

# One month's rain falls in space of single day in some parts of Oxfordshire, causing Ominous echo of last

By OUR REPORTERS  
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OXFORDSHIRE has been warned it faces another wet summer, but officials have promised they are now better prepared.

The county has suffered major flooding three times in the past 12 months, including the deluge on Tuesday that saw schools shut, homes flooded and roads closed.

The weather also brought back painful memories to the thousands of homeowners hit by last July's floods, and prompted questions about whether the county could handle a repeat.

The Met Office told *The Oxford Times* this week that there was unlikely to be a prolonged period of dry weather during the summer and warned that spells of heavy rain and flash floods were likely instead.

Met Office forecaster John Hammond said: "We are going to get heavy spells of rain and I understand people are apprehensive."

But he stressed a repeat of last July's severe floods was unlikely.

Jill Moss, who lives in West Street, off Botley Road, Oxford, said she was "not confident" that the authorities would be able to save Osney Island — which was flooded badly last July — if it was badly hit again.

She said: "It was so stressful last year. It was scary. I'm a widow and I had to move all my furniture by myself."



■ DEEP TROUBLE: Above: A car ploughs through flood water on Elsfield Road, off the A40 near Oxford. Below: A robin takes shelter from the rain on the River Thames towpath at Osney Island. Bottom: A car makes its way through flood water in Hailey Road, Witney

Bridge Street flood victim Tom Mardle, 25, said: "Every time it rains they have to pump the drains. It's ridiculous. They are not doing anything proactive. It's all reactive."

Geoff Bell, area flood risk

manager for the Environment Agency, assured people the authorities were in a better position than last summer, although he said he understood their concerns.

He said: "Everybody has learnt lessons, but it's a mammoth task. To say how much better off we are is difficult. There's no quick or cheap solution to reducing the risk of flooding. We are making sure our warnings are better and people are better prepared."

He added: "You can't predict exactly when and where rain will fall and, unfortunately, floodplains flood — that's the natural system."

"However much maintenance we do, unless the capacity of the drainage system is massively increased it is always going to be overwhelmed by floods like this."

Oxford City Council said "good progress" had been made since last July.

Executive director Tim Sadler said a sandbag store had been set up at the Environment Agency's Osney depot and the council had bought flood barriers for East Street and West Street.

An emergency vehicle stocked with more than 1,000 anti-flood water bags was also now based at the council's City Works depot.



A prolonged period of dry weather is unlikely this summer and spells of heavy rain and flash floods are likely instead



the event of further flooding, the service would act "as proactively as possible, as early as possible".

Vale of White Horse District Council leader Tony de Vere insisted his council was also better prepared.

Fire crews dealt with more

than 120 emergency calls on Tuesday as at least 12 roads were closed.

At Peers School in Oxford, hundreds of pupils were sent home after teachers decided it was unsafe.

Headteacher Ed McConnell said: "We had hundreds of soaking wet children with still four hours of school to go."

Pupils at Witney Community Primary School were also sent home.

In Wheatley, two feet of water streamed down High Street, flooding a number of homes in Crown Square.

Father-of-two Christian Guthrie's home was six inches under water and he said: "It was coming in everywhere — through the doors, windows and pipes. It was like having an inside fountain."

In Wendlebury, near Bicester, some homeowners are only just returning after last summer's floods. But sandbags were needed as water in the village reached two feet in places.

A row of homes in Thame Road, Tiddington, and houses in Kidlington and Kennington also had rain water pumped out by fire crews.

The water was also two-feet deep in Barton Village Road, Barton, in Oxford.

Several roads in Oxfordshire were still closed the next afternoon.

Roads that remained shut

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flash flooding and creating scenes reminiscent of last summer's devastating floods

# July, as rains return



■ WET WEATHER: Clockwise from top left: Flooding in Hailey Road, Witney; Oxford shoppers take shelter during Tuesday's downpour; East Hanney was flooded in parts; Wheatley was also hit; Abingdon homes were affected; Josie Hamill outside her home in Barton; Wendlebury, near Bicester, suffered; traffic in Botley Road, Oxford, on Tuesday



for 24 hours, included Mill Lane, Chaigrove; the A420 at Acorn Bridge; High Street, Chaigrove; and Bridge Road, Ickford, from Ickford to Shabbington, near Thame. All have since been opened again.

Early on Wednesday, the A329 in Milton Common, near junction seven of the M40, was closed, together with the A338, between the A415 Frilford Road junction and the Grove Park Drive junction in East Hanney. These routes were reopened before lunchtime.

John Kelly, the county's emergency planning officer, said accommodation had been prepared at Oxford United's Kassam Stadium for any residents evacuated due to flooding, but it was not needed.

He said: "There was a lot of surface water on the roads, but it started to drain away quite rapidly."

"A couple of days of sunshine should help to dry the ground out."

Paul Smith, a spokesman for Oxfordshire County