# PROTECTING RUISHTON FROM INCREASED FLOOD RISK

**The case for refusing or restricting further development where it could increase flood risk to Ruishton, Creech St Michael, Henlade and other downstream communities.**

**A Strategic Planning and Flood-Risk Paper for consideration by Somerset Council October 2026.**



*Land surrounding Ruishton taken by a parishioner*

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11th October 2026

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## Introduction

Ruishton is an established community with a long and well-documented history of flooding. Flooding is not an abstract future possibility for Ruishton, it is an experienced and recurring event.

The centre of Ruishton, Ruishton Lane, Cheats Road, Bushy Cross Lane, Lipe Lane, Lower Henlade and surrounding areas have experienced repeated flooding and disruption. The Ruishton and Thornfalcon Neighbourhood Plan records that flooding is one of the greatest concerns of residents and states that Ruishton and Lower Henlade are susceptible to flooding. The Plan specifically identifies the need to avoid increasing flood risk through new development[1].



*Cheats Road taken by a parishioner 24.11.24*

More recently, the River Tone flood-warning area continues to specifically identify Ruishton and Creech St Michael, and in January 2026 the Environment Agency issued repeated flood warnings for the area. An Environment Agency warning on 28 January 2026 specifically acknowledged that "significant flooding occurred" in communities including Ruishton and Creech St Michael[2].

Ruishton has also been identified by Somerset Rivers Authority and its partners as a flooding hotspot within the Taunton catchment[3]. The Authority's current project is intended to understand flooding from multiple sources and to develop an integrated catchment model and mitigation options.

This evidence is important because the argument against inappropriate development is not based simply on residents' fears. It is supported by:

- documented historic flooding
- recent Environment Agency flood warnings
- the adopted Ruishton and Thornfalcon Neighbourhood Plan
- Somerset Council's own flood-risk investigations
- the Taunton Integrated Catchment work
- British Geological Survey evidence concerning the geology of the Somerset Levels
- national planning policy
- the 2015 York Flood Inquiry
- and the Government's decision in 2026 to provide Somerset Council with £50 million for flood resilience and prevention[4].

[1] See https://ruishtonparish.gov.uk/parish-council/neighbourhood-plans Ruishton and Thornfalcon Neighbourhood Plan section 6.3.3

[2] River Levels.UK https://riverlevels.uk/flood-warning-river-tone-from-bathpool-to-ham-including-ruishton-and-creech-st-michael-riverside-properties/181809?utm#google_vignette

[3] Somerset Rivers Authority https://www.somersetriversauthority.org.uk/flood-risk-work/sra-annual-report-2024-25/taunton-flood-action-plan/?utm

[4] Gov.UK https://www.gov.uk/government/news/50-million-investment-to-help-protect-somersets-farms-and-homes-from-flooding?utm

The central argument of this paper is therefore:

Where an existing community is already experiencing recurrent flooding, and where the Council and its partners are undertaking major investigations and spending substantial public money to reduce that flood risk, planning decisions should not permit additional development that has not demonstrated, through robust catchment-scale evidence, that it will not increase flood risk elsewhere.

This should apply particularly to development on the outer areas of the Somerset Levels and the catchments draining towards Ruishton, Creech St Michael and other vulnerable communities.

## Supporting Evidence Base

### 1. The central planning question

The issue is not whether Somerset requires new housing. Somerset does require additional housing. The issue is whether every location proposed by a developer is an appropriate location for that housing.

Somerset Council's emerging Local Plan will cover the period 2025–2045 and is intended to establish a spatial strategy identifying:

- how much development is required
- where it should be located
- what infrastructure is required
- and which environmental and other areas should be protected[5]

The Council's current housing-need calculation is approximately 3,769 homes per year. However, Somerset Council itself makes an important distinction between housing need and housing requirement.

Housing need is an assessment of the minimum number of homes indicated by the Government's methodology. Housing requirement is what the Local Plan ultimately seeks to provide after taking account of local circumstances, constraints and other considerations[6].

Therefore:

The existence of a national or county-wide housing requirement does not mean that every field offered by a developer must be developed.

The planning system exists precisely to determine where development should and should not take place.

[5] Somerset Council About the Local Plan https://www.somerset.gov.uk/planning-buildings-and-land/somerset-local-plan/about-the-local-plan/?utm

[6] Somerset Council housing need/requirement https://www.somerset.gov.uk/planning-buildings-and-land/somerset-local-plan/about-the-local-plan/?utm#Calculating%20housing%20need

## 2. Ruishton has a special and documented flooding problem

Ruishton's flooding problem is not hypothetical. The adopted Ruishton and Thornfalcon Neighbourhood Plan records:

- regular flooding in recent years
- significant flooding in Ruishton village
- flooding affecting Lower Henlade
- disruption to local roads
- disruption to the school and recreation facilities
- and the closure of the village hall during flooding



*Centre of Ruishton taken by a parishioner 24.11.24*

The Plan describes flooding as one of the greatest anxieties of local residents[7].

This is powerful evidence because the local community has already undertaken a formal planning process in which flooding was identified, researched and incorporated into the adopted planning framework.

The Neighbourhood Plan is not simply a residents' petition.

Somerset Council formally made the Ruishton and Thornfalcon Neighbourhood Plan part of the Development Plan on 14 February 2024[8]. It therefore has a formal role in determining planning applications in the parish.

## 3. The Neighbourhood Plan contains a specific Flooding Policy

The adopted Neighbourhood Plan contains Policy E4 – Ensuring no Net Increase in Flood Risk. It states that "Development proposals should demonstrate that they do not increase local flood risk…".

The policy also addresses:

- known surface-water flooding
- Sustainable Drainage Systems
- mitigation of surface-water runoff;
- and long-term management of drainage systems.

This means that future applications in Ruishton should not be assessed solely by asking whether water can



*Village Hall Cheats Road 27.1.26*

[7] See Neighbourhood Plan page 56 https://ruishtonparish.gov.uk/parish-council/neighbourhood-plans
[8] See item 21 https://somerset.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=934&MeetingId=7130&utm

technically be removed from the development site. The relevant question is broader:

Does the development increase local flood risk?

That includes considering what happens to water after it leaves the development.

**4. National planning policy is now particularly strong**

The current National Planning Policy Framework, published on 29 September 2026[9], provides a very strong basis for this approach. Its flood-risk policies require development plans to consider:

- current flood risk
- future flood risk
- cumulative impacts
- climate change
- and the advice of flood-risk management authorities

Most importantly, national policy states that development should be steered away from areas at risk of flooding.

The sequential test, Policy F5, is intended to ensure that development is directed towards areas with the lowest flood risk where suitable alternatives are reasonably available[10]. The current policy is also explicit that development should not increase flood risk elsewhere.

Policy F7 states that development proposals should not present a flood risk to occupiers and should not increase flood risk elsewhere. Where development is in an area known to be at risk, now or in the future, it should be refused unless specified safeguards can be demonstrated including demonstrating that flood risk will not be increased elsewhere. This is directly relevant to Ruishton. The fact that a development site itself may be capable of being protected does not necessarily answer the planning question. A development might be made safe internally while altering:

- surface-water runoff
- drainage patterns
- flood-storage capacity
- groundwater behaviour
- watercourse flows
- or the timing and volume of water reaching downstream areas

Those effects must be considered.

**5. The key issue: “No increase elsewhere” must mean no increase in reality**

There is a potential weakness in conventional development drainage assessments. A developer may demonstrate that the discharge from a site is restricted to a calculated

[9] Gov.UK Chapter 18 NPPF https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-planning-policy-framework-chapter-18-managing-flood-risk-and-coastal-change-f1-9?utm

[10] See F5: The sequential test https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-planning-policy-framework-chapter-18-managing-flood-risk-and-coastal-change-f1-9?utm

greenfield rate. That does not necessarily mean that the development has no effect on flooding in a real-world catchment. This is particularly important in Somerset.

Somerset Rivers Authority has now recognised this issue explicitly. Its 2026–27 programme includes a project titled “Catchment modelling: understanding how development affects flood risks in Somerset”[11].

The Authority states that one of the most frequently expressed concerns in Somerset is that new housing and commercial development can make flooding worse downstream. It also states that existing drainage guidance does not always reflect Somerset’s local conditions.

In particular, the project identifies the fact that in the very flat Levels and Moors, water can remain for days or even months rather than flowing rapidly away.

This is exceptionally important evidence for Ruishton. It means that Somerset’s own flood-management authorities recognise that standard development drainage assumptions may not adequately describe what happens in Somerset’s unusually flat catchments. The Authority is therefore funding new catchment modelling to examine:

- runoff volumes
- discharge timings
- climate change
- soil conditions
- local infrastructure
- and the way development affects flood risk

According to Somerset Rivers Authority, the project may result in new standards requiring developments to retain water for longer and release it more gradually.

**6. The precautionary principle should apply until the catchment evidence is complete**

This creates an important planning argument. If Somerset Council is currently investigating whether existing drainage standards properly account for the special conditions of Somerset’s catchments, it would be inappropriate to assume that conventional drainage calculations automatically demonstrate that a new development cannot increase downstream flood risk.

The prudent approach would be:

- Do not approve additional development where there is credible evidence of flood risk until the Council has sufficient catchment-scale evidence to demonstrate that the development will not increase that risk.

This is not an argument against development forever. It is an argument for evidence before irreversible development. Once houses, roads, gardens and hard surfaces have

[11] See project “Catchment modelling: understanding how development affects flood risks in Somerset” https://www.somersetriversauthority.org.uk/flood-risk-work/sra-enhanced-programme-2026-27/?utm

been constructed, the land-use change is effectively permanent. A drainage problem cannot simply be reversed.

## 7. The 2015 York flood inquiry provides a useful precedent

On Boxing Day 2015, York experienced exceptionally severe flooding. An independent York Flood Inquiry subsequently considered what could be learned from the event. The Inquiry is particularly relevant because it considered the relationship between:

- development
- land drainage
- catchment management
- planning
- watercourses
- and flood risk

The Inquiry found that building development in the catchment over the preceding decades had contributed to land draining more quickly into the River Foss[12].

The Inquiry subsequently concluded, under Catchment Management, that "development control must form part of mitigating flood risk".

It recommended consideration of ways to ensure development did not increase flood risk, including consideration of land drainage and whether new developments should be able to connect automatically to existing sewerage systems.

Most importantly, the Inquiry's conclusions called for risk-management authorities to:

- prevent an increase in flood risk from development where possible
- prevent additional flow entering existing drainage systems and watercourses
- use whole-catchment approaches
- and understand historic and future flood events

The lesson is highly relevant, a planning authority should not wait for a catastrophic flood to demonstrate that development has contributed to the problem.

## 8. Ruishton is already identified as a flooding hotspot

This is one of the strongest pieces of current evidence. The Taunton Flood Action Plan work has investigated flooding at a number of locations. Ruishton is explicitly identified as one of the flooding hotspots.

The project is being led by Somerset Council and Wessex Water, with involvement from the Environment Agency and Network Rail[13]. The work was designed to:

- understand flooding from different sources
- compare modelling against historical flooding

[12] See Page 29 https://www.york.gov.uk/downloads/file/1444/york-flood-inquiry-main-report-2-18mb-pdf
[13] Somerset Rivers Authority https://www.somersetriversauthority.org.uk/flood-risk-work/sra-annual-report-2024-25/taunton-flood-action-plan/?utm

- develop an integrated catchment model
- identify problems
- and develop possible mitigation options

The fact that Ruishton has been selected for detailed investigation should be a material consideration when determining new applications.

It demonstrates that the Council itself recognises that Ruishton's flood problems require more than a site-by-site assessment.



*Village centre and Dinhams taken by a parishioner*

**9. Ruishton's flooding has continued into 2026**

This is not simply historic evidence. In January 2026, the Environment Agency issued repeated flood warnings for the River Tone area covering Ruishton and Creech St Michael. On 28 January 2026, the Environment Agency specifically stated "We are very aware that significant flooding occurred in communities such as Bathpool, Ruishton and Creech St Michael."[14]

The warning history shows multiple flood warnings during January 2026 and further warnings issued in December 2025 and January 2025[15]. This provides an up-to-date evidential basis for treating flooding as a current planning constraint, rather than a historic event that has been solved.

**10. Flooding and vulnerable residents**

The consequences of flooding are not evenly distributed. Older people, disabled residents and people with limited mobility may be particularly vulnerable. The situation at the Council-owned Dinhams properties in Ruishton, is therefore highly significant. The issue should be presented not simply as property damage. It is about:



*Dinhams Bungalows taken by a parishioner*

- safety
- access
- evacuation
- heating
- electricity
- medical needs
- mobility
- and the ability of vulnerable residents to remain safely in their homes

[14] https://riverlevels.uk/flood-warning-river-tone-from-bathpool-to-ham-including-ruishton-and-creech-st-michael-riverside-properties/181809?utm_source=chatgpt.com River Levels.UK

[15] Previous flood warnings https://riverlevels.uk/flood-warning-river-tone-from-bathpool-to-ham-including-ruishton-and-creech-st-michael-riverside-properties/181958?utm

If flooding has already approached the point where vulnerable residents were at serious risk, the planning authority should be extremely cautious about permitting development that could increase the frequency, duration or severity of those events.

## 11. Public investment in flood protection creates an important planning context

In June 2026 the Government announced £50 million for Somerset Council to improve flood resilience[16]. The funding followed severe flooding in Somerset and is intended to support measures including:

- improved water-management infrastructure
- flood defence
- nature-based solutions
- watercourse maintenance
- pumping
- and community flood resilience

Somerset Council has subsequently confirmed that its programme includes 15 projects and a combination of engineering, maintenance, pumping and community resilience measures[17]. This creates a fundamental public-policy question:

- Why should public money be spent reducing flood risk to existing communities while planning decisions simultaneously permit development that may increase pressure on the same catchment?

The two policies should be complementary. Flood mitigation expenditure should not be undermined by development policy.

## 12. The £50 million investment should strengthen, not weaken, the case for strategic planning

The £50 million should not be interpreted as creating additional capacity for development. It is intended to improve resilience and reduce flood risk. That distinction matters. Flood defences should not become a justification for permitting development that would otherwise be inappropriate. Instead, the Council should first establish:

1. the existing flood risk
2. the existing capacity of the catchment
3. the improvements that are required
4. the effect of climate change
5. the cumulative effect of existing and proposed development
6. and the amount of additional development, if any, that the catchment can safely accommodate

Only then should further development be considered.

[16] Gov.UK flood investment https://www.gov.uk/government/news/50-million-investment-to-help-protect-somersets-farms-and-homes-from-flooding?utm

[17] Somerset Council https://www.somerset.gov.uk/news/council-outlines-next-steps-in-allocating-50-million-of-flood-resilience-funding/?utm

## 13. The geology of the Somerset Levels

The underlying scientific geological evidence supports the broader concern about the area's unusual geology and drainage characteristics. The British Geological Survey (BGS) identifies extensive alluvial deposits across the Somerset Levels, comprising combinations of:

- silty clay
- clay
- sand
- peat
- gravel
- and other superficial deposits[18]

BGS describes the Somerset Levels formation as including deposits of dark silty clays, silts, sands and peat, with thicknesses reaching many metres in places[19]. The BGS geological evidence also identifies the Somerset Levels as a very low-lying landscape with extensive floodplain and alluvial deposits[20].

The Environment Agency describes the Somerset Levels and Moors as one of the lowest areas in the UK, with 18% of Somerset lying below average tide level, and records flooding in the area extending back centuries[21].

This evidences that the geology, topography and drainage characteristics of the Somerset Levels and adjoining catchments create a hydrologically sensitive environment in which the timing, volume and routing of runoff require careful catchment-scale consideration.

## 14. The Levels' existing flood management is already essential

The Government's description of the Somerset Levels and Moors makes clear that water management has been essential to the area for centuries. The Levels are exceptionally low-lying, and the Environment Agency records widespread historical flooding. The area therefore depends upon an extensive interaction between:

- rivers
- drains
- pumping
- flood storage
- agricultural land
- wetlands
- watercourses
- embankments
- and other infrastructure

[18] Earthwise https://earthwise.bgs.ac.uk/index.php/Alluvium%2C_Quaternary%2C_Bristol_and_Gloucester_region?utm
[19] BGS Somerset Levels formation https://webapps.bgs.ac.uk/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?pub=SLEV&utm
[20] Earthwise BGS https://earthwise.bgs.ac.uk/index.php/Alluvium%2C_Quaternary%2C_Bristol_and_Gloucester_region?utm
[21] See Background https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/somerset-levels-and-moors-reducing-the-risk-of-flooding/somerset-levels-and-moors-reducing-the-risk-of-flooding?utmEnvironment

Development decisions should recognise that this is a managed hydrological system. It is not simply an empty landscape waiting to be urbanised.

### 15. The National Park / Wetland proposal

There have been recent public proposals for greater protection of the Somerset Levels, including calls for National Park status. Recent reporting in September 2026 records campaigning for the Somerset Levels to become an English National Park, with supporters arguing that this would provide greater long-term protection for the area's wetlands, wildlife and landscape[22]. It illustrates a wider recognition that the Somerset Levels have exceptional environmental and water-management characteristics.

For Ruishton, the relevant question is whether the protective principle should extend beyond the most obvious wetland areas to the outer catchments that influence water entering the Levels and vulnerable settlements.

### 16. The importance of surface-water runoff

A development changes how rainfall interacts with land. Before development, rainfall may:

- infiltrate
- evaporate
- be stored in vegetation
- pond temporarily
- flow slowly through field drainage
- or enter watercourses over a longer period



*Lower Henlade taken by a parishioner*

After development, the site contains:

- roofs
- roads
- driveways
- pavements
- compacted ground
- drainage pipes
- attenuation systems
- and engineered outlets

The important question is therefore not simply "Where does the water go?", it is "How much water reaches the downstream system, when does it arrive, and what happens when that system is already near capacity?"

This is precisely why Somerset Rivers Authority is now undertaking catchment modelling concerning development and flood risk[23].

[22] https://somersetdaily.co.uk/campaigners-propose-somerset-levels-as-englands-11th-national-park/?utm
[23] https://www.somersetriversauthority.org.uk/flood-risk-work/sra-enhanced-programme-2026-27/?utm

## 17. The “flood wedge” concept

A useful strategic approach would be to establish what might be described as a Ruishton Flood Resilience Wedge.

This is not presented as an existing statutory designation, unless and until Somerset Council formally creates one. Instead, it is proposed as a planning concept for protecting Ruishton and downstream communities from cumulative flood impacts.

The wedge could encompass:

- existing floodplain
- surface-water flow routes
- drainage corridors
- wetlands
- flood-storage areas
- agricultural land performing a flood-management function
- watercourses
- ditches
- attenuation areas
- and strategically important open land

Within the proposed wedge, new development would be:

- strongly restricted
- required to demonstrate exceptional justification where appropriate
- required to demonstrate no increase in downstream flood risk
- subject to catchment-scale assessment
- and prevented from removing flood-storage capacity without demonstrable replacement

The objective would be to keep the present flood-management capacity of the landscape intact rather than progressively reducing it through piecemeal development.

## 18. The flood wedge should protect existing communities first

The principal purpose of the proposed wedge should be protection of existing communities. These include:

- Ruishton
- Creech St Michael
- Ham
- Lower Henlade
- and other settlements or properties affected by the same drainage and river systems



*Lower Henlade taken by a parishioner*

The proposal should therefore be based on a simple planning principle that existing communities should not be required to accept additional flood risk merely because land upstream or adjacent to them has become commercially attractive to developers. This is particularly compelling where the development would alter runoff or flood-storage conditions.

**19. Development should be directed towards more sustainable locations**

The proposal does not require Somerset to abandon its housing obligations. Instead, it requires the Council to distinguish between “housing need” and “the location of housing”.

The emerging Somerset Local Plan[24] is specifically intended to establish the spatial distribution of development. This provides an opportunity to direct a greater proportion of future development towards locations where:

- flood risk is lower
- infrastructure capacity is greater
- public transport is stronger
- services are accessible
- and development does not undermine vulnerable rural communities

This approach is entirely consistent with the principle behind the NPPF’s sequential approach to flood risk.

**20. New settlements and strategic development locations**

The suggestion of providing housing in appropriate new-town or strategic-development locations merits serious consideration. Rather than allowing housing numbers to be delivered through numerous small developments around vulnerable villages, Somerset could consider whether larger strategic locations can provide:

- schools
- healthcare
- employment
- public transport
- drainage
- flood storage
- green infrastructure
- and other services

as part of a comprehensive plan.

A strategic settlement can be designed around infrastructure. A series of incremental developments often requires existing infrastructure to absorb additional demand. The proposal should therefore be “Plan the infrastructure and flood-management system first, then plan the housing around it”. This reverses the traditional developer-led sequence in which a site is proposed first and infrastructure solutions are subsequently negotiated.

[24] https://www.somerset.gov.uk/planning-buildings-and-land/somerset-local-plan/about-the-local-plan/?utm

## 21. Ruishton should not become the default location for housing pressure

This point is particularly relevant because major development proposals have already been considered at Brookfield Nursery, Ruishton Lane and Woodlands Castle, also adjoining Ruishton Lane.

Taylor Wimpey submitted application 31/23/0007 for up to 150 dwellings at Brookfield Nursery, Ruishton Lane. Somerset Council initially refused the application. Following an eight-day planning inquiry in January 2025, the Planning Inspector allowed the appeal and granted outline permission for up to 150 dwellings, subject to conditions[25].



*Land adjoining Brookfields Nursery development taken 27.1.26*

Belstone Fox submitted application 31/24/0009/HYB (Hybrid application for outline and full planning permission) for 18 dwellings, change of use aken by a parishioner 27.1.26 Woodlands into a residential dwelling and a 70-bed care home. Somerset Council initially refused the application in February 2025. Following an appeal hearing in March 2026, the Planning Inspector allowed the appeal and permission was granted[26].





*Land adjoining Belstone Fox Woodlands development taken by a parishioner 27.1.26*

[25] Brookfield Nursery https://www3.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk/WebPages/Imaging/ViewImage/ViewImage.aspx?SRBarCode=Ty1DGRaXMsgH0HACBKT&ExtID=PDF&QC=hOhC1

[26] Woodlands https://www3.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk/WebPages/Imaging/ViewImage/ViewImage.aspx?SRBarCode=Ty1DG%23MAfsfa%25JACBET&ExtID=PDF&QC=hOhC1

The existence of these permissions makes the cumulative-impact argument even more important. It means that future proposals should not be considered as though Ruishton has no existing or committed development pressure. The Council should examine:

- the approved Brookfield Nursery and Woodlands developments
- other existing permissions
- proposed applications
- infrastructure capacity
- drainage
- surface-water flow
- the River Tone
- and cumulative flood consequences

The planning question should no longer be simply “Would this individual proposal cause unacceptable flooding?”. It should also be “What happens when this proposal is added to everything that has already been approved or is reasonably foreseeable in the same catchment?” That is exactly the type of cumulative consideration contemplated by the current NPPF flood-risk policies[27].

**22. The Brookfield Nursery and Woodlands decisions do not settle future applications**

The granting of permissions for two developments should not be interpreted as establishing that unlimited further development is acceptable. Every subsequent application must still be determined on its own planning merits and against the policies applicable at that time. The very fact that Ruishton has subsequently experienced significant flooding and that Somerset is undertaking further catchment modelling, strengthens the case for ensuring that future applications use the most up-to-date evidence.

A previous decision should not prevent the Council from considering new evidence.

**23. Climate change strengthens the case for caution**

National planning policy now explicitly requires flood planning to consider current and future climate impacts. The current NPPF[28] requires development plans to consider the current and future impacts of climate change when identifying suitable development locations.
It also requires development proposals to take account of the current and potential impacts of climate change over the lifetime of the development[29].

The issue therefore is not “Has this site flooded in the past?”, it is “What will flood risk look like during the lifetime of a house constructed today?”. That is a fundamentally different question. A planning decision made in 2026 could affect residents for many decades.

[27] https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-planning-policy-framework-chapter-18-managing-flood-risk-and-coastal-change-f1-9?utm
[28] https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-planning-policy-framework-chapter-18-managing-flood-risk-and-coastal-change-f1-9?utm
[29] https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-planning-policy-framework-chapter-5-meeting-the-challenge-of-climate-change-cc1-3?utm

**24. Protecting the outer catchment may be more effective than only protecting the lowest land**

Flood management should not concentrate exclusively on the areas that flood last. If water is allowed to move rapidly from higher ground towards low-lying communities, downstream flood problems can be intensified. The most effective flood management may therefore include:

- upstream storage
- wetland creation
- restoring natural drainage
- slowing runoff
- maintaining hedgerows
- improving soil management
- restoring ditches
- protecting floodplain
- and preventing inappropriate development

Somerset Rivers Authority's current programme already includes natural flood management measures intended to slow water through upper and middle catchments and protect vulnerable lower areas. This supports the concept of a Ruishton Flood Resilience Wedge.

**25. Natural flood management should be considered alongside planning controls**

The proposed approach should not be solely "No houses". It should be "Protect the catchment and make the catchment work better". Measures could include:

Wetlands
Create or restore wetlands that can temporarily store water.
Flood storage
Identify land that can safely accommodate excess water during extreme events.
Ditches
Protect and maintain existing drainage ditches.
Hedgerows
Protect and use existing vegetation and land management to slow runoff.
Soil management
Reduce soil compaction and improve infiltration where appropriate.
Attenuation
Require development to hold water back for longer periods.
Green infrastructure
Use open land for multiple purposes, including recreation, ecology and flood management.

**26 A Ruishton Flood Resilience Wedge**

As set out in sections 17 and 18, Somerset Council is asked to investigate establishing a formally defined Ruishton Flood Resilience Wedge.

The boundaries should be established through technical evidence rather than political or arbitrary boundaries.

The assessment should map:

- river flood risk
- surface-water flow
- groundwater
- drainage infrastructure
- flood-storage areas
- historic flood locations
- soil and geological characteristics
- watercourses
- culverts
- pumping infrastructure
- wetlands
- existing development
- approved development
- proposed development
- and predicted climate-change impacts

The resulting map should identify land where development could adversely affect downstream flood risk.



*Pump being put in situ village centre 27.1.26*

**27. Development within the wedge**

Within such a wedge, development should only be supported where a robust catchment assessment demonstrates:

1. no increase in flood risk to existing properties
2. no reduction in flood-storage capacity
3. no unacceptable alteration to drainage routes
4. no increase in peak runoff
5. no unacceptable increase in the duration of downstream flooding
6. no unacceptable cumulative impact
7. safe access and escape
8. adequate drainage maintenance
9. resilience to climate change
10. and compatibility with the adopted Neighbourhood Plan

Where those tests cannot be demonstrated, permission should be refused.

**28. The case for a temporary development pause**

Given the current circumstances, Somerset Council should consider whether a temporary strategic pause is justified for development proposals in the Ruishton catchment that could materially affect flood risk. Such a pause should not be framed as an indefinite prohibition. It could instead last until:

- the current catchment modelling is completed
- the evidence is published
- the £50 million flood-resilience programme has been properly incorporated into strategic planning
- cumulative development has been mapped
- and an evidence-based flood-resilience strategy for Ruishton has been adopted

This would provide a rational basis for future decisions.

**29. The argument is not anti-development**

It is important to add that this paper does not intend to characterise developers as inherently irresponsible. Developers are entitled to submit planning applications. The Council is entitled to refuse them where planning policy and evidence justify refusal. The argument is that development should be directed towards locations where it can be accommodated safely rather than forcing vulnerable communities to absorb the consequences of unsuitable development.

**30. The principle of "development where it is safe"**

The appropriate planning hierarchy should be:

First
: Identify areas of lowest flood risk.

Second
: Identify locations with adequate infrastructure.

Third
: Identify locations where development can support sustainable transport and community services.

Fourth
: Identify environmentally appropriate development locations.

Fifth
: Direct the required housing towards those locations.

Finally
: Consider whether remaining sites are genuinely necessary.

This is broadly consistent with the national sequential approach to flood risk[30].

**31. Somerset's new Local Plan provides the opportunity**

Somerset Council is now undertaking the new Somerset Local Plan process. The current timetable[31] provides for:

- further evidence and plan development during 2027
- proposed Local Plan consultation in 2028
- examination in 2028/29
- and adoption in March 2029.

[30] https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-planning-policy-framework-chapter-18-managing-flood-risk-and-coastal-change-f1-9?utm

[31] https://www.somerset.gov.uk/planning-buildings-and-land/somerset-local-plan/somerset-local-plan-timetable/?utm

The Council should use this opportunity to identify:

- strategic growth locations
- flood-resilient development areas
- areas unsuitable for development
- natural flood-management corridors
- flood-storage areas
- and communities requiring additional protection

Ruishton should be considered within this strategic process.

**32. A strategic alternative to piecemeal development**

Instead of accepting a succession of developer-led applications, Somerset Council could establish a strategic approach which is:

> **Housing requirement → spatial strategy → infrastructure → flood assessment → environmental assessment → site allocation → development**

rather than:

> **Developer site → planning application → objections → negotiations → drainage mitigation → development**

The first approach enables strategic planning addressing flood assessments and risks, whereas the second can result in cumulative impacts that are difficult to see when each application is examined separately.

## Recommendations to Somerset Council

This paper recommends that Somerset Council:

1. Recognises Ruishton as a flood-sensitive community where additional development requires exceptional scrutiny.

2. Gives full weight to Policy E4 of the adopted Ruishton and Thornfalcon Neighbourhood Plan.

3. Requires future development proposals to demonstrate that they will not increase flood risk elsewhere, including cumulative and downstream impacts.

4. Requires catchment-scale evidence rather than relying solely on site-specific drainage calculations where development could affect downstream communities.

5. Completes and publishes the Ruishton/Taunton catchment modelling before approving further major development capable of affecting the catchment.

6. Maps a Ruishton Flood Resilience Wedge.

7. Safeguards land required for:

- flood storage
- wetlands
- drainage
- watercourses
- natural flood management
- and future flood-defence measures

8. Ensures that approved developments cannot compromise the effectiveness of the £50 million Somerset flood-resilience programme.

9. Considers cumulative impacts from all approved, proposed and reasonably foreseeable developments.

10. Directs future housing towards strategic locations with lower flood risk and better infrastructure.

11. Considers whether a temporary pause on major development affecting the Ruishton catchment is justified until the current catchment evidence is complete.

12. Ensures that flood-risk evidence includes historic photographic and community evidence, not merely computer modelling.

## Proposed Planning Policy

It is recommended that Somerset Council could consider adopting a policy along the following lines:

Ruishton Flood Resilience Policy

Development within or affecting the Ruishton catchment will only be supported where it has been demonstrated through proportionate and, where necessary, catchment-scale evidence that the proposal will not increase flood risk to existing communities or properties.

Particular consideration shall be given to:

- cumulative impacts
- surface-water runoff
- flood-storage capacity
- drainage infrastructure
- watercourse capacity
- climate change
- downstream impacts
- natural flood-management opportunities
- and the protection of vulnerable residents

Development which would reduce flood-storage capacity, obstruct flood-flow routes, increase peak or cumulative runoff, or otherwise increase flood risk elsewhere should be refused unless the relevant planning policies provide a lawful basis for an alternative

conclusion and the necessary evidence demonstrates that the risk can be satisfactorily addressed.

Land identified as necessary for flood storage, natural flood management, drainage or future flood-resilience infrastructure should be safeguarded from development.

## Proposed "Ruishton Flood Resilience Wedge"

It is recommended that the Council also investigate a strategic designation extending beyond the immediate village. The proposed wedge would recognise that Ruishton's flood risk cannot be managed solely within the village boundary. The designation should therefore encompass the relevant upstream and downstream hydrological system.

Its purpose would be to preserve:
- water storage
- drainage
- wetlands
- open land
- flow routes
- agricultural land with flood-management functions
- and natural flood-management opportunities

It should become part of the evidence base for the Somerset Local Plan.

## Conclusions

Ruishton is not an abstract planning location. It is an established community with a documented history of flooding.

The adopted Ruishton and Thornfalcon Neighbourhood Plan recognises flooding as a major local concern and contains Policy E4 specifically requiring development proposals not to increase local flood risk[32].

The Environment Agency continues to identify Ruishton and Creech St Michael within a flood-warning area, and significant flooding occurred in the communities during January 2026[33].

Somerset Council and its partners have identified Ruishton as a flooding hotspot within the Taunton catchment[34].

Somerset Rivers Authority is now undertaking specific work examining how development affects flood risk because existing drainage assumptions may not adequately reflect the behaviour of water in the unusually flat Somerset Levels and Moor[35].

[32] Policy E4 https://ruishtonparish.gov.uk/parish-council/neighbourhood-plans
[33] https://riverlevels.uk/flood-warning-river-tone-from-bathpool-to-ham-including-ruishton-and-creech-st-michael-riverside-properties/181809?utm
[34] https://www.somersetriversauthority.org.uk/flood-risk-work/sra-annual-report-2024-25/taunton-flood-action-plan/?utm
[35] https://www.somersetriversauthority.org.uk/flood-risk-work/sra-enhanced-programme-2026-27/?utm

At the same time, the Government has committed £50 million to Somerset Council for flood resilience and prevention[36].

These facts should lead to a simple conclusion in planning terms:

> The protection of existing communities from increased flood risk must be treated as a fundamental consideration when deciding where Somerset's future development should occur.

The Council should not allow the cumulative development of the Ruishton catchment to outpace its understanding of the catchment's ability to absorb additional runoff. Nor should public investment in flood resilience be undermined by decisions that permit development capable of increasing the underlying problem. The current circumstances provide an opportunity to take a different approach.

Somerset Council should:

- Protect the floodplain
- Protect the drainage system
- Protect natural flood-storage areas
- Protect Ruishton and neighbouring communities
- Complete the catchment modelling
- Use the £50 million flood-resilience investment strategically
- And direct future housing towards locations where it can be accommodated without increasing flood risk

The proposed Ruishton Flood Resilience Wedge would provide a practical mechanism for achieving this. It would not be an anti-development policy. It would be a pro-resilience, pro-community and evidence-led planning policy.

The fundamental principle should be:

> Do not build the problem into the landscape and then spend public money trying to remove it.

Ruishton has already experienced the consequences of flooding. The planning system has the opportunity to learn from those experiences before approving further development.

[36] https://www.gov.uk/government/news/50-million-investment-to-help-protect-somersets-farms-and-homes-from-flooding?utm

# Appendix A

## Ruishton Flood Image Archive

Pictures of floods within Ruishton, Lower Henlade and surrounding areas can be found at:

1. https://ruishtonparish.gov.uk/flood-image-archive
2. https://ruishtonparish.gov.uk/photo-galleries/floods

(Images collated by Dave Duke, Parishioner)