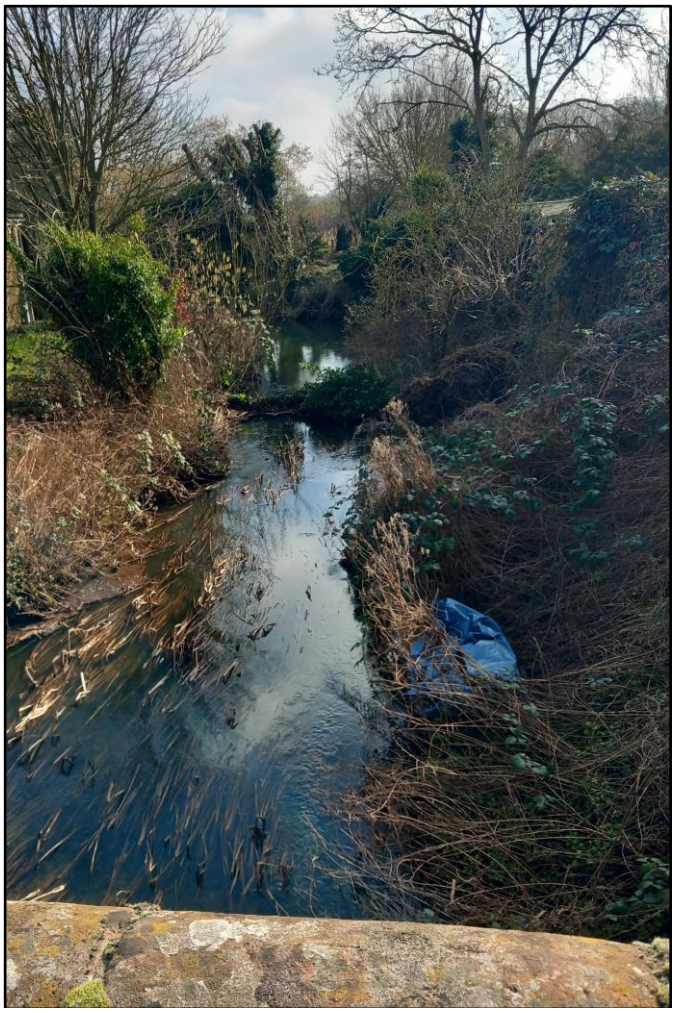
Section 19 Flood and Water Management Act 2010

Marlesford Flood Investigation –

Storm Babet 2023



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Executive Summary

Storm Babet caused significant disruption to communities across Suffolk between 18th - 21st October 2023. Marlesford was one of the villages significantly impacted, with approximately 12 properties suffering internal flooding as well as disruption to infrastructure and services. Suffolk County Council, as Lead Local Flood Authority, have therefore undertaken a Section 19 Flood Investigation. The resulting report will:

- highlight the probable causes of flooding
- identify options to reduce future flood risk and increase property resilience
- make recommendations for actions by relevant responsible organisations, landowners or homeowners.

Marlesford is located in an area at risk of both fluvial and pluvial flooding. The nature of the surrounding topography and geology contributes to the susceptibility of the community to flooding. Parts of the village are low-lying, in the river valley. Multiple surface water flow paths converge into the river Ore. The local geology and soils are characterised as having impeded permeability and high run off, making a number of properties in Marlesford vulnerable to flooding due to intense rainfall events.

Storm Babet delivered significant rainfall to the catchment, following an extended period of above average rainfall. The impact within Marlesford was widespread and for the purposes of this report, the affected areas have been categorised into two locations. The description of the flood events detailed in the report have been compiled using data submitted to Suffolk County Council, as well as information from Risk Management Authorities (e.g. Suffolk County Council Highways and Anglian Water) and the community.

A comprehensive summary for each location is provided within the report, outlining the context of the event and the impact. Key findings are that Marlesford was severely impacted by flooding due to the intensity of rainfall, that caused surface water flow paths to overwhelm the capacity of watercourses and drainage infrastructure.

Short, medium and longer term recommendations have been published and each have a potential role to improve resilience and reduce the risk of flooding to the village. For short term measures, key highlights include the implementation of community flood plans, maximising Property Flood Resilience (PFR) grants and maintenance of watercourses and drainage assets. For medium to longer term recommendations, there is emphasis on management of water from rural land and the creation of new natural flood management features, to reduce flood risk within the catchment.

Justification for Investigation

Suffolk County Council, Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) has determined that in accordance with our criteria, it is considered necessary and appropriate to carry out an investigation into this flood event.

This is in accordance with Section 19 (1) of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010, and in accordance with Section 19 (2) of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010, to publish the results and notify the relevant risk management authorities (RMAs).

Section 19 Local authorities: investigations

(1) On becoming aware of a flood in its area, a lead local flood authority must, to the extent that it considers it necessary or appropriate, investigate -

> *(a) which risk management authorities have relevant flood risk management functions, and*
>
> *(b) whether each of those risk management authorities has exercised, or is proposing to exercise, those functions in response to the flood.*

(2) Where an authority carries out an investigation under subsection (1) it must -

> *(a) publish the results of its investigation, and*
>
> *(b) notify any relevant risk management authorities*

Criteria for an investigation (as per Appendix D of the Suffolk Flood Risk Management Strategy):	
There was a risk to life because of flooding?	
Internal flooding of one property (domestic or business) has been experienced on more than one occasion?	
Internal flooding of five properties has been experienced during one single flood incident	✓
Where a major transport route was closed for more than 10 hours because of flooding	
Critical infrastructure was affected by flooding	
There is ambiguity surrounding the source or responsibility of a flood incident	

Understanding the flood context

1. What happened during Storm Babet

A succession of weather fronts between the 11th and 13th of October 2023 brought significant rainfall to the region. Readings indicate that between 30mm and 50mm of rain fell across Suffolk compared with an average of just less than 65mm across the whole month of October according to Met Office weather data (Met Office, 1991-2020). This significant rainfall occurred in a short space of time and resulted in saturated land and rivers reaching their capacity. Shortly after this, Storm Babet followed on the 18th to 21st of October 2023. The storm brought between 50 mm and 80 mm of rain to much of central and northern East Anglia, with some Suffolk weather stations recording the wettest October day on record.

The Environment Agency river level measuring stations indicated many flows close to or exceeding their highest on record, and the weather remained wetter than average for the rest of the month. October 2023 was the joint wettest on record in the east of England since 1871. During Storm Babet, Suffolk saw the heaviest rainfall across East Anglia causing significant flooding of roads and properties. The river systems rose rapidly across whole catchments due to the existing conditions, which was unusual as storms will often impact a small area and result in a steady progression of flood water downstream. A major incident was declared by the Suffolk Resilience Forum (SRF) in the afternoon of the 20th of October due to significant impacts on communities and disruption to the road and rail networks.

The following maps illustrate the extent to which the rainfall in the months preceding Storm Babet exceeded the average monthly rainfall for July to October in recent years in Suffolk.

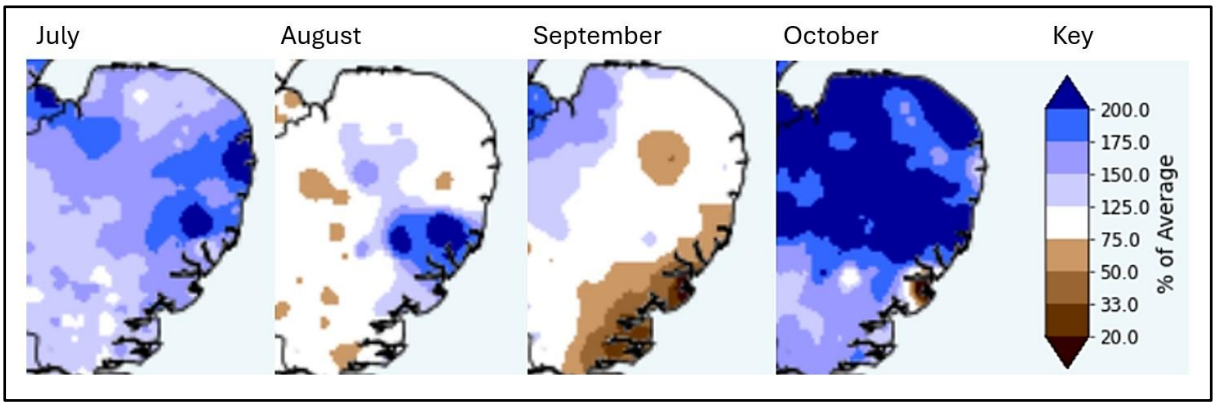

Figure 1. Average rainfall in East Anglia between July and October 2023 as a percentage of the historical average monthly rainfall

The following report acknowledges that October 2023, and in particular Storm Babet, was an extreme event and will assess the likely causes and impacts. The report will recommend measures to reduce the risk of flooding within the location, in line with best practice, ranging from large to small scale interventions and be targeted at a range of stakeholders. It should be noted that Storm Babet was a significant event, with a low probability of recurrence. The recommendations will provide advice about reducing flood risk; however, they should not be relied upon as a guaranteed failsafe to mitigate against all future flooding.

