

Briefing: Axe/Brue catchment

1st March 2024

Overview: Winter weather

It has been a very wet autumn and winter in Somerset. Since the start of the storm season, hundreds of homes have been flooded by fluvial or surface water in dozens of communities across the county, some of them multiple times. The ground has remained saturated and responsive to further rainfall.

Mendip has had a number of exceptional rainfall events, and the Sheppey, Axe and Brue have seen consistently high river levels. Communities affected by flooding include Shepton Mallet, Croscombe, Nunney, Easton, Westbury-sub-Mendip, Wookey and Godney.

We are working closely with our partners at Somerset Council, Somerset Rivers Authority and the Internal Drainage Board to monitor the situation and to gather data about properties affected by flooding. This information is crucial for both incident response, and also for long term planning of flood risk reduction measures. We would encourage residents to report property flooding – for **non-emergency** reporting use [FORT - Home \(geowessex.com\)](https://www.geowessex.com) (see below for emergency info). This information is shared with risk management authorities to ensure it goes to the correct organisation.

We know that as well as the economic and physical impacts, flooding can have a serious effect on emotional wellbeing. Please see the links at the end of this note for information about recovery from flooding.

The Government's Flood Recovery Framework is used in exceptional circumstances to support councils and communities following severe flooding. [Somerset Council](#) is taking applications from residents who were flooded **between 2 – 12 January**, and a further grant for adaptations to properties will also be available soon.

We will be organising a public engagement drop in at Godney with partners in coming weeks as part of our wider recovery programme.

Operational response

Incident staff have been on duty 24/7, issuing flood warnings, responding to reports, checking assets and clearing trash screens. **Our pumping stations are running whenever possible, but they can only operate when there is capacity in the river to receive the floodwater.** Levels in the River Brue have been persistently high, both because of high flows and high tides. We are using every opportunity to evacuate water from the moors as river levels allow.

There are three permanent pumps at North Drain pumping station. One of these pumps has been under repair since last year, and supplementary submersible pumps have been in place since November to replace this. Pumping operations have brought water down and held to normal winter levels multiple times during the winter, but the ground remains saturated, and water on low lying fields takes time to work through the network of rhynes and watercourses to the pumping stations.

High river levels in the Brue between 17th and 25th February inhibited pumping for almost the entire period, and a great deal of water entered the moors from the river during this time. We have now deployed more temporary pumps to give the station extra resilience and pumping capacity and allow maintenance to take place on one of the other station pumps. These additional pumps are operational and running whenever river levels allow.

In all areas of the Somerset Levels and Moors, landowners can help speed the evacuation of water by ensuring that their rhynes, culverts and ditches are clear of obstructions.

For more information on riparian rights and responsibilities see: [Owning a Watercourse](#).

We are aware of other environmental impacts including septic tanks reaching capacity due to high water levels. Our Environment Management colleagues have provided advice and guidance, and we have collaborated with our partners at Somerset Council to signpost the welfare support available. (see links below).

Forecast

The current forecasts predict minimal rainfall today and tomorrow morning, followed by further rainfall (average totals <10mm per day) in the subsequent days. Although these rainfall totals are not as high as in previous weeks, the cumulative impacts may result in further slow increases in floodwater levels.

Flooding advice and information

Our advice to the public is to stay safe and not enter floodwater – just 30 cm of fast flowing water can move a car, and just 15 cm of fast flowing water could be enough to knock you off your feet.

What to do to prepare for flooding

- Call Floodline on 0345 988 1188 for updates on flooding, to sign up for flood warnings, or to report flooding.
- Go to www.gov.uk/prepare-for-flooding or search 'know my flood risk' to sign up for Environment Agency flood warnings, receive information on the risk in your area and what to do in a flood.
- Sign up for flood warnings at www.gov.uk/sign-up-for-flood-warnings
- Follow us on social media: www.facebook.com/environmentagencywessex
www.twitter.com/EnvAgencySW
Or visit: www.somersetiversauthority.org.uk

What to do during a flood

Call 999 if there is a risk to life

- Stay up-to-date on weather information and warnings: <https://check-for-flooding.service.gov.uk/plan-ahead-for-flooding>
- Report current flooding to the Environment Agency Incident Hotline (main rivers or sea), Somerset Council (ordinary watercourses) or Wessex Water (sewers)

- Get information on what to do during a flood from: www.gov.uk/help-during-flood
<http://www.somersetprepared.org.uk/hazard-advice/flooding>
www.somsetriversauthority.org.uk/useful-info
- Remember: Always stay safe. In an immediate flood emergency or where there is a risk to life, follow the advice of the emergency services.

Recovery from Flooding

- The Somerset Council website provide information and links of who to contact should you require support. [Flooding information and advice \(somerset.gov.uk\)](https://www.somerset.gov.uk). You can also contact Somerset Council on **0300 123 2224**.
- For information on recovering from flooding, see: [How to recover from flooding - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk); or: <https://floodmary.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/homeowners-guide-to-flood-recovery.pdf>
- Somerset Council may be able to support with housing and welfare issues <https://www.somerset.gov.uk/beaches-ports-and-flooding/flooding-information-and-advice/>
- Submit a detailed property flooding report at <https://swim.geowessex.com/somerset>
- Flooding is very distressing, and it is common for people's emotional health to be impacted. Somerset Talking Therapies may be able to offer help: <https://www.somersetft.nhs.uk/somerset-talking-therapies/>

Emergency Reporting

In an emergency, if there is a risk to life, please report flooding to 999.

For other emergency reporting, who you report the flooding to will depend on the source of the flood: <https://www.gov.uk/report-flood-cause>

For main rivers: Environment Agency incident hotline 0800 80 70 60

For ordinary watercourses / roads: Somerset Council [Report a problem on the road \(somerset.gov.uk\)](https://www.somerset.gov.uk)

For sewage / burst mains: Wessex Water 0345 600 4 600 (24hr) www.wessexwater.co.uk/your-wastewater/flooding/sewer-flooding

For all enquiries, or if you would like to be added to the distribution list for Axe/ Brue or wider Somerset Levels and Moors updates, please email: WessexEnquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk