Section 19 Flood and Water Management Act 2010

Occold Flood Investigation –

Storm Babet 2023

	Name	Date
Report Author	Stephen Quinn	
Responsible Officer:	Stephen Quinn	
Checked by:	Ellie Coleby	28/08/2025
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Suffolk Flood Risk Management Partnership

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Executive Summary

Storm Babet caused significant disruption to communities across Suffolk between 18th - 21st October 2023. Occold was a community that was impacted, with approximately six 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.

Occold is located in an area at significant risk of pluvial flooding and the nature of the surrounding topography and geology contributes to the susceptibility of the community to flooding. The flat nature of Occold, with little variation in elevation across the village means that during high rainfall events, considerable overland flowpaths converge in 'basin like' low points in the village. The local geology and soils are susceptible to high run off, making a number of properties in the village vulnerable to flooding during to intense rainfall events.

Storm Babet delivered significant rainfall to the catchment, following a period of above average rainfall. Impacts within Occold were widespread and for the purposes of this report, the affected areas have been grouped 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, The Environment Agency 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. A key finding is that Occold was severely impacted by flooding due to the intensity and duration of rainfall which overwhelmed the capacity of ditches, piped watercourses and localised 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 in Occold. For short term measures, key highlights include the implementation of a community flood plan and installing Property Flood Resilience (PFR). For medium to longer term recommendations, there is emphasis on the management of water from rural land through new natural flood management features and riparian landowners to carry out watercourse maintenance where appropriate to reduce flood risk within the village.

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.

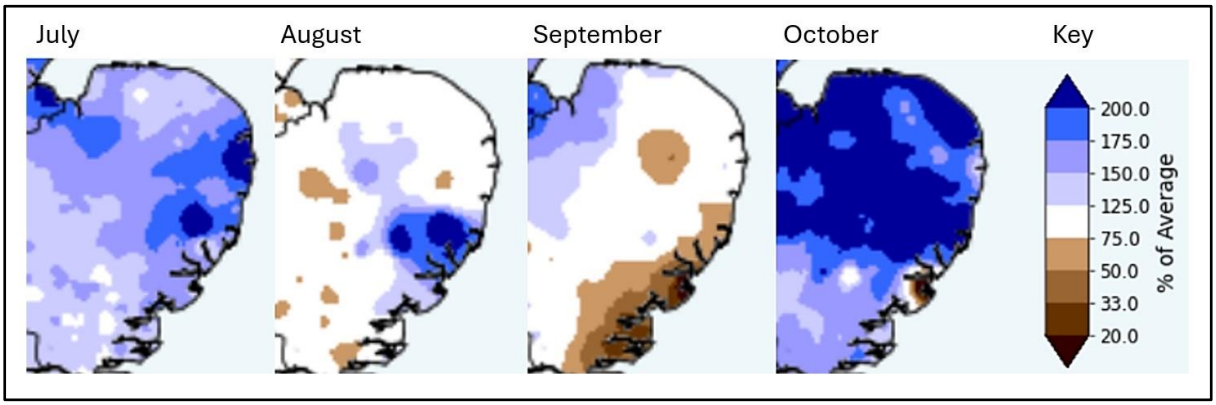

Figure 1. Average rainfall in East Anglia between July and October 2023 (as a percentage of the historical average monthly rainfall)

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

Occold is a village, and parish situated approximately two miles south of Eye. It is in the local authority district of Mid Suffolk.

