



Community Self Help and Flood controls

One Parish Council's Flood Control Journey – Stoke St Mary, Somerset

Graeme Watt – PC Cllr for Flood Controls, Volunteer Activities and Highways

“Do what we can for ourselves, wherever it’ll make a meaningful difference”

How Did We Get Here:

- Co-opted to the Parish Council in 2024 - took on Highways and footpaths briefs initially
- Flooding a top issue for those briefs – and for residents!
 - Many hours lost to oblivion at the beginning trying to connect with SC highways team with zero success, including through LCNs
 - In fairness, SC was in the middle of umpteenth redundancy round and multiple reorgs
 - And SC was in Financial Crisis
- Blurted out in frustration at my first PC “Why don’t we get some volunteers and do the drains ourselves –

“Its just drains, how hard can it be ...”

Community DIY - Engaging Volunteers

Volunteer Policy and Procedures – “Safe and legal”:

- Talked with insurers about how volunteers were covered and what was needed to be safe and legal
- Includes real-world “Risk Assessment Tool” (1 page but reality grounded)
- Approved by PC Jul 2024 with initial budget from Precept

Press-gang to gather volunteers?

Not needed – huge groundswell of support, and remarkable pool of skills, even in a small PC (270 households) – the key is personal engagement

How’s it going?

- Volunteer action events of 2 plus people – about 30 done all told (10 so far this year), the majority but not all now, flood control related
- Now have key tools, a shed, signs and a breeding programme for traffic cones...
- “Chapter 8” compliant – ie traffic cone trained!



“Its just drains, how hard can it be ...”

Actually, it turns out it's not just drains

- Learning to work with multiple agencies, land-owners and users etc – **a complex puzzle ...**
- Drains, road side ditches, cross country ditches, watercourses and more ...
- SRA CFAF grant (£12k) 2 part project focussed on recovery of a cross country ditch and enlarging storm drains – now all completed (Part B required Land Drainage Consent)
- Developed a Flood Controls Strategy (2 pages plus a 1 page three yr plan – we are in yr 3):
 - **“Do what we can for ourselves, wherever it'll make a meaningful difference”**
 - Our Flood Controls Strategy in 3 steps
 - **Road Drains in 2024/5,**
 - **Water Courses in 2025/6 + Road Drains next steps,**
 - **Water Sources from 2026/7 + Road Drains next steps + Water Courses next steps**
 - Now have allocated budget from Precept and seek grants where appropriate
- Residents education and self help – SRA and EVAG sponsored roadshow in SSM village hall in May

Drains / Watercourses Toolkit:

People's own power tools where needed, plus:



X2

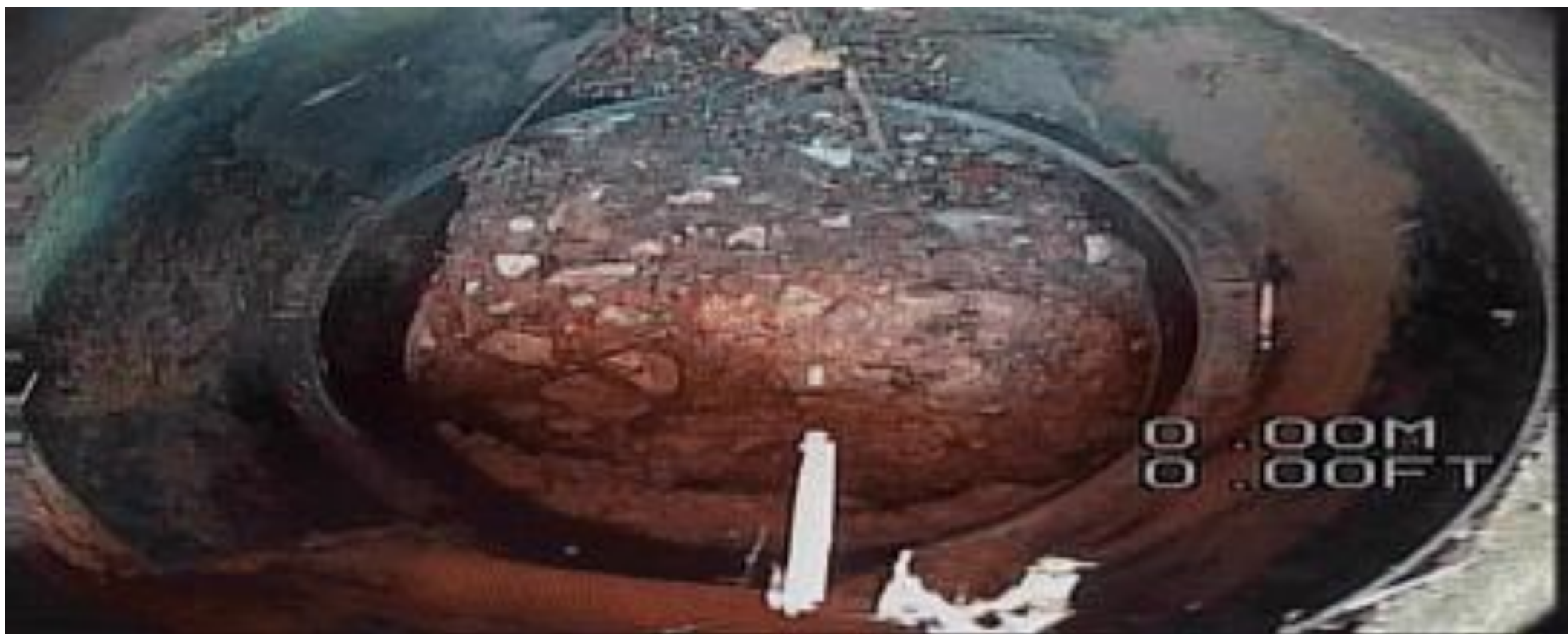
- Pictured tools
- Small Shovel
- Med / Large Shovel
- Trowel
- Garden Sheers or Pruner
- Barrow
- High Viz / PPE
- Cones and Signs
- (Crow-bar if no drain lifters)
- And a shed to keep them in!

Engagement With Somerset Council? “Jetting” example:



- Put yourself in their shoes ...
- Patience and a sense of humour ...
- Mutual benefit **NOT** pointed fingers ...
- Underground blockages - evidence?
 - Greinton Parish Meeting experience
 - Borrowed their grant funded drain cam ...
 - SSC team fully engaged – “targeted” jetting completed in our 4 key blocked areas
- A win - win

Example Drain Video



Is it Working? In our key focus flood areas:

- Not (yet!) fully held the floods at bay, but
- Very clear evidence in 2025 / 26 storms:
 - Fewer floods
 - Less deep
 - Much faster draining
- E.G. - Storm Chandra:
 - In SSM village, we would have expected extensive village centre floods, lasting a day or more
 - Only 20% of usual risk area flooded and only for 40 minutes (when Black Brook burst its banks), - shallow enough to be passable with care
 - Work on clearing water courses, including Black Brook and CFAF Part A was **CRITICAL** to success
- Flooding in the areas targeted by CFAF part B (now completed) and the known blockage areas jetted by SC Highways team? ***Let's see what happens this Winter!***

Our volunteers are doing better than King Cnut did, but Chandra shows we still need to complete our strategy, do the maintenance and try to work constructively with our stakeholders ...

Questions?