oakington and Westwick, inspired partly by the flooding experienced in August 2014. It is issued in conjunction with the Oakington and Westwick Emergency Plan.

It includes:

- Recent flooding history of the area
- A potted story of the August 2014 flood.
- Where is flooding likely in the area
- What precautionary measures you can take
- What to do if there is another flood in the future.

## Recent flooding history of the area:

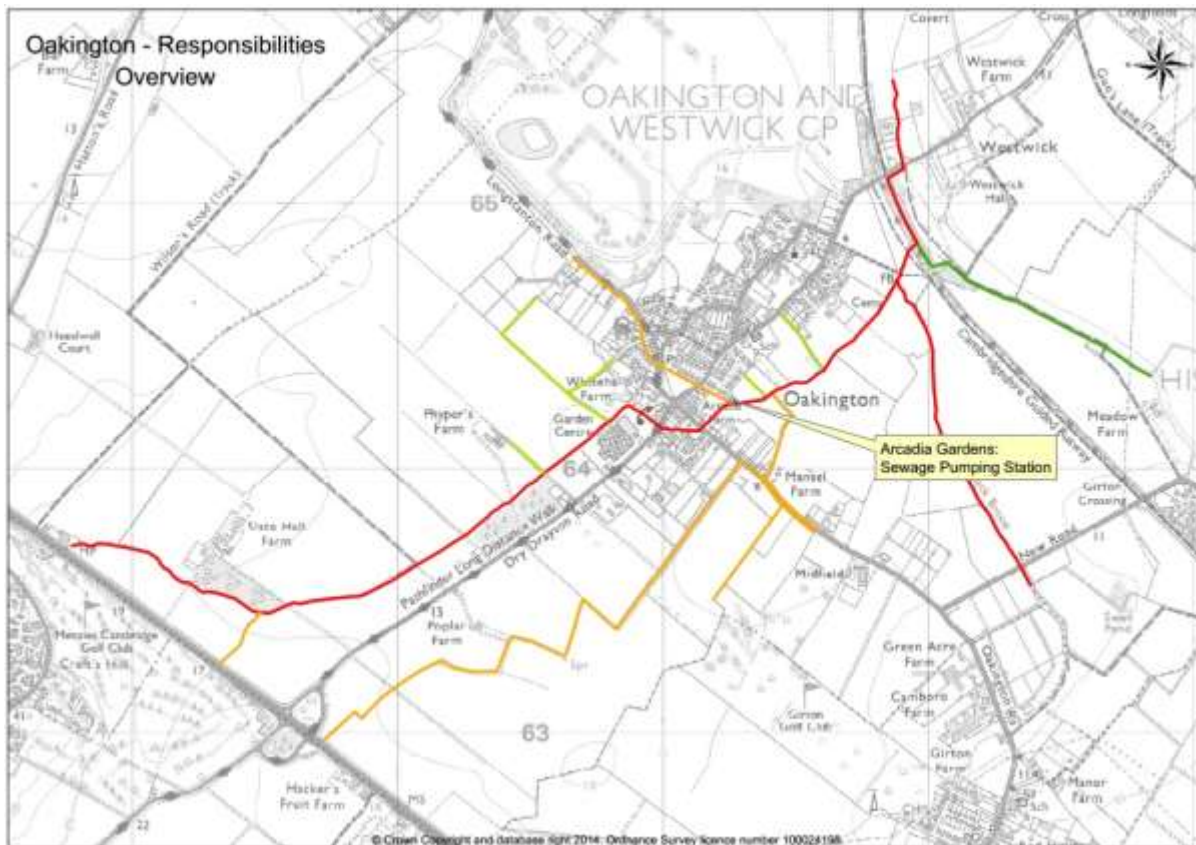
There has been a steady history of flooding in the Oakington and Westwick area over many years. This was first recorded in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century, and is partly the reason why Water Lane is so called. In more recent times, major flooding in the area is recorded in 1947, 1953, 1978, 1998, 2001 and twice in 2014. There has of course been minor flooding rather more frequently than this, but not to the extent of entering and damaging multiple properties.

The Oakington & Westwick catchment area covers about 45 square km (nearly 20 square miles) and is drained by three main brooks and a number of tributaries. *See separate maps for the approximate catchment area and the watercourses that flow into or through Oakington.*

Water management in the area began in earnest in the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century with the identification of all the watercourses in the area, and responsibility for maintenance of these given (by Act of Parliament) to various bodies and landowners – the “Awarded Watercourses” scheme. This still applies to this day, though the responsible bodies have changed over time. A map of who has responsibility for each significant watercourse in the area is shown below. In this map, red indicates the Environment Agency, orange and dark green is South Cambridgeshire District Council, and pale green are the respective “riparian” landowners – very few of these in this area.

*If you are one of the riparian landowners, you might like to read the document*

*<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/riverside-ownership-rights-and-responsibilities> which lists your rights and responsibilities in respect of that watercourse.*



## A potted story of the August 2014 flood

*A fuller story of the flood was published in the September edition of the Journal, and is available as part of that document on the Oakington and Westwick website. Please see that for full details.*

On August 8<sup>th</sup> 2014 some very unusual weather conditions brought the remains of an Atlantic weather system over Cambridgeshire and almost out of the blue caused several hours of mostly relentless and very heavy rain over a small area of Cambridgeshire from around Bourn and Caldecote in the west, over Oakington and Bar Hill in the centre, and touching Histon and Cottenham towards the east of the area. The rain moved slowly northwards and also badly affected Longstanton, Swavesey, Waterbeach and Rampton before moving away towards March, where it eventually seems to have died out. In this area, figures show that 124mm (over 5 inches) fell between 2pm and 6pm, with later rain in the early evening bringing the total to around 140mm (about 6 inches). That is three times more rainfall in 6 hours than the total average for the whole of August. This is now quoted as a one in 340 year event, and is way beyond the planned capacity of any of the local drains and watercourses.

The inevitable happened and the rain itself caused initial surface water flooding across the area, blocking the A14, the A428, the Oakington Crossroads and many of the other lower roads in and through the village. At that time though, the Oakington Brook itself was low, and the water gradually seeped away, though slower than one might hope, through the surface drains into the Brook and off

downstream. By about 7pm the roads were largely clear, and despite some further heavy rain the worst seemed over. Not so.

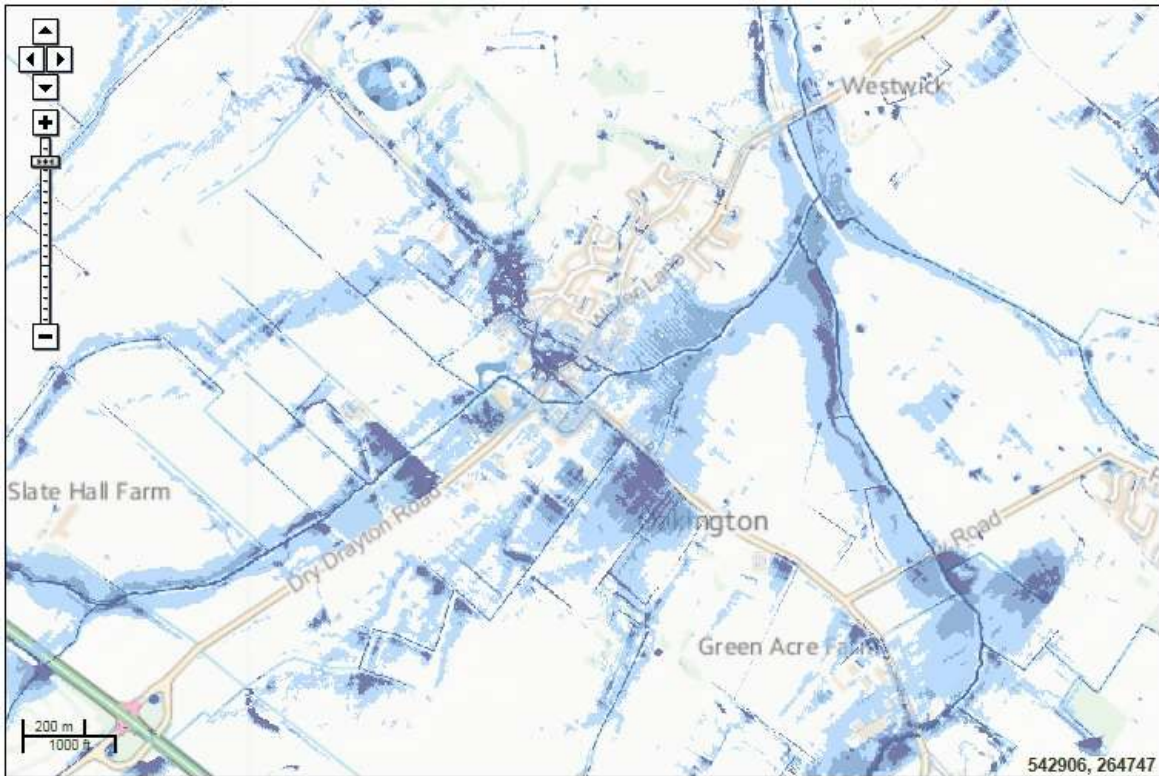
Oakington (Westwick Bridge) is the pinch-point for the drainage from a catchment area that runs from Bar Hill to Hardwick to Madingley to North Cambridge to Girton to Histon, and much of that area had 140mm of water on it still. The effect of this is that over some hours this water starts to find its way into the watercourses, slowly at first but once the ground is wet and side-ditches are full this can peak very suddenly and run almost like a tidal rip, and this is what happened. The flood hit and ran through Bar Hill, where the flood management systems were entirely inadequate on the day, and then on down Oakington Brook into Oakington, which it reached late in the evening. Here the water was blocked by the various road and other bridges in the village, which cannot currently cope with this sort of event, and backed up and spread into surrounding streets, gardens and sadly, as so many found, houses.

Over the next 24 hours the feed of water gradually dropped and the water found its way by various routes down to Westwick Bridge and eventually away to Rampton and Cottenham Lode and on towards the sea.

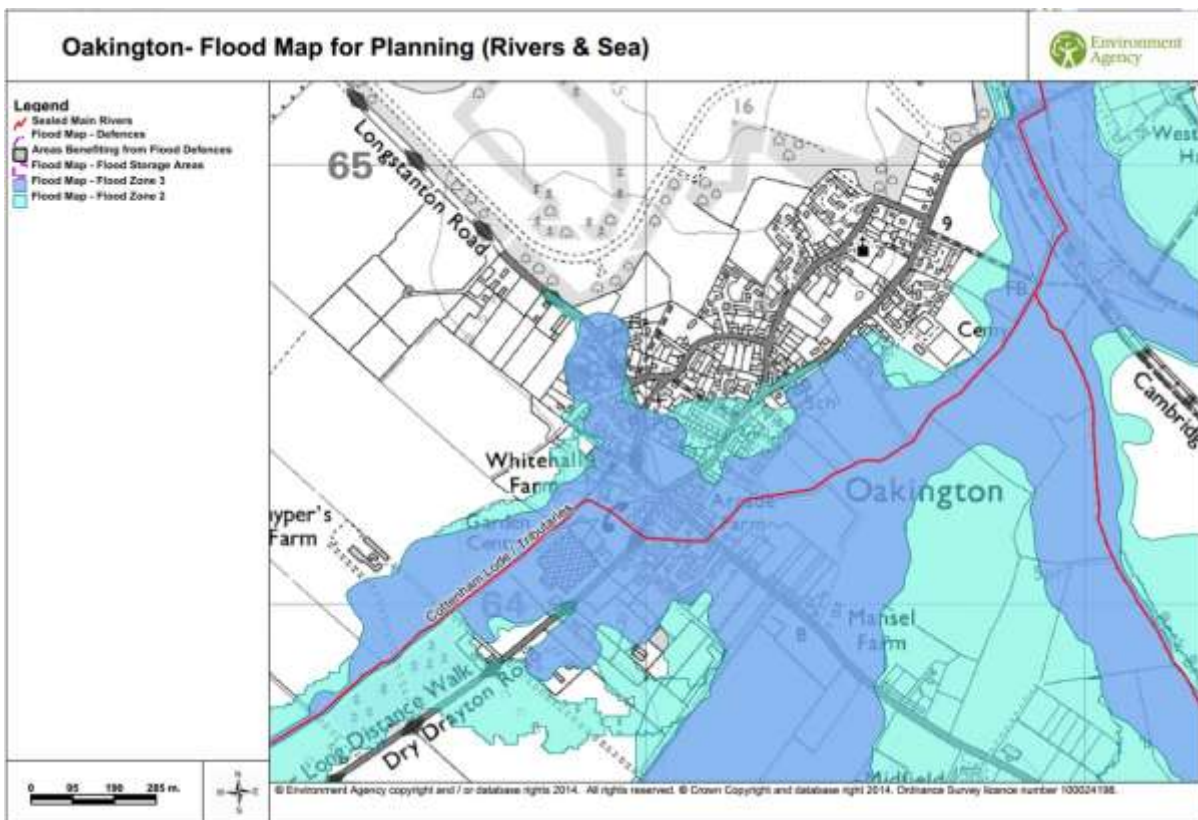
Many residents in The Broadway and elsewhere had to vacate their homes for emergency accommodation, and much repair work has been done to make their homes habitable again; there were still some families unable to return by Easter 2015. In total around 60 properties are believed to have had flooding indoors, and another 40-50 had flooding in their garage or out-buildings.

## Where is flooding likely in the area?

The story of the flood in the previous section is actually a story of two floods, one surface water flood and then a river flood. These are actually different types of event. The Environment Agency published flood maps for both these types of event (as for many others less relevant to our area). The maps below give some ideas which parts of the village are at some level of risk from each type of flood, and as other maps in this document are reproduced by kind permission of the Environment Agency and contain Environment Agency information © Environment Agency and database right.



Risk of Surface Water flooding in the Oakington and Westwick area, the three shades of blue indicate flood zones 1, 2 and 3 respectively.



Risk of River-induced flooding in the Oakington and Westwick area, colours as in the previous chart.



If your property is in one of the flood zones the increased risk of flooding is likely to have an impact of things like the cost of your home insurance, your ability to get planning permission, and your ability to sell your property at a fair market price. There are Government plans to spread the additional costs relating to flooding in home insurance across all home policy holders, but these are not yet in place and there seems little that can be done about the other effects without proper flood mitigation being installed across our area by the various agencies with such responsibility.

## What precautionary measures can you take?

There are three classes of action you can consider if you are in (or close to) a flood zone, these are “Prevent”, “Protect” and “Prepare”.

**Prevention** is largely in the hands of others, but you can for example if building or making alterations to your home ensure that it is built above any reasonable flood level, and that surface water drainage from the property is designed that it will run away from your home into the provided drainage systems. These days planning permission for such activities will insist on suitable measures being taken. If you do happen to have surface water draining into the foul water sewers you might consider getting this re-routed into the proper surface water drainage systems. There is now a volunteer Flood Mitigation Group in the village looking at possible ways of getting more wide-scale flood protection put in place.

**Protection** includes consideration of ways to keep flood water away from or out of your home, and might involve investing in flood gates that you can install quickly across the lower parts of external doors, and checking that there are no routes for water to enter the property through the floors, ventilation grilles and the like. The “Property-Level Protection Scheme” has been piloted in some properties in the village (though sadly with no great success last August). Various companies can design and provide similar equipment. You might also want to consider raising things like the electrical supply within your house so that mains equipment and outlet sockets are above any reasonable flood level.

**Preparation** covers making sure that you know what to do if another flood does occur in your area. It is a mixture of planning so that any flood will minimise damage to your furniture and belongings, having the right emergency equipment and resources available in a suitable location, and knowing who to contact to deal with the various stages from the initial flood through getting the flood water removed to cleaning up after the event.

You might like to obtain and complete a Personal Flood Plan, such as <http://publications.environment-agency.gov.uk/pdf/GEHO0709BQPU-e-e.pdf>. This suggests a basic set of equipment that you might like to put together and keep with the plan in a safe place out of reach of any flood water.

The National Flood Forum is an organisation that aims to give advice on many aspects of flood preparation and recovery. Their website is at <http://www.nationalfloodforum.org.uk/> and if you need help with preparation for a flood, dealing with a flood, getting insurance if you are in a flood risk area and more, you can also call them on 01299 403055 for advice on such matters.

There is also a very useful though rather detailed handbook on flood preparation and what to do if a flood happens again which you can download here:

[https://www.scams.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/Floodsense%20flood\\_protection\\_guide.pdf](https://www.scams.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/Floodsense%20flood_protection_guide.pdf)

Make sure you are signed up to receive email or SMS warnings of any imminent flood, see <https://www.gov.uk/sign-up-for-flood-warnings> for how to do this. If you do not have e-mail access or a mobile phone, consider asking a neighbour who has signed up for the service if they would be kind enough to let you know if a warning is issued.

Flood alerts come in two types, an “**amber**” alert is a warning of a potential flood risk in the next 24 hours, you should start to prepare for a flood (see the next section) and listen to local radio channels and check the Environment Agency and Parish Council websites for updates. A “**red**” alert indicates a significantly increased risk of a flood event in the next 4-6 hours, or less. You should begin active preparations (see the next section) and continue to monitor media channels. There is also a “**bright red**” alert which indicates a flood is highly likely within 2 hours. Make sure you are fully prepared.

You can also sign up at the Meteorological Office to get email alerts of severe weather or floods, see <http://www.metoffice.gov.uk/> and the email signup system is right at the bottom of the page. These are fairly wide-scale alerts rather than localised to our local area.

## What to do if there is a flood or flood alert in the area?

The first and most important principle is to make sure that you and your family are safe and stay safe. Think also of any vulnerable neighbours.

Hopefully you have prepared a personal flood plan as recommended above. This would be a good time to dig it out and read it through again.

Try to protect your property as far as possible. If you have advanced warning of the flood consider moving your car to higher ground, and raising valuable property above the likely reach of the flood. Make sure you will still have access to food and water and remember that electricity, gas and water supplies and sewerage may be at risk.

If a flood does actually occur, and if you need to, start to contact the various organisations listed in that plan that can help with your particular circumstances. Remember that if the flood is more than localised to the village, there may be many people trying to contact the agencies. Be patient and keep trying.

Responsibilities and contacts:

**Cambridgeshire County Council** are the Lead Local Flood authority in this area, and you can contact them on 01223 699155, or by email at [FloodAndWater@cambridgeshire.gov.uk](mailto:FloodAndWater@cambridgeshire.gov.uk).

The **County Council Highways** department are responsible for the surface water drains in the roads, contact them on 0345 045 5212 during office hours, or if the road is flooding or there is a related emergency dial 999 at other times.

**Anglian Water** are responsible for the public sewerage system (not the same as the surface water drains). If your toilet is not flushing away, or there is sewage appearing from manholes, contact them on 03457 145 145. Make sure you get a reference number from them.

**Cambridge Water** are responsible only for the fresh water supply to your taps etc., not normally an issue related to floods. Contact them on 01223 706050 if you do have a supply issue.

The **Environment Agency** is responsible for the Oakington Brook and Beck Brook watercourses (the “main rivers”). Contact them if there are problems with or resulting from these, on their Floodline on 0345 988 1188.

**South Cambridgeshire District Council** are responsible for the awarded watercourses marked in orange or dark green on the map earlier. Call them on 0345 045 0063 if there are problems with or resulting from these watercourses.

For other more general emergencies related to flooding call the Fire Service or Police on 999.

If you need other help or are unable to get hold of these authorities please let the **Parish Council** know on 01223 232398, we may be able to get help to you through other channels. The Parish Council Emergency Team is likely to be active, look out for people wearing high-visibility vests in your street, and ask for help or advice if needed.

Mike Oakley, Chairman, Oakington and Westwick Parish Council, January 2015.  
*(Modified July and September 2015 to incorporate updated information).*

*I would like to acknowledge the help and contributions of the Environment Agency in particular in the preparation of this document.*