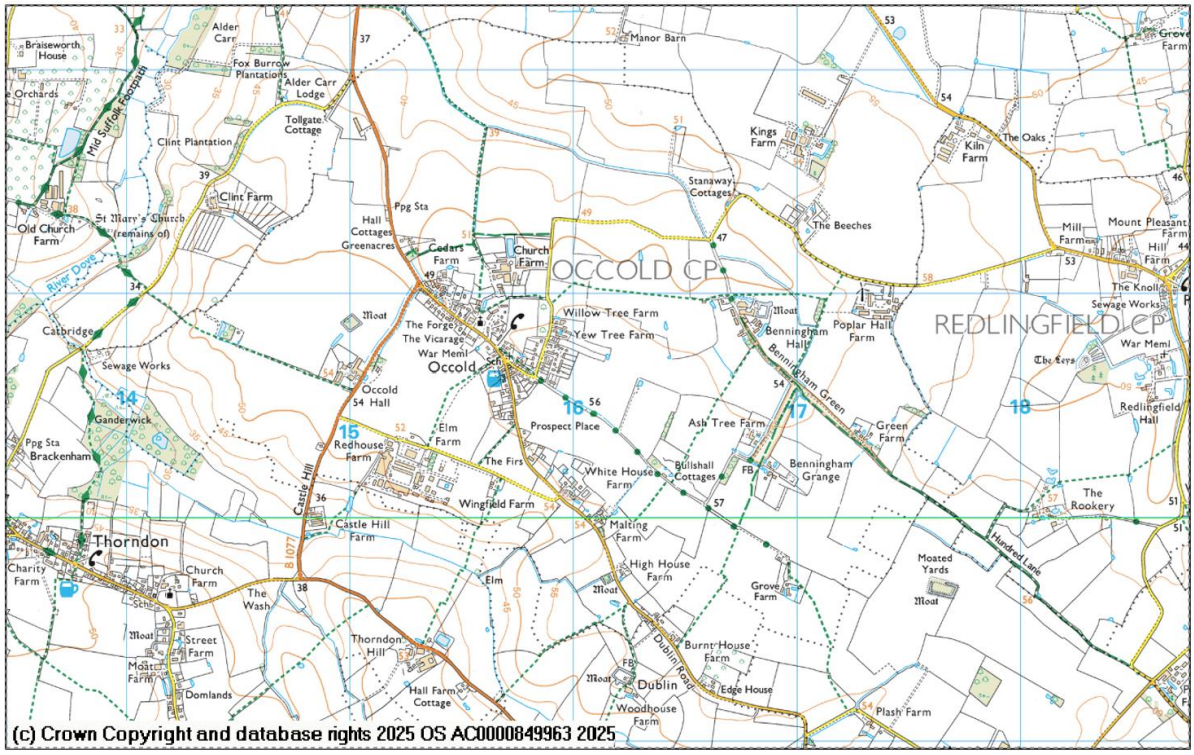

Figure 2. Investigation area map

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 below, shows the most significant watercourses in and around Occold.

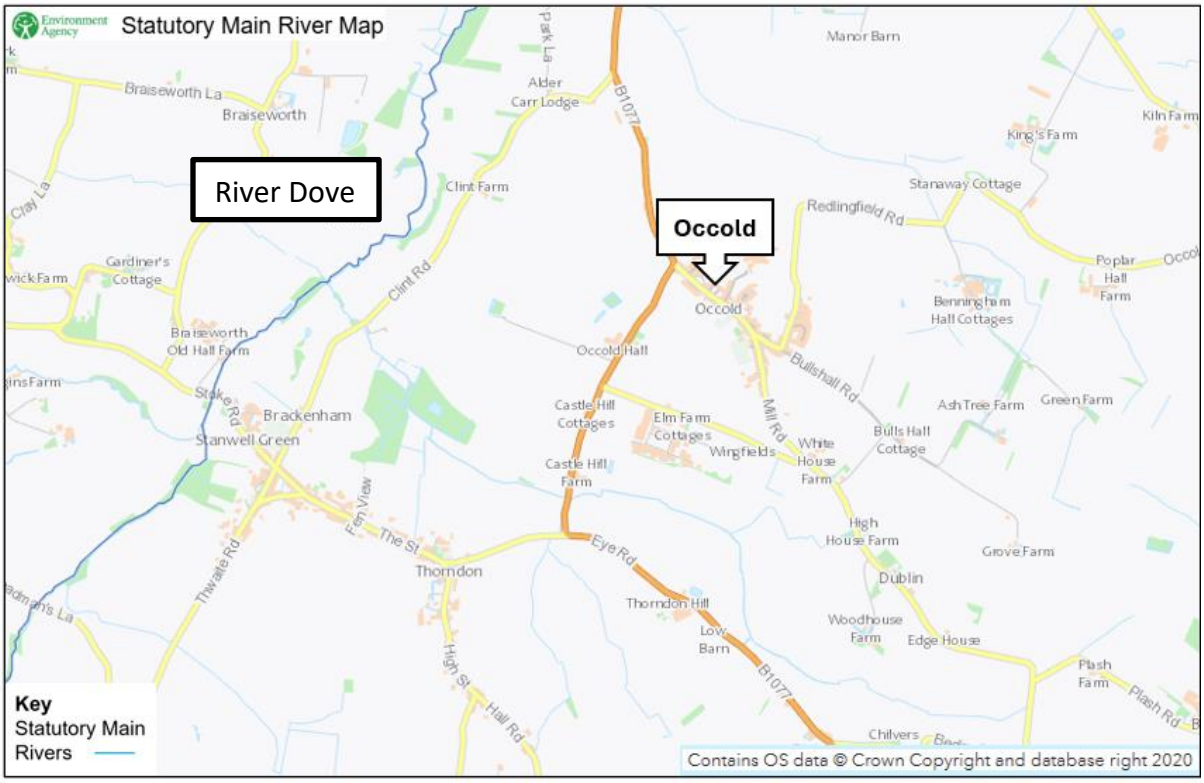

Figure 3. Location of statutory main river and ordinary watercourses

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. Occold was impacted with six properties reporting internal flooding to Suffolk County Council. Flood water was described as coming from multiple sources including surface water runoff from surrounding fields and highways (pluvial).

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 Street
2. Mill Road, The Causeway and The Street

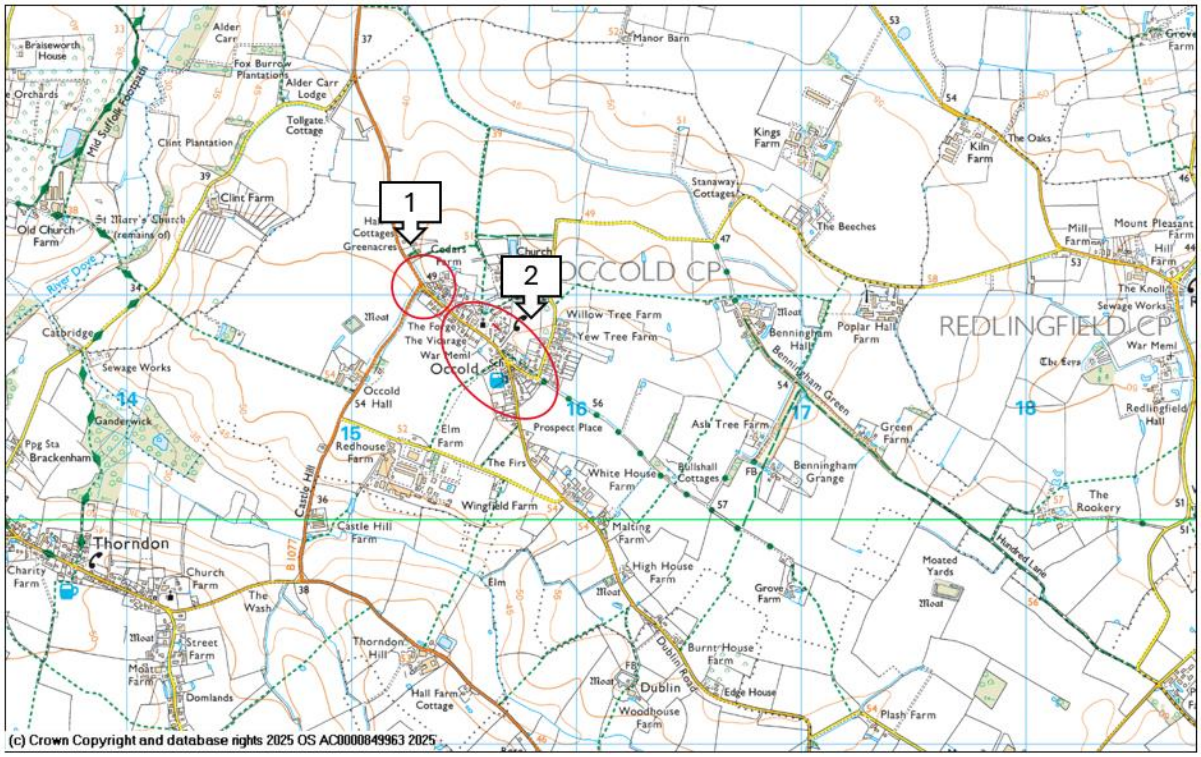

Figure 4. Occold investigation area map with locations

3. Records of any historical flooding

Prior to Storm Babet, there are previous reports of flooding to gardens and driveways on Mill Road and The Causeway.

The village centre where Mill Road joins The Street frequently floods across the highway during winter storms.

Anglian Water records show there has been flooding on Redlingfield Road from overload of sewers due to large amounts of surface water entering the system.

4. Predicted Flood Risk

Several areas of Occold are at risk of flooding from pluvial 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 Occold. There are several flow paths that run through and around the village and there are multiple pockets of isolated surface water pooling.

There is a high chance of surface water flooding on sections of Church Street and Mill Road. There is a medium to high chance of flooding on The Street, and The Causeway. These areas were all affected by flooding during Storm Babet.

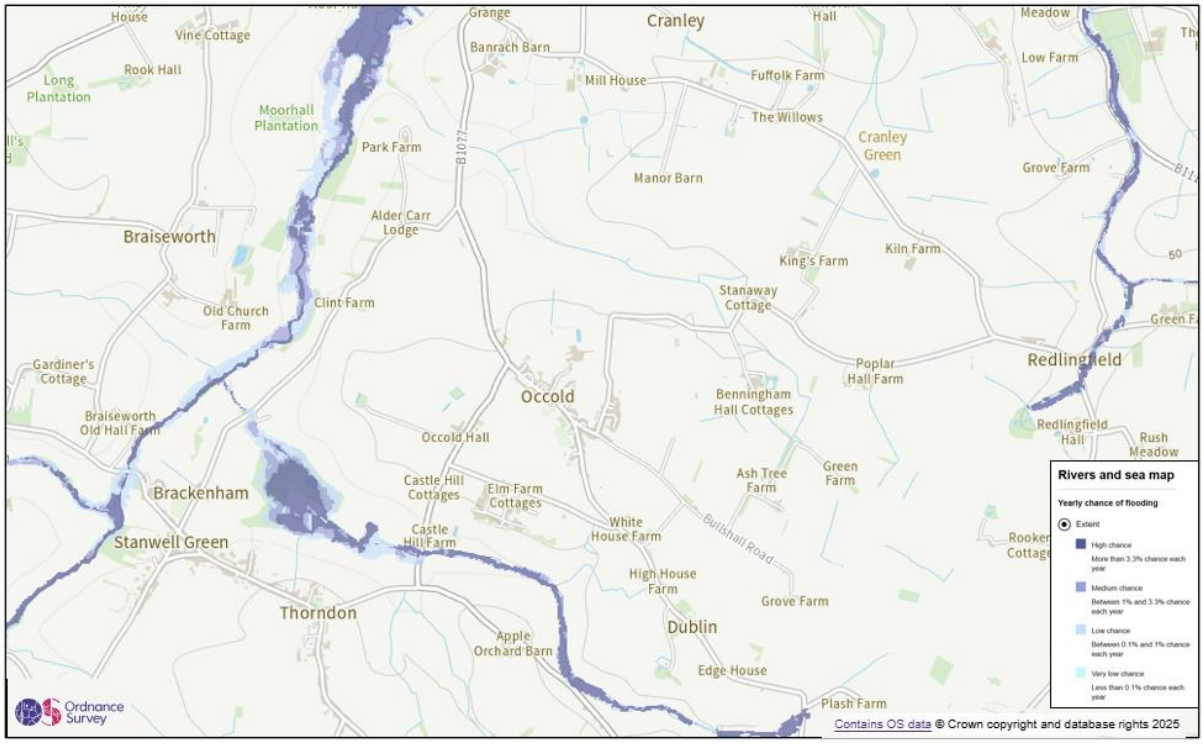

Figure 6. Flood risk from rivers and sea

Figure 6 shows the predicted fluvial (from designated main river and ordinary watercourses) flood risk in Occold. The river Dove, a tributary to the river Waveney to the west, is a distance away, therefore there is limited risk of fluvial flood risk in Occold.

5. Catchment characteristics

Figure 7 shows the topography surrounding Occold with gradient changes across the wider region. The village of Occold is situated on higher ground, with a gradual gradient, sloping towards the river Dove to the west. The village centre is generally flat and can act as a basin for surface water during heavy rainfall events.

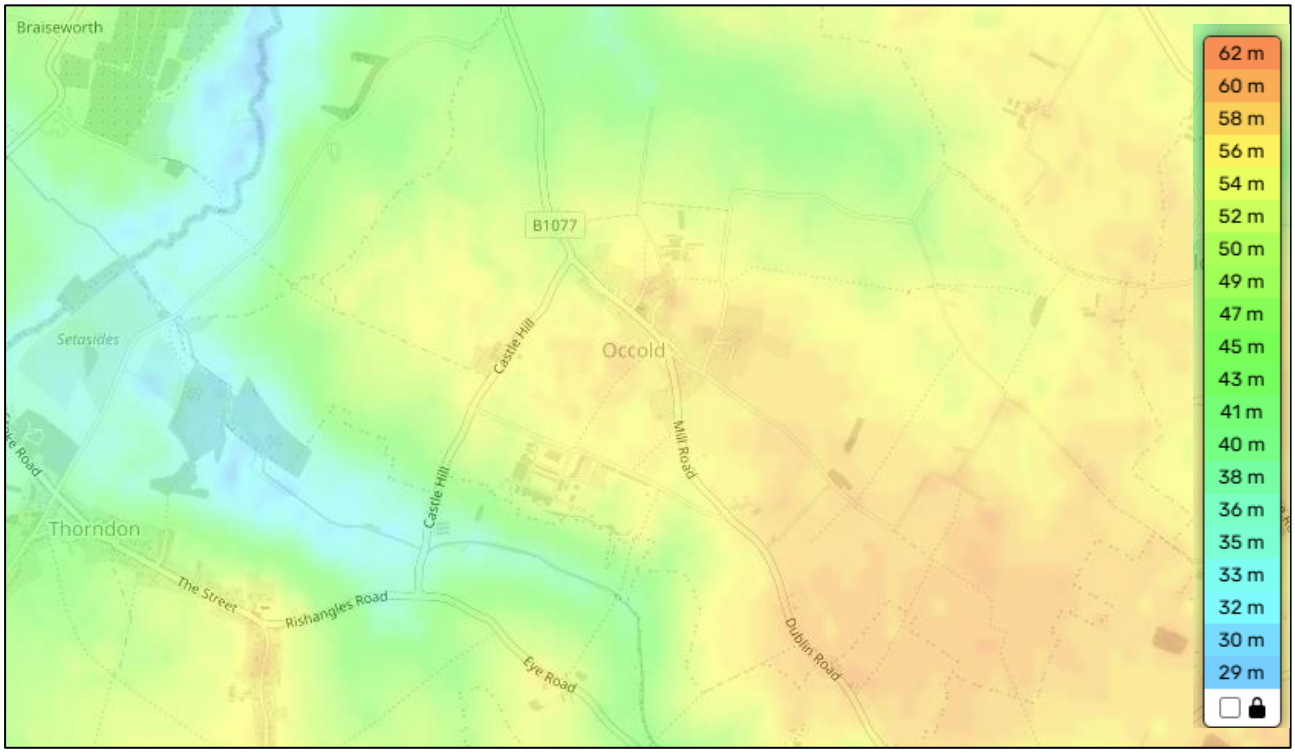

Figure 7. Occold and surrounding topography (TessaDEM as cited in topographic-map.com)

Figure 8. Soil map (LandIS Soilscapes)

Figure 9. Superficial Geology (BGS Viewer)

The soils surrounding Occold are loamy and clayey, which are seasonally wet, meaning that water permeates more slowly. This causes surface water runoff to be greater. In the wider area closer to the river Dove, soils are a mixture of freely draining and clayey soils.

Lowestoft Formation ‘Diamicton’ surrounds Occold 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. Saturated ground and high rainfall, like that of Storm Babet, will further emphasise the vulnerability of the parish and localised flooding could be experienced.

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.

Heavy rainfall in the Occold area was observed between 19 and 20 October. The nearest rainfall gauge to Occold is in Stradbroke (approx. 6 miles northeast of Occold). At the Stradbroke rainfall gauge there was 50.15mm of rain recorded over a period of 18hrs between 19 Oct 21:30 and 20 Oct 15:15. 26.55mm (more than half) of this rainfall was received over a 4 hour period on the morning of 20 October.

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.

Occold is not covered by the Environment Agency Flood Warning Service.

The description of the flood events outlined 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 Street

The intense rainfall during Storm Babet caused large amounts of floodwater to pool on the highway with long sections of Church Street either partially or wholly submerged in floodwater. Surface water run-off from fields to the west and along the B1077 flowed on to Church Street (see Figure 10).

One property was internally flooded initially to the rear and then via the front directly from the flood water on the highway and additionally from foul water backing up from drains. The foul sewer on Church Street was seen to be still surcharging days after the storm. Anglian Water believe the sewer was likely overloaded from the rainfall and excess surface water runoff entering the sewer rather than a fault or any asset failure.

During the storm the existing highway drainage assets on Church Street were overwhelmed by the sheer amount of floodwater. The water was unable to drain away as the ditch into which the gullies drain, was so high and itself at full capacity,

overtopping in places. The ditch along Church Street takes flood water flows from the eastern side of the village and surface water runoff from the fields to the north and south.

The majority of the highway drainage assets in this area were recorded as being operational, prior to Storm Babet. However, at least one asset was non-operational during the event, a small kerb offlet blocked with debris. Residents described highway drainage maintenance as an ongoing problem with the issue frequently reported. Resident's reports suggest this may have contributed to the flooding as the offlet was silted and blocked with the floodwater flowing past it. However, in the extreme storm conditions experienced, the capacity of the wider drainage system, even if fully functioning, would have been exceeded.

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

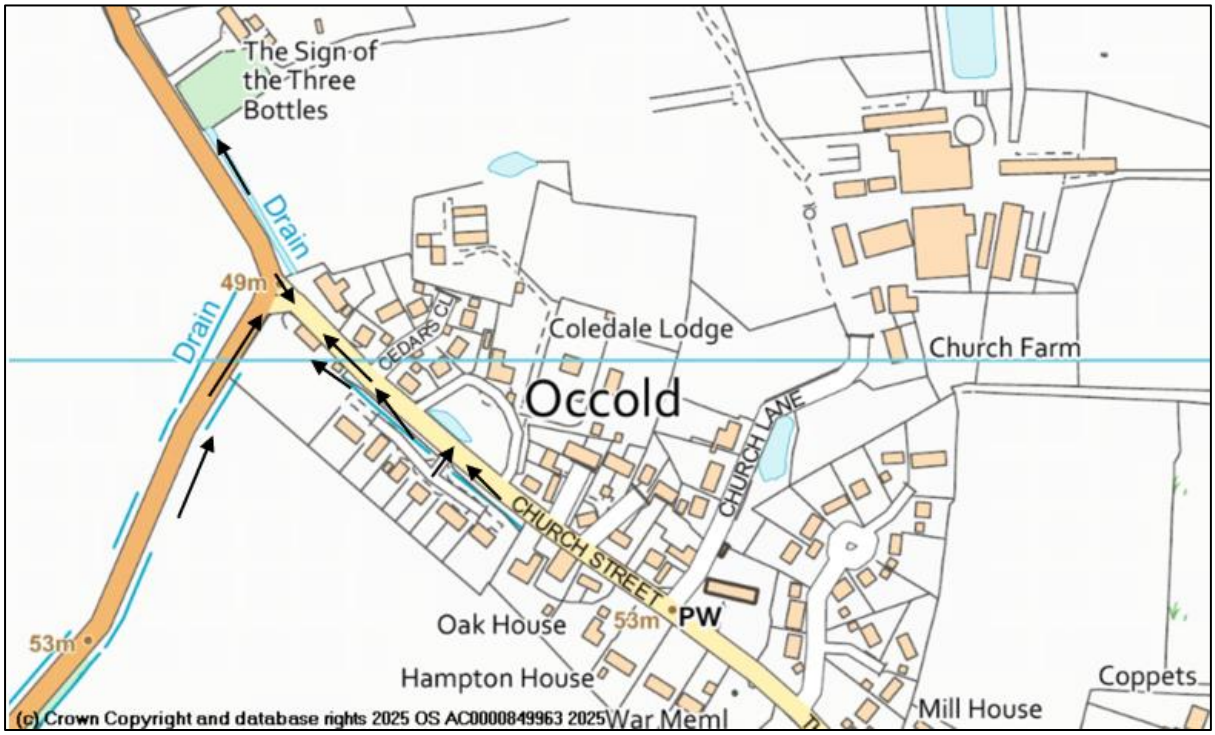

Figure 10. Approximate flood water flow routes along Church Street

Figure 11. Surface water flood risk on Church Street

In Summary:

- Intense rainfall during Storm Babet caused large amounts of floodwater to pool on the highway. Flood water flowed East to West along Church Street and from the B1077 onto Church Street.
- Drainage assets on Church Street were overwhelmed by the sheer amount of floodwater. The water was unable to drain away as the ditch into which the gullies drain, was at full capacity and itself overtopping in places.
- One property was internally flooded via the front directly from the floodwater on the highway and surrounded in floodwater.

LLFA recommended action(s):

- Residents to install Property Flood Resilience (PFR).
- Riparian landowners to carry out appropriate watercourse maintenance to reduce flood risk as necessary as per their riparian responsibilities.
- Explore potential NFM projects to attenuate water on overland flow paths north and south of Church Street and in the fields north and south of Bullshall Road to the East E.g. storage ponds, scrapes and wetland areas.
- Suffolk Highways to ensure the completion of highway drainage asset cyclic maintenance on Church Street.

2. Mill Road, The Causeway and The Street

Following heavy rainfall on the morning of 20 October, high water levels flowed through the drainage ditches in and around Occold. Floodwater levels exceeded the capacity of the ditches in multiple locations and flowed across land and onto the highways (see Figure 12). The rainfall added to the floodwater pooling extensively in

several places on the highway, particularly Mill Road / The Street and the junction of Bullshall Road with Redlingfield Road.

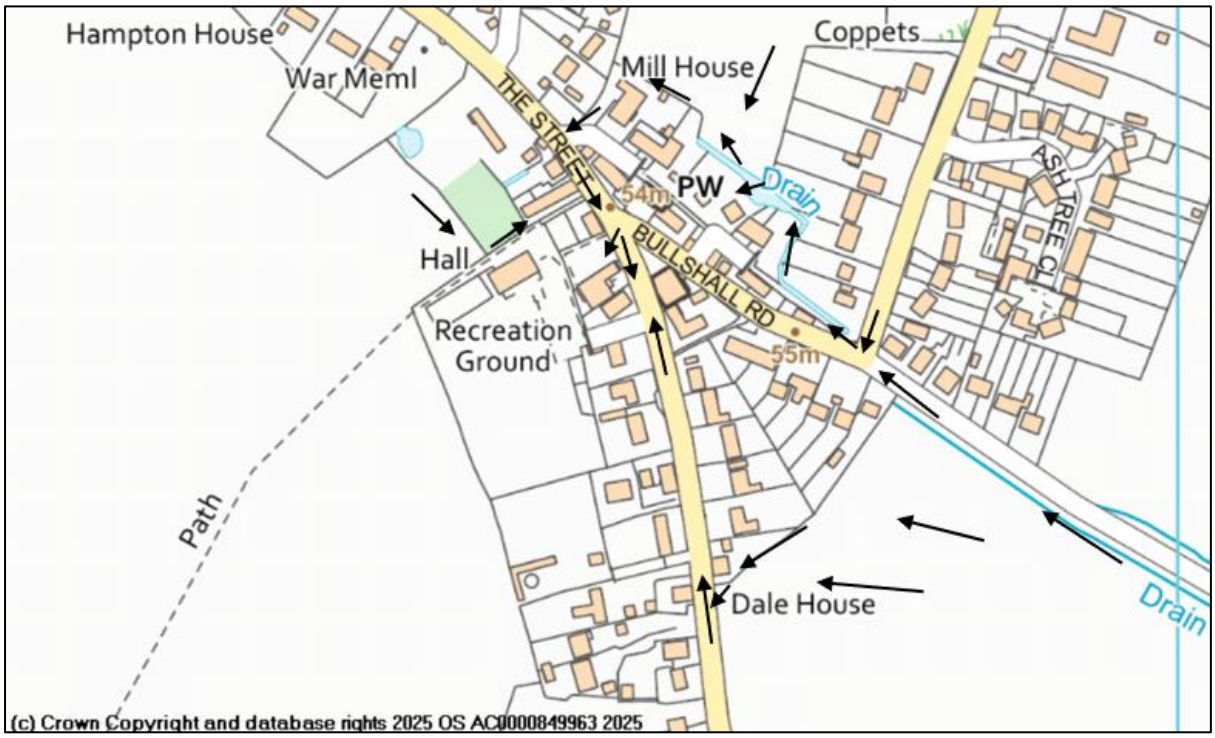

Figure 12. Approximate flood water flow routes on Mill Road, The Causeway and The Street

Residents reported that parts of Mill Road were submerged in floodwater and that flooding has been an issue for a number of years. During the storm event the highway was impassable cutting off one side of the village from the other. One property was flooded from the front, directly from the surface water flooding along the stretch of road. Another property was flooded internally from an adjacent ditch, as rainfall rates on the field caused the ditch to overtop and backup at the corner of the field. The floodwater flowed across the garden toward the house.

Additional surface runoff from the nearby fields added to the extent of the flooding as the existing highway drainage was overwhelmed. There is a lack of drainage assets along the length of Mill Road. Some sections of Mill Road are shown as being at a high chance of surface water flooding on the national flood risk maps (see Figure 13).

On The Causeway, the drainage ditch to the north, overflowed into the gardens and flooded one property. Residents reported the floodwater backing up in the open ditch as the downstream piped sections of the watercourse couldn't cope with the volume of surface water runoff. The pipe is relatively undersized given the potential amount of floodwater coming into the ditch at this location and may also have been partially blocked during the storm event. This area is shown as being at a low to medium chance of surface water flooding on the national flood risk maps (see Figure 13).

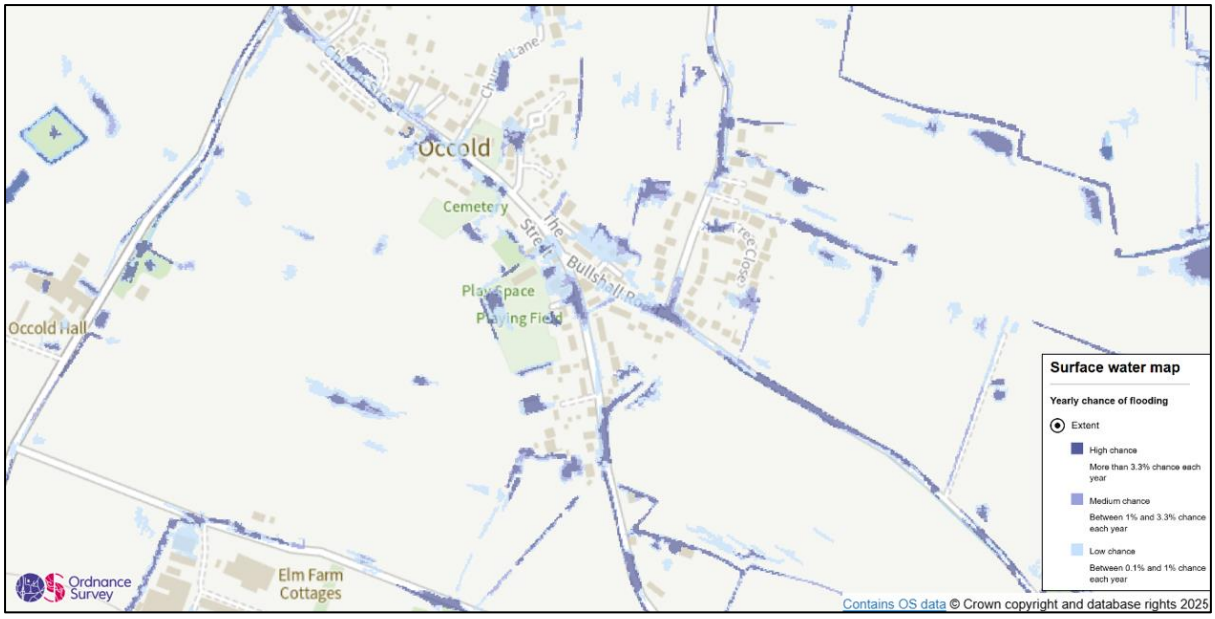

Figure 13. Surface water flood risk on Mill Road, The Causeway and The Street

On The Street, multiple properties were flooded from both the front and back as the floodwater spread and eventually surrounded the properties. Deep surface water flooding began pooling on stretches of The Street and Mill Road from early morning. Floodwater depth on the highway at the worst location reached approximately 60cm. The reports from residents suggest the road drains were unable to cope with the amount of flood water on the highway. Traffic attempting to pass through the floodwater caused bow waves to push water towards the properties, causing internal flooding.

The situation was compounded by additional water rising from the overflowing ditches behind the properties. One property has been reported to suffer repeated external flooding of the garden every time there is heavy rain. The local primary school was significantly impacted during the storm (although not flooded internally). The dangerously high floodwater levels made exiting the school safely difficult for students and teachers.

In Summary:

- Following heavy rainfall on the morning of 20 October, high water levels flowed through the drainage ditches through and around Occold. The rainfall added to the floodwater pooling extensively in several places on the highway.
- Parts of Mill Road were submerged in floodwater; one property was flooded to the front from the road; another property was flooded from an adjacent ditch as floodwater overtopped the ditch.
- On The Causeway, the drainage ditch to the north, overflowed across the gardens and into one property. A potentially undersized piped section may also have contributed to the extent of the flooding.

- On The Street multiple properties were flooded from both the front and back as the floodwater spread and surrounded the properties.
- Traffic attempting to pass through the floodwater pushed water towards properties exacerbating the flooding experienced.
- Reports suggest the highway drainage was unable to cope with the amount of floodwater on the highway.
- The situation was compounded by additional runoff from fields overflowing ditches behind the properties.

LLFA recommended action(s):

- Residents to install Property Flood Resilience (PFR).
- Riparian landowners to carry out appropriate watercourse maintenance to reduce flood risk as necessary as per their riparian responsibilities.
- Explore potential NFM projects to attenuate water on overland flow paths in the fields north and south of Bullshall Road and adjacent to Mill Road E.g. storage ponds, scrapes and wetland areas.
- Occold Parish Council to investigate utilising the Suffolk Highways Community Self Help scheme to be able to set out flood warning signage on the highway.
- Riparian landowners to investigate options for additional water storage and increasing the capacity of the ditch (including the piped sections) behind The Causeway.
- Suffolk Highways to ensure the completion of highway drainage asset cyclic maintenance on Mill Road and The Street.

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
Mid 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.
Occold 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	Application window now closed. Installation of PFR measures on approved applications has been extended to December 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.
Understand the annual event probability of the rainfall & river flow across the region.	The Environment Agency (EA)	Complete. Details of the report can be found on the SCC website or at the following https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/flooding-and-drainage/storm-babet
Occold village Flood Group formed	Members of Parish Council, District Council and village residents	Complete
• Informal survey and mapping of ditches and problem areas around the village. • Held one 'clearance day' to carryout maintenance on ditches and drains. • Initial Discussions held with River Waveney Trust regarding NFM options. • The pipe under the village green	Occold Flood Group	Complete

has been surveyed. The pipe junction with the main drain under Church Street may have slowed the flow coming from The Causeway. • Site visits with SCC Highways looking at key locations; Mill Road & Church Street. • Flood mitigation equipment (road signs, sandbags) has been purchased.		

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 Occold. 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
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.	Occold Parish Council	6 months	
Residents to consider installing Property Flood Resilience (PFR) measures to property to reduce damage caused by flooding.	SCC LLFA / Residents	N/A	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. There is currently no active PFR schemes being managed by the LLFA in Suffolk.
Riparian landowners to carry out appropriate watercourse maintenance to reduce flood risk as necessary as	Riparian landowners	N/A	Further information on Riparian Ownership can be found within SCC published "Flood Smart Living" handbook.

per their riparian responsibilities.			
Investigate utilising the Community Self Help scheme to be able to set out flood warning signage on the highway.	Occold Parish Council / Suffolk Highways	6 -12 months	Further information ca be found at the following https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/highway-maintenance/community-self-help-scheme
Suffolk Highways to ensure the completion of highway drainage asset cyclic maintenance on Church Street, Mill Road and The Street.	Suffolk Highways	Annually	Ongoing. Routine cleansing of the gullies will be completed in line with the set cycles (annual or biennial).
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 fields to the North, South and East of Occold e.g. storage ponds, wetland areas, leaky dams, woody debris installation.	Landowners, supported by relevant authority, resource dependant (SCC LLFA, EA)	12 - 24 months	
Riparian landowners to investigate options for additional water storage and increasing the capacity of the ditch (including the piped sections) behind The Causeway.	Landowners, supported by relevant authority, resource dependant (SCC LLFA)	12 - 24 months	

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+	
Long Term actions (significantly longer timescale and budget required with potentially greater positive impact)			
Installation of NFM features to attenuate and slow flood water if investigation works suggest it is viable.	Landowners, supported by relevant authority, resource dependant (SCC LLFA, EA)	TBC	
Deliver any interventions that are economically, technically and environmentally feasible and acceptable to improve the flood resilience of the village.	Landowners and/residents, supported by relevant authority, resource dependant (SCC LLFA, EA)	TBC	

Approval

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

Reviewer	Date of Review

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.

Suffolk County Council expressly disclaims responsibility for any error in, or omission from, this report arising from or in connection with any of the assumptions being incorrect.

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 – Indicative locations for NFM and watercourse maintenance