2. Location of flooding

Marlesford is a village in the East Suffolk district. The village is situated bordering the river Ore which flows northwest to southeast. Marlesford also straddles the A12 main road. The village is about two miles away from the large village of Wickham Market.

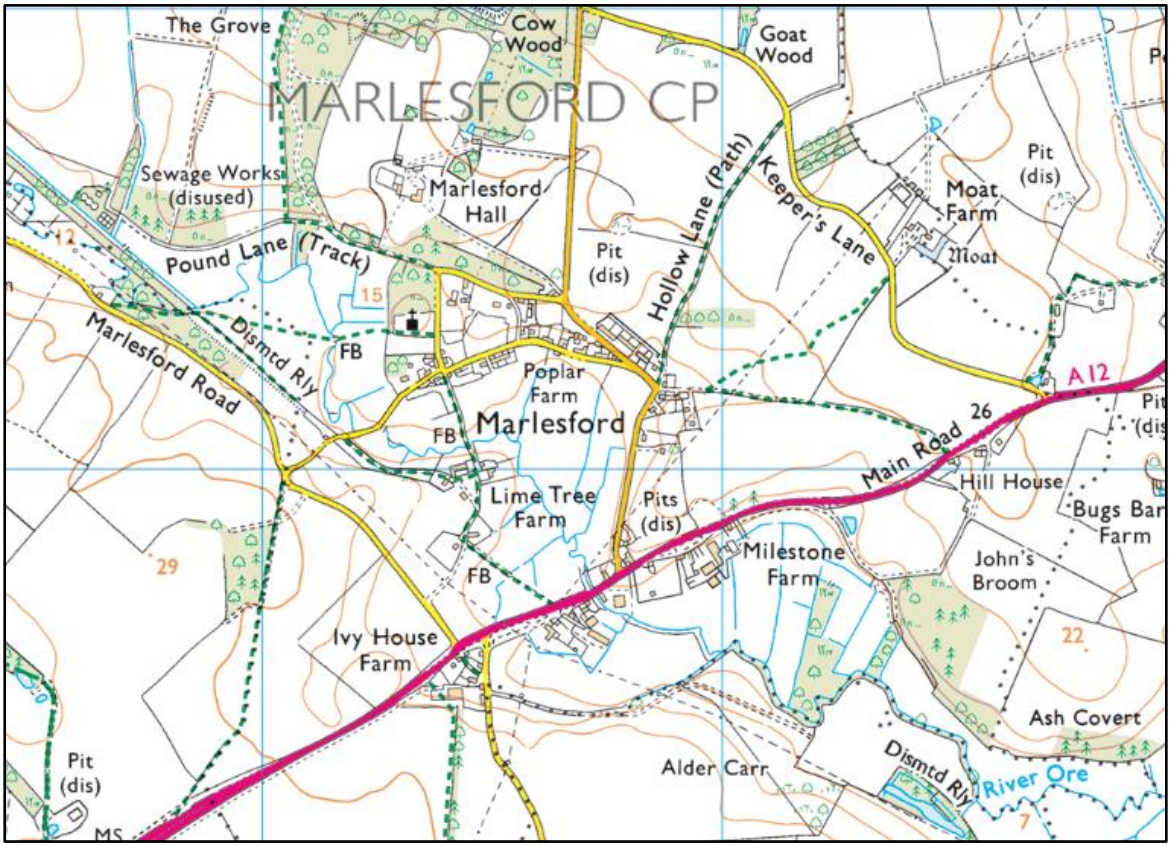

Figure 2. Investigation area map

The Environment Agency has permissive powers to carry out maintenance, improvement or construction work on main rivers to manage flood risk. The Internal Drainage Boards (IDBs) have similar permissive powers but instead relate to ordinary watercourses within their board area.

Lead Local Flood Authorities (LLFAs) and Internal Drainage Boards (IDBs) manage the flood risk from ordinary watercourses but responsibility for maintaining watercourses rests with the Riparian Landowner, defined as those who have a river, stream or ditch which runs next to or through their land or property.

Figure. 3 shows the most significant watercourses in the area surrounding Martlesham, including the river Ore, a statutory main river.

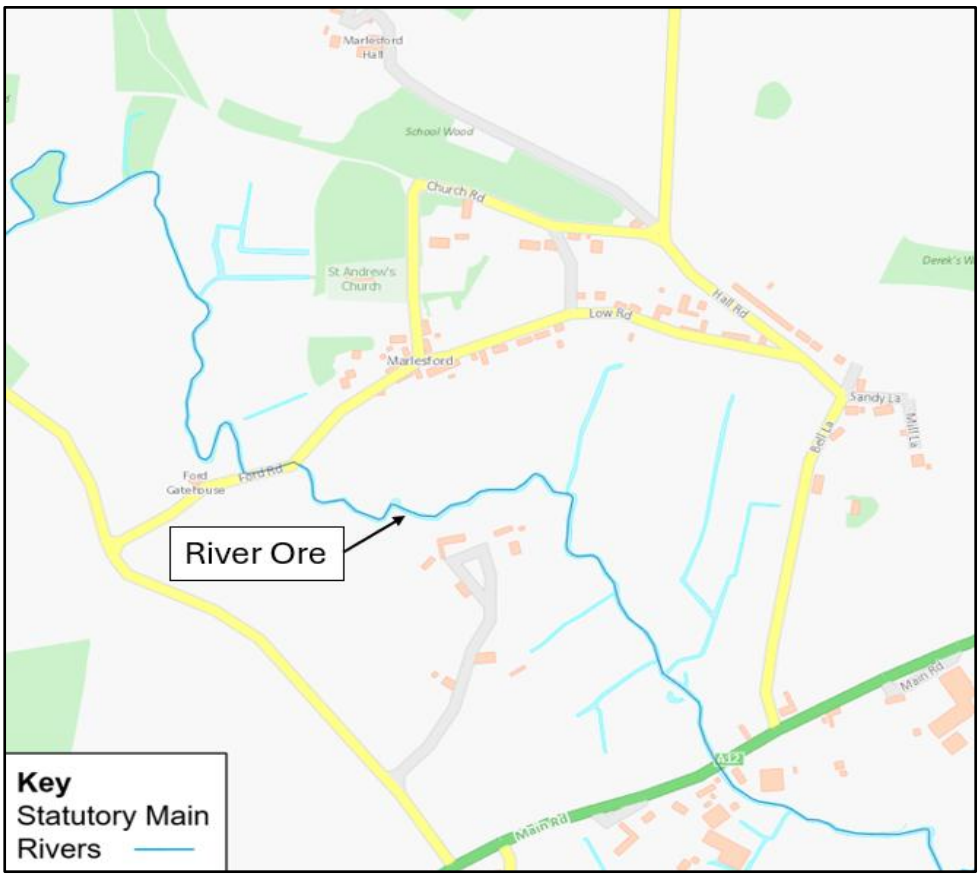

Figure 3. Location of statutory main river and ordinary watercourses

On the 20th of October 2023, Storm Babet resulted in significant rainfall in Suffolk on top of an already wetter than average October. This caused internal flooding to properties, residential and commercial, across the county from various flooding sources. Marlesford was significantly impacted with approximately 12 properties reporting internal flooding. Flood water was described as coming from multiple sources including surface water runoff from surrounding fields and highways (pluvial) and the overtopping of local watercourses (fluvial).

For the purposes of this investigation the areas affected by flooding have been separated into two distinct locations (see Figure 4). The locations are as follows:

1. Church Road
2. Main Road and Bell Lane

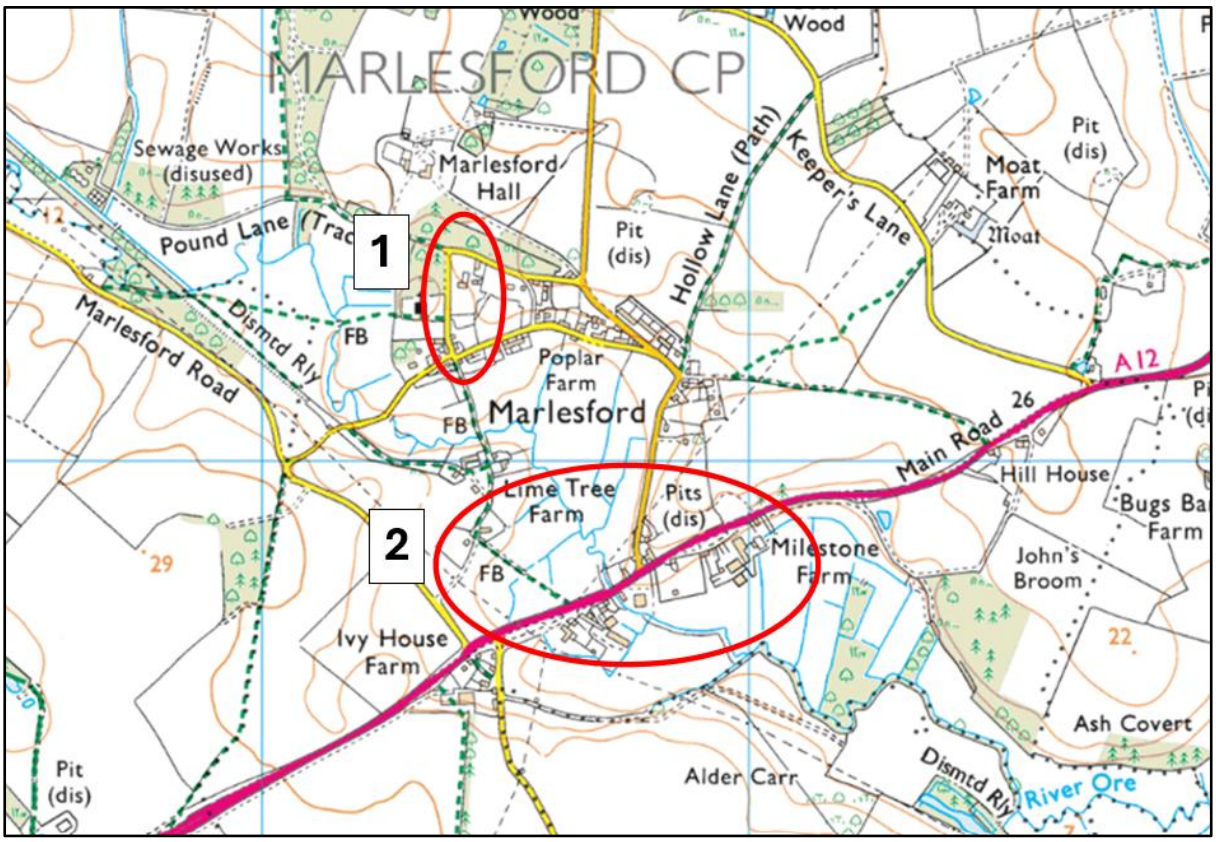

Figure 4. Marlesford investigation area map with locations

3. Records of any historical flooding

A review of Suffolk County Council's highway reporting tool, Environment Agency and Anglian Water records, indicate that Marlesford has been occasionally impacted by flooding in the past.

Suffolk Highways are aware of longstanding issues of road flooding on the A12 between Marlesford and Little Glemham. At Keepers Lane near Little Glemham flood water getting into gardens also seems to be a longstanding issue.

The Environment Agency hold no flood history data for Marlesford.

Anglian Water have no assets in the area and no flood history information.

4. Predicted Flood Risk

Several areas of Marlesford are at risk of flooding from pluvial and fluvial sources.

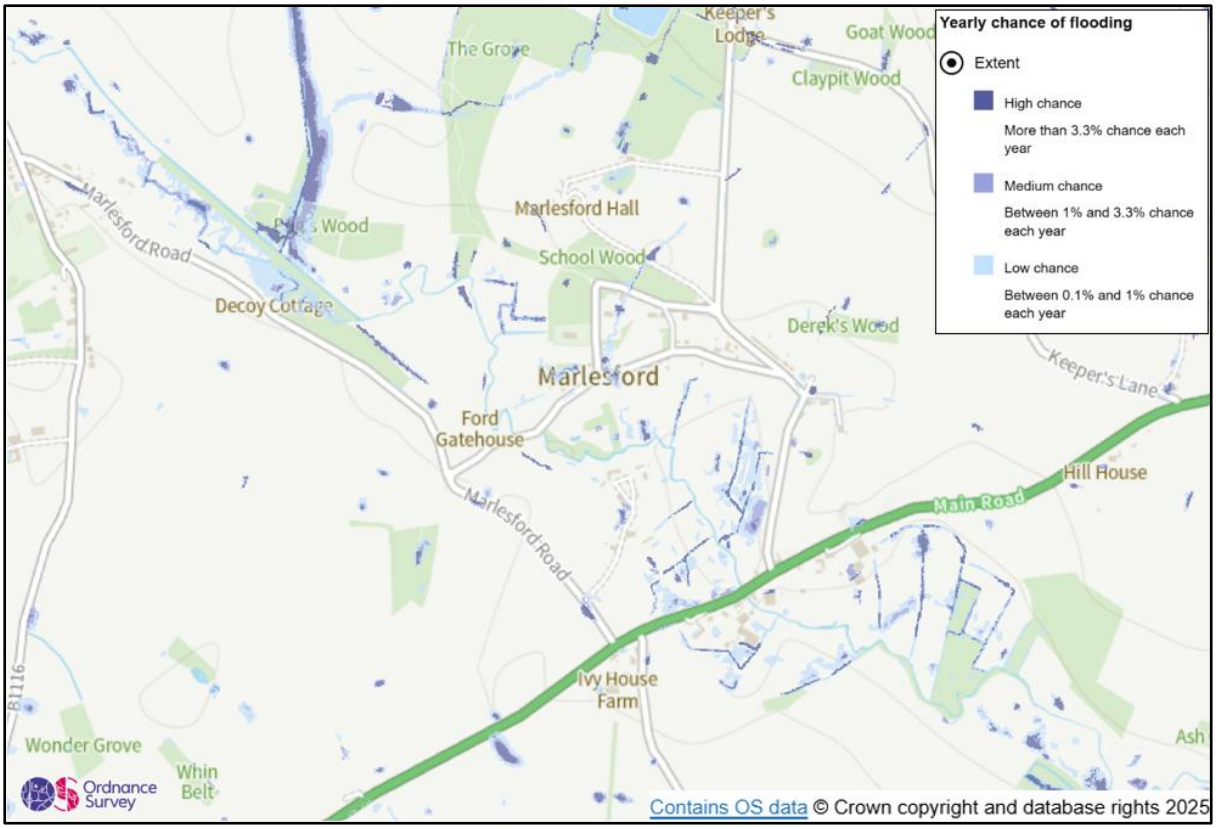

Figure 5. Surface water flood risk

Figure 5 highlights the predicted pluvial (surface water run-off from surrounding land and highways) flood risk in Marlesford, with multiple flow paths coming into Marlesford from the north into the floodplain of the river Ore.

There is a medium to high chance of surface water flooding on sections of Church Road. This area was affected by flooding during Storm Babet.

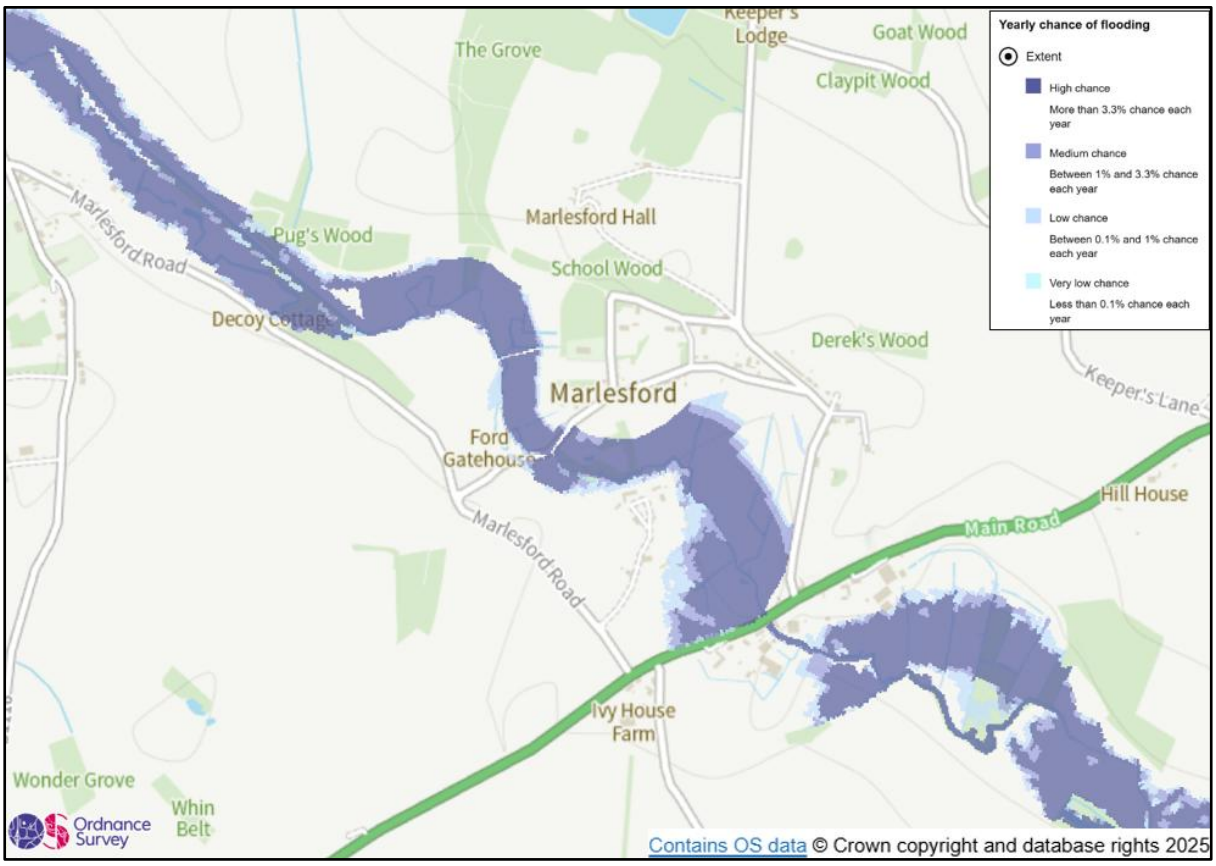

Figure 6. Flood risk from rivers and sea

Figure 6 shows the predicted fluvial (from designated main river and ordinary watercourses) flood risk in Marlesford. Fluvial flood risk in Marlesford is predominantly associated with the river Ore which passes through the village.

In Marlesford, the vast majority of the housing is outside of the areas at risk of fluvial flooding. Properties immediately south of the A12 are shown to be outside of the fluvial flood risk area. A number of these properties were internally flooded during Storm Babet.

5. Catchment characteristics

The village of Marlesford is situated in a rural area dominated by arable agriculture. The nearby A12 Main Road is located just south of the village centre. Marlesford borders the river Ore which flows approximately northwest to southeast through the village.

The low-lying nature of parts of Marlesford mean that during high rainfall events, considerable overland flows converge upstream of the village and ultimately into the river Ore bringing floodwater in close proximity to the village. Overwhelmed drainage infrastructure and ordinary watercourses may also be observed during these intense rainfall events.

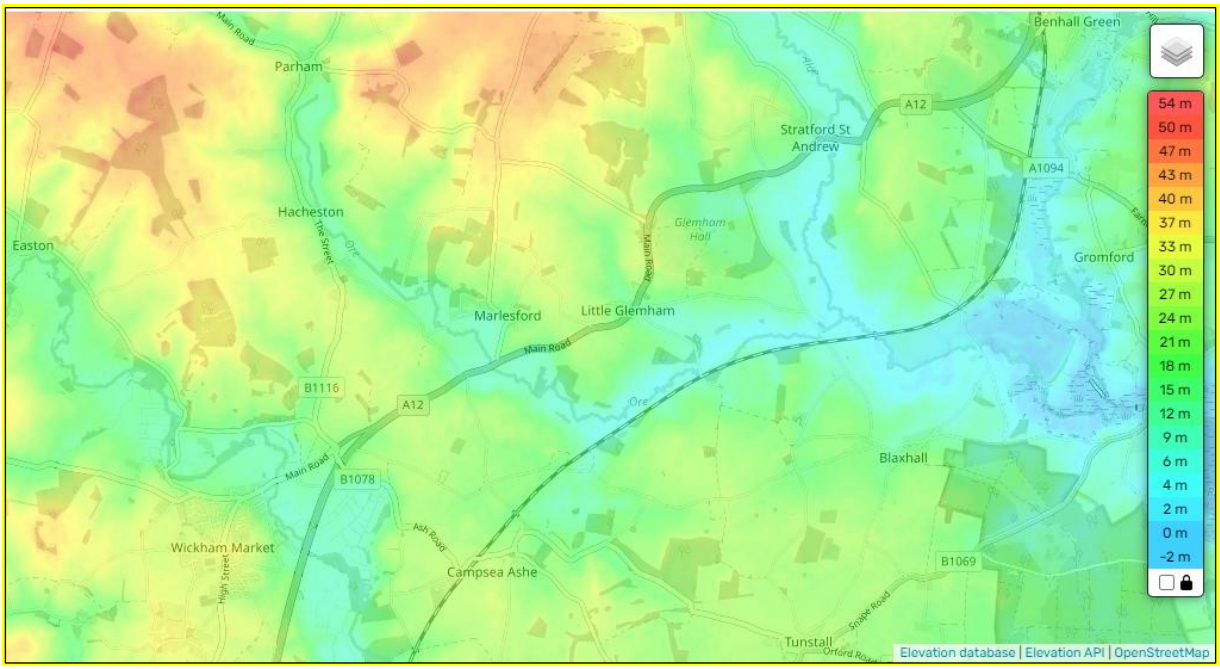

Figure 7. Marlesford and surrounding topography (TessaDEM as cited in topographic-map.com)

Figure 7 shows the topography surrounding Marlesford with gradient changes across the wider village. One of the lowest points in Marlesford is at the A12 road bridge over the river Ore. The junction of Church Road with Ford Road and Low Road is lower than the surrounding land to the north and west. These locations were identified as being some of the worst affected areas during Storm Babet.

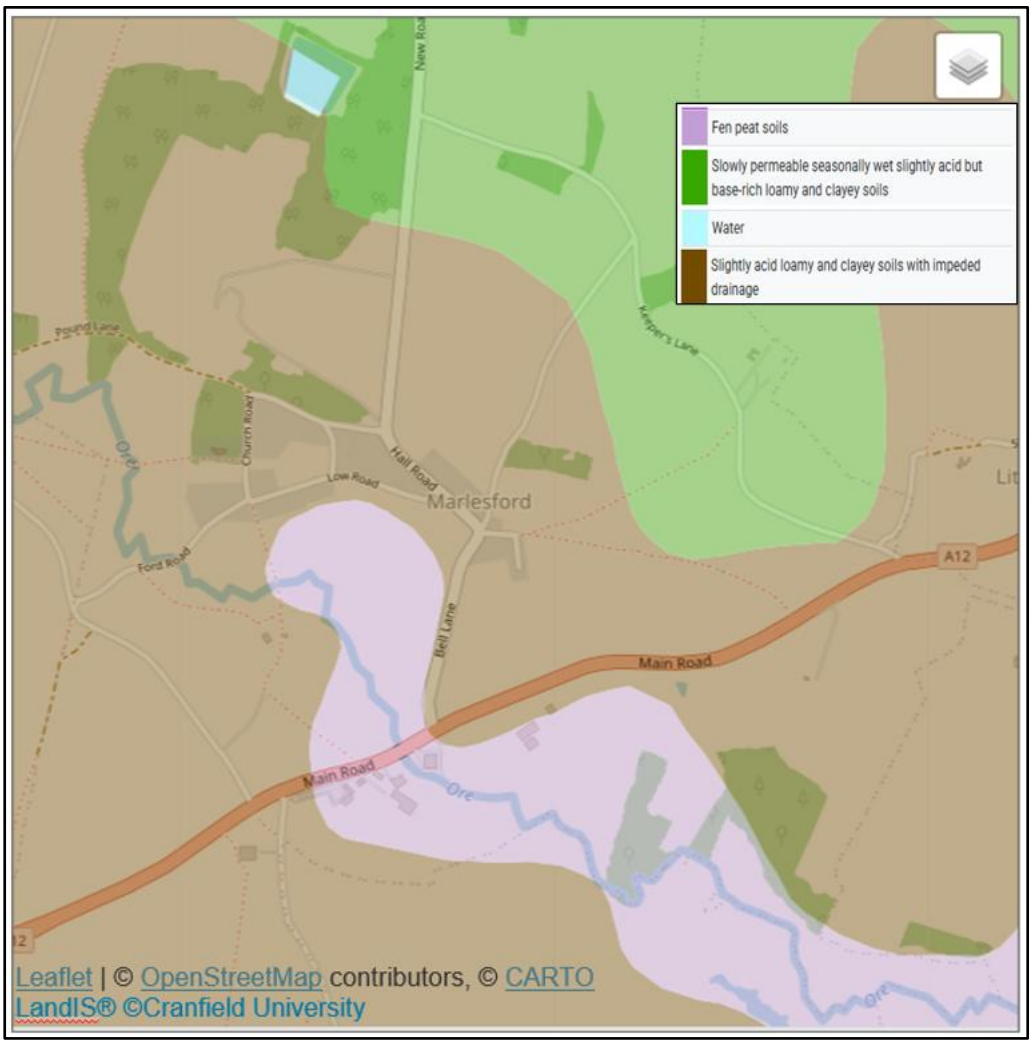

Figure 8. Soil map (LandIS Soilscapes)

The soils more generally surrounding Marlesford are loamy and clayey with impeded drainage, meaning that water permeates more slowly and surface water runoff is greater. The floodplain soils surrounding the river Ore are more freely draining, usually have naturally high groundwater and tend to be wetter.

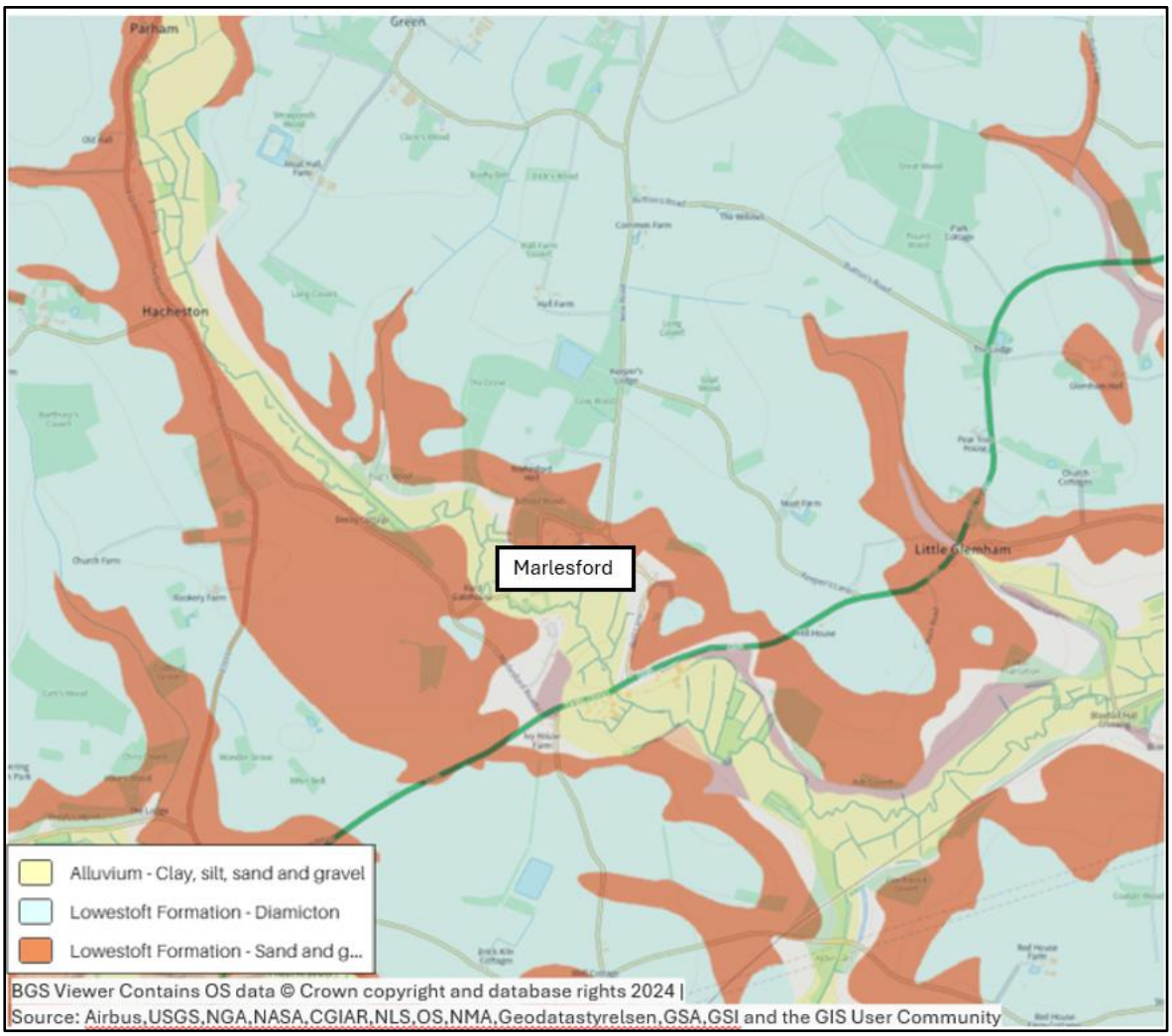

Figure 9. Superficial Geology (BGS Viewer)

Lowestoft Formation 'Diamicton' surrounds the village of Marlesford which is described by the British geological survey as a diverse mixture of clay, sand, gravel, and boulders varying widely in size and shape. This generally has a low permeability meaning water will tend to flow off it before it can be infiltrated, which reflects some of the reports from the Storm Babet event.

The low-lying nature of parts of Marlesford, multiple surface water flow paths merging into the river Ore and the low permeability of the surrounding soils, make it susceptible to flooding in extreme rainfall events.

Flooding Source(s), Pathway(s) & Receptor(s)

Storm Babet was an extreme event which came at a time when Suffolk had experienced a significant amount of rainfall in the preceding week.

Storm Babet delivered significant rainfall in the catchment between 19 and 20 October. At Benhall Green rainfall gauge, approximately 5 miles northeast of Marlesford, there was 44mm of rain recorded in a 12-hour period.

The Environment Agency issue two types of warning when flooding is possible from a main river. These are:

1. Flood Alert – Flooding is possible. Be prepared. - usually issued between 2 and 12 hours before flooding.
2. Flood Warning - Flooding is expected. Immediate action required – usually issued 30 minutes to 2 hours before flooding.

The Church Road area of Marlesford is not covered by the Flood Warning Service. However, a number of properties within Marlesford, particularly south of the A12 are within the flood warning area of The River Ore from Framlingham to Blaxhall, including Parham, Hacheston and Marlesford. A Flood Warning was in force from 20th October 2023 at 12:45pm until it was removed on 22nd October 2023.

These properties also are within the more extensive Flood Alert area of the Thorpeness Hundred River and the river Ore. This Flood Alert was also in force on 20th October 2023.

The description of the flood events described below will discuss the probable sources of flooding, the observed flow paths through the community and the receptors which have been affected. The term 'floodwater' may be used to describe both fluvial (water from a watercourse) and pluvial (surface water run-off) flooding. This section has been prepared using reports submitted to Suffolk County Council via the online Highways Reporting Tool and information gathered by Risk Management Authorities (RMAs) and the community.

Detailed descriptions of each investigation area can be found in the following section.

1. Church Road

On the morning of 20 October, intense rainfall caused surface water to pool on Church Road and flow down the hill towards property entrances to the north (see Image 1). Residents reported torrents of water pouring through an open gate causing severe flooding as the floodwater flowed through gardens and along the driveway.

The floodwater flowed south impacting additional properties further south on Church Road (see Figure 10). Residents here described entire gardens submerged as water flooded properties from the front and rear.

Multiple reports mention blocked drains on Church Road, drains being overwhelmed by the amount of floodwater and floodwater staying for several hours. There is also a report of a ditch bursting its bank and overflowing. There are also possible links to temporary building restoration works happening in the vicinity adding to the multitude of issues around the drainage on Church Road at the time of Storm Babet.

Church Road is narrow rural road and drainage here relies on grips. The grips had been recut in September 2023. Unfortunately, grips are a double edged sword, in normal rainfall they allow water to flow off the road, but conversely, they can provide a flow path from the ditch sooner than with a solid bank.

Flooding reoccurred throughout the winter during subsequent named storms (Ciaran & Henk) and more frequent wet weather events. During Jan/Feb 2024, piping was installed where necessary and ditches were cleared out to mitigate the effects of surface water on Church Lane.

The floodwater flowpaths observed during Storm Babet closely match the national surface water flood risk mapping (see Figure 11). Parts of Church Road are characterised as having a high chance of surface water flooding.

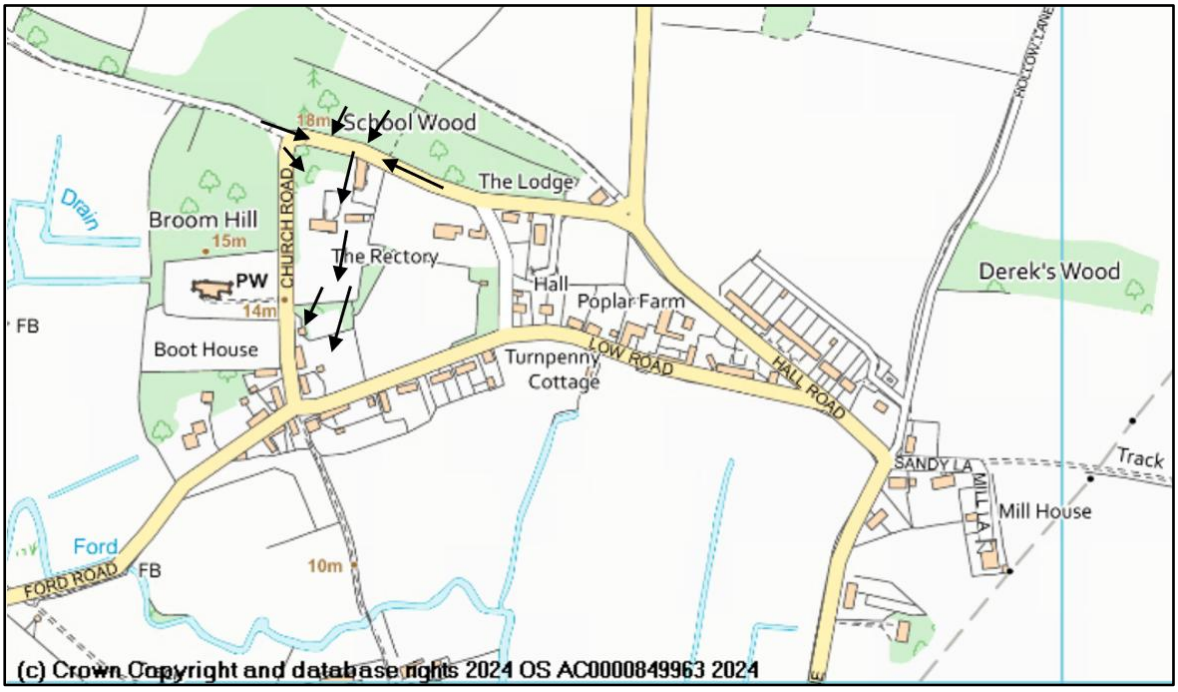

Figure 10. Approximate flood water flow routes along Church Road

Figure 11. Surface water flood risk on Church Road

In Summary:

- On 20 October intense rainfall caused surface water on Church Road to flow towards adjacent properties.
- Torrents of water poured through gardens and driveways south of Church Road causing severe flooding as the floodwater surrounded properties from the front and rear.
- Multiple issues including blocked drains, overflowing ditches, recently recut grips and nearby building works negatively impacted drainage on Church Road during Storm Babet.

LLFA recommended action(s):

- Residents to install Property Flood Resilience (PFR) via grant funded scheme.
- Suffolk Highways to ensure the completion of highway drainage asset cyclic maintenance on Church Road.

2. Main Road and Bell Lane

Following heavy rainfall on the morning of 20 October, extreme water levels flowed down the river Ore from the catchments upstream of Marlesford. From late morning onwards, the swollen river levels exceeded the capacity of the channel and floodwater flowed across the floodplain between the village centre and the A12 Main Road (see Figure 12). Some properties in this area were flooded directly from the overwhelmed river Ore with residents citing the shear amount of rain and runoff from the surrounding fields.

The section of the A12 next to the road bridge (see Image 2) over the river Ore was flooded. The floodwater is reported to have come off the Main Road towards adjacent properties. Floodwater also backed up and impacted nearby properties as the swollen river Ore also overtopped south of the Main Road (see Image 4) adding to the extent of the flooding.

The floodwater on the highway was slow to drain away, as the highway gullies were blocked up with mud and silt washed in with all the surface runoff during the storm. Prior to Storm Babet the highway drainage assets in this vicinity were cleaned and assessed to be operational in July 2023.

The flooded properties located immediately south of the A12 Main Road are shown to be outside of the fluvial flood risk area (see Figure 13). This may highlight the unique nature of the Storm Babet event in terms of its impact on the ground or possibly indicates an issue with the current flood model at this specific location. When the Environment Agency updates the model, they will look carefully at this location to ensure it is represented correctly.

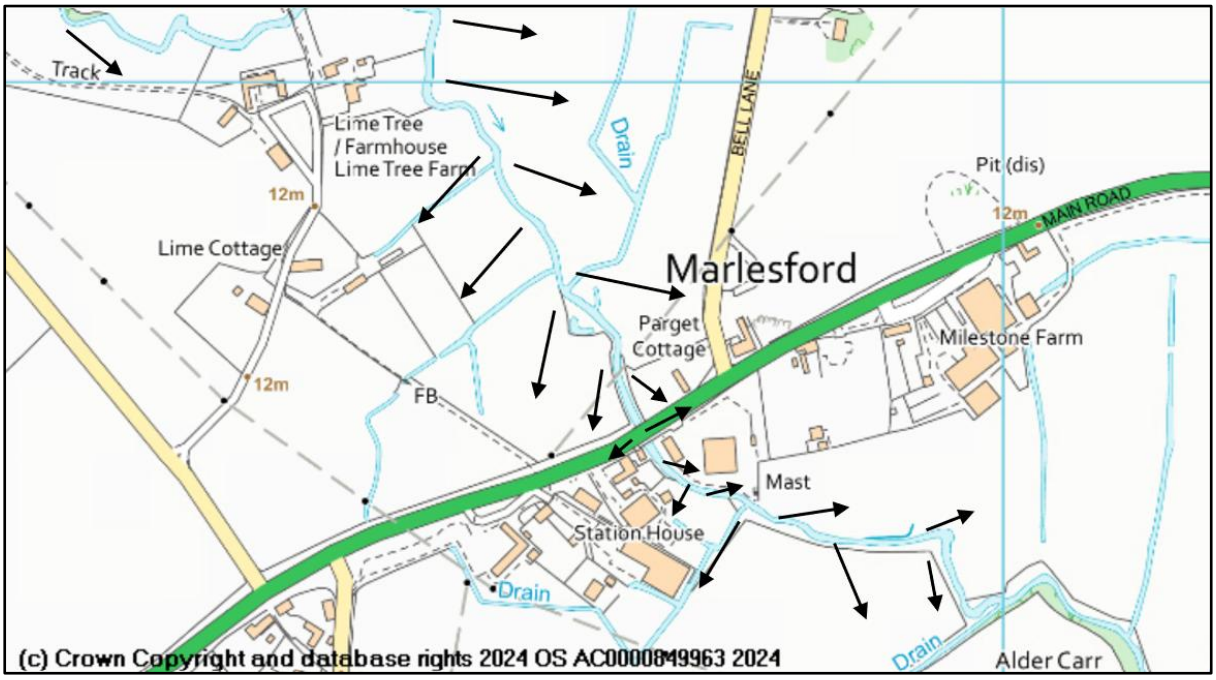

Figure 12. Approximate flood water flow routes next to Main Road and Bell Lane

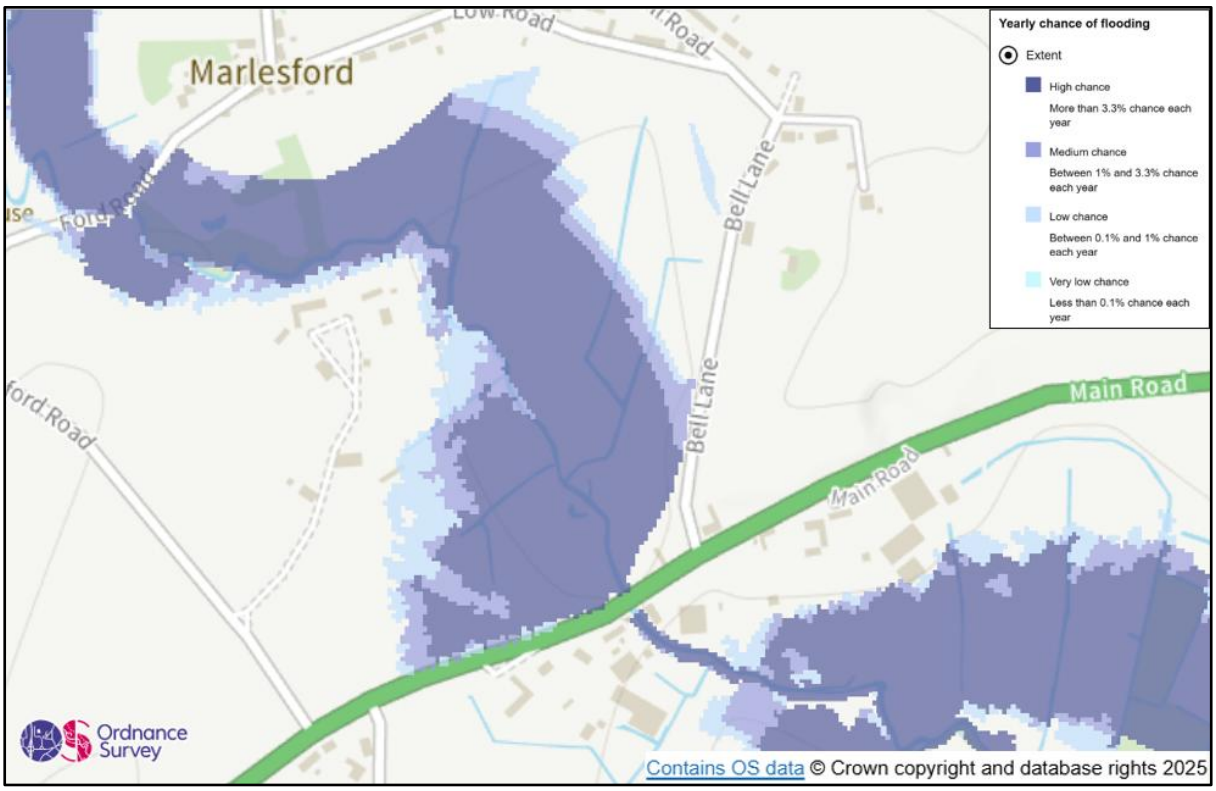

Figure 13. Fluvial flood risk next to Main Road and Bell Lane

In Summary:

- Heavy rainfall on the morning of 20 October resulted in extreme water levels in the river Ore through Marlesford.
- The swollen river levels exceeded the capacity of the channel and floodwater flowed across the floodplain flooding some properties directly.
- The area of the A12 Main Road next to the road bridge was flooded.
- The river Ore also overtopped south of the A12 Main Road adding to the extent of the flooding and impacting the adjacent properties.
- Highway drainage gullies on Main Road and Bell Lane were blocked with mud and silt washed in with surface water runoff during the storm event.

LLFA recommended action(s):

- Residents to install Property Flood Resilience (PFR) via grant funded scheme.
- Explore potential NFM measures which aim to attenuate water and 'slow the flow' on overland flow paths in the upper catchments above Marlesford e.g. storage ponds, wetland areas, leaky dams, woody debris installation and restoration of watercourses.
- The EA to investigate if there is flood risk benefit to carrying out in-channel maintenance of the river Ore through Marlesford adjacent to the A12 road bridge. Where maintenance is undertaken it is to assist with conveyance in regular winter flows and there may be limited benefit in an event the size of Storm Babet.

- Suffolk Highways to ensure the completion of highway drainage asset cyclic maintenance on Bell Lane and the A12 Main Road through Marlesford.
- Improved understanding of fluvial flood risk within the village through updates to the river Ore hydraulic modelling.

Images

The use of photos below has been included to support the investigation and provide further context of the flood event.

Image 1 - Church Road looking west

Image 2 - A12 road bridge over the river Ore

Image 3 - River Ore looking upstream from A12 road bridge

Image 4 - River Ore looking downstream from A12 road bridge

Risk Management Authorities, Non Risk Management Authority and flood risk function(s)

The following section acknowledges both RMA's and Non-RMA's relevant to the location and provide an overview of their flood risk functions. The table has been compiled from information collated as part of the investigation. It is not exhaustive and it should be acknowledged additional organisations and groups may be active within the community.

Risk Management Authority	**Relevant Flood Risk Function(s)**
Suffolk County Council	Lead local Flood Authority (LLFA), Highways Authority & Asset Owner
The Environment Agency (EA)	Lead organisation for providing flood risk management under its permissive powers and issuing warnings of flooding from main river
Anglian Water	Asset owner supplying water and water recycling services
Internal Drainage Board (IDB)	Supervising land drainage and flood defence works on ordinary watercourses
East Suffolk District Council	Local Planning Authority (LPA) & Asset Owner
Non-Risk Management Authority	**Relevant Flood Risk Function(s)**
Private Landowners	Riparian responsibilities and management of water from land or watercourses
Private Homeowners	Improving flood resilience to property and some riparian responsibilities if adjacent to watercourses.
Marlesford Parish Council	Manage flood risk at a community level, prepare and produce flood action plans and maintain watercourses where present on land they own

Action(s) completed prior to publication:

The following section acknowledges actions that RMA's and Non-RMAs have implemented or are currently in progress since Storm Babet and prior to publishing of this report.

Action	Risk Management Authority	Progress
Offer of Property Flood Resilience (PFR) measures to the properties that flooded during Storms Babet	Suffolk County Council Lead Local Flood Authority	Ongoing – deadline for applications end of May 2025. Work completion and final claims due by end Dec 2025.
Ensure riparian landowner responsibilities are understood with regard to watercourse management.	Suffolk County Council Lead Local Flood Authority	SCC published "Flood Smart Living" online and hard copy guide to increasing flood resilience for residents, landowners and communities, December 2024
The highway drainage grips on Church Road were recut in early September 2023 prior to Storm Babet.	Suffolk Highways	Complete
The highway drainage gully on Church Road was last cleansed November 2024.	Suffolk Highways	Complete
Understand the annual event probability of the rainfall & river flow across the region	The Environment Agency (EA)	Complete
New modelling of the main river Ore in the process of being commissioned. Due 2027.	The Environment Agency (EA)	Ongoing
Additional piping installed on Church Road to manage surface water flows. Ditches have been cleared from Church Road to Low Road allowing a free flow of water down to the water meadows.	Marlesford Parish Council	Complete

LLFA Recommended Action(s):

The following section provides a range of flood mitigation measures that could be implemented to reduce the risk of flooding in Marlesford. They have been derived from data and evidence collated as part of the report and have been included having been considered realistic in their implementation. The implementation of actions falls to the responsible party. Progress on the action will be monitored by Suffolk County Council, but it should be acknowledged that the council has limited powers to enforce the implementation of recommended actions.

Action	Responsible Party	Timescale for response	Latest Progress Update for Actions (June 2026)
Short Term Actions (e.g. standard maintenance activity and initial investigation of options that can be undertaken with limited need for forward planning)			
Establish a Community Emergency Plan that includes plans to manage future flood events – Liaison with Suffolk Joint Emergency Planning Unit	Marlesford Parish Council	6 months	**Responsibility for progressing an emergency plan remains with the Parish Council.**
Maximise the take up of the £5k PFR Grant currently available to residents before the end of May 2025 deadline for applications.	SCC LLFA / Residents	1 months	**Complete:** DEFRA PFR Grant has now closed for new applications. Installation of PFR measures on approved applications has been extended to December 2025. Further information on PFR measures can be found within SCC published "Flood Smart Living" handbook including advice on how to source products independently.

			There is currently no active PFR schemes being managed by the LLFA in Suffolk.
EA to investigate if there is flood risk benefit to increasing in-channel maintenance of the river Ore through Marlesford adjacent to the A12 road bridge.	The Environment Agency (EA)	6 months	**Complete** The current modelling sensitivity roughness scenarios show the differences in extents are considered to have a marginal impact on flood risk, therefore there is insufficient flood risk benefit for the EA to undertake routine maintenance here.
Suffolk Highways to ensure the completion of highway drainage asset cyclic maintenance on Church Road, Bell Lane and the A12 Main Road through Marlesford.	Suffolk Highways	Annually	**Ongoing** Routine cleansing of the gullies will be completed in line with the set cycles (annual or biennial). **Complete** **Church Road** Following the last maintenance cycle in November 2024, the drainage network was confirmed to be clear and fully functional. The next scheduled cyclical works are planned for October 2025. All drainage grips along the road have also been inspected and are operating without any defects. **Complete** **Bell Lane** Three previously non-operational gullies have been fully restored to service following jetting works. An inspection of the adjacent ditch has also confirmed that it is clear of defects.

			Complete **Main Road** Root blocked and collapsed pipes replaced. Outfall ditch regraded.
Medium Term Actions (e.g. longer planning timescales and potential need to source funding but potential for greater impact)			
Explore potential NFM measures which aim to attenuate water and 'slow the flow' on overland flow paths in the upper catchments above Marlesford e.g. storage ponds, wetland areas, leaky dams, woody debris installation and restoration of watercourses.	Landowners, supported by relevant authority, resource dependant (SCC LLFA, EA, IDB)	12 - 24 months	**Ongoing** No update expected at this time. Further information on Riparian Ownership can be found within SCC published "Flood Smart Living" handbook.
Improved understanding of fluvial flood risk within the village through updates to the River Ore hydraulic modelling.	The Environment Agency (EA)	2027	**Ongoing** The Environment Agency have contracted a consultant to undertake flood risk modelling project for the River Ore catchment.
Investigate opportunities to update development plan policy in Neighbourhood Plans or any potential Joint Local Plan site allocation(s) which identify risks and opportunities to mitigate flood risk issues as development comes forward	Local Planning Authority, SCC LLFA	12 months+	**Ongoing** Update from Local Planning Authority We are not aware of any Neighbourhood Plan activity in Marlesford. Work on a new East Suffolk Local Plan is anticipated to begin in 2025 with adoption by 2029.
Long Term actions (significantly longer timescale and budget required with potentially greater positive impact)			
Installation of NFM features within upper catchments to attenuate and slow flood water if investigation works suggest it is viable	Landowners, supported by relevant authority,	TBC	**Ongoing** – no update expected at this time.

	resource dependant (SCC LLFA, EA, IDB)		

Approval

This report will be reviewed and updated every 6 months until actions are marked as complete.

Reviewer	Date of Review
Ellie Coleby	16/10/2025
Ellie Coleby	06/10/2026

Disclaimer

This report has been prepared and published as part of Suffolk County Council's responsibilities under Section 19 of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010. It is intended to provide context and information to support the delivery of the local flood risk management strategy and should not be used for any other purpose.

The findings of the report are based on a subjective assessment of the information available by those undertaking the investigation and therefore while all reasonable efforts have been made to gather and verify such information may not include all relevant information. As such it should not be considered as a definitive assessment of all factors that may have triggered or contributed to the flood event. Should there be additional information available to develop the report, please email to floodinvestigations@suffolk.gov.uk

The opinions, conclusions and recommendations in this Report are based on assumptions made by Suffolk County Council when preparing this report, including, but not limited to those key assumptions noted in the Report, including reliance on information provided by third parties.

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The opinions, conclusions and any recommendations in this report are based on conditions encountered and information reviewed at the time of preparation and Suffolk County Council expressly disclaims responsibility for any error in, or omission from this report arising from or in connection with those opinions, conclusions, and any recommendations.

The implications for producing Flood Investigation Reports and any consequences of blight have been considered. The process of gaining insurance for a property and/or purchasing/selling a property and any flooding issues identified are considered a separate and legally binding process placed upon property owners and this is independent of and does not relate to Suffolk County Council highlighting flooding to properties at a street level. Property owners and prospective purchasers or occupiers of property are advised to seek and rely on their own surveys and reports regarding any specific risk to any identified area of land.

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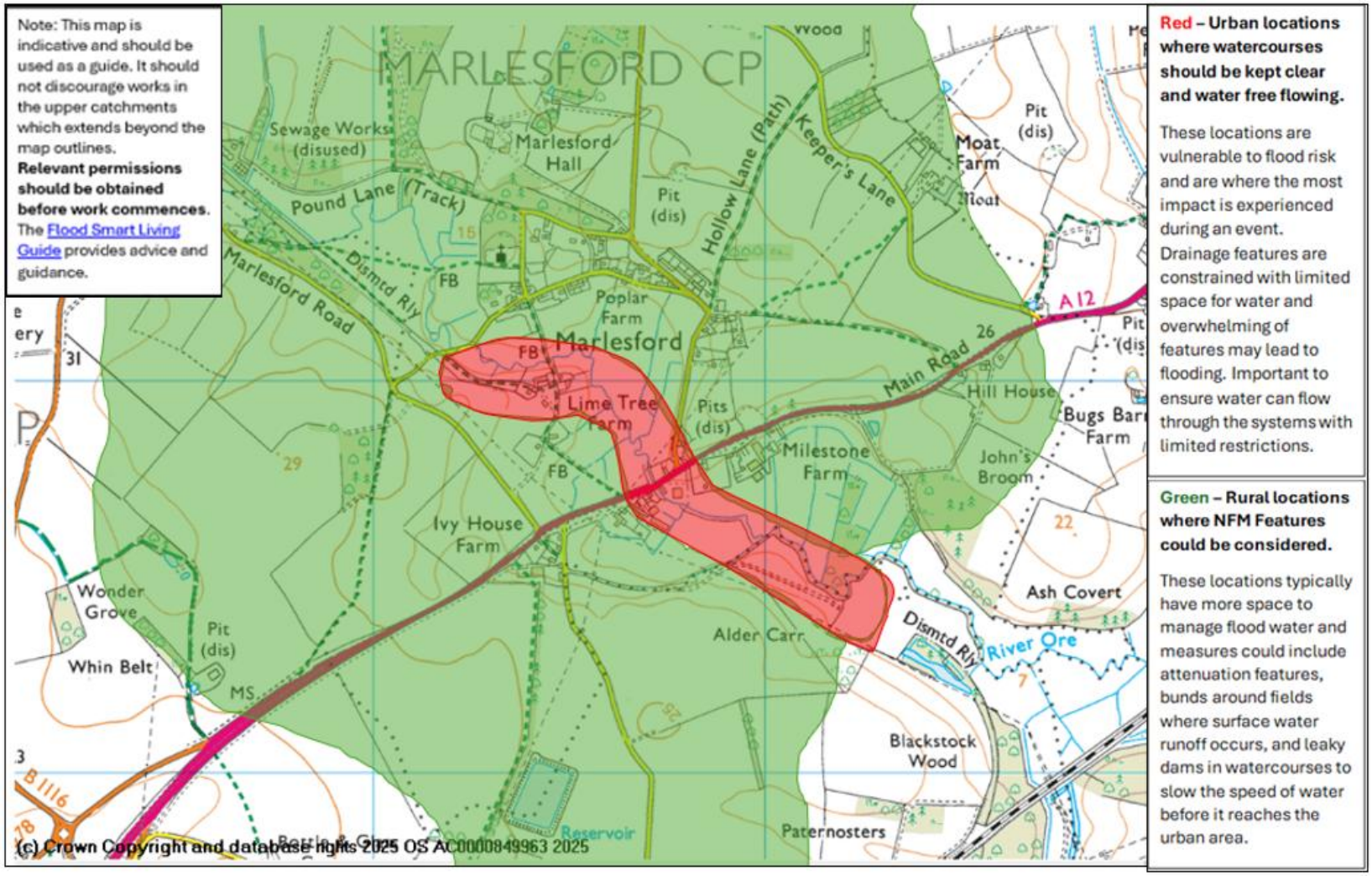
Appendix A – Inidicative locations for NFM and watercourse maintenance



Red – Urban locations where watercourses should be kept clear and water free flowing.

These locations are vulnerable to flood risk and are where the most impact is experienced during an event. Drainage features are constrained with limited space for water and overwhelming of features may lead to flooding. Important to ensure water can flow through the systems with limited restrictions.

Green – Rural locations where NFM Features could be considered.

These locations typically have more space to manage flood water and measures could include attenuation features, bunds around fields where surface water runoff occurs, and leaky dams in watercourses to slow the speed of water before it reaches the urban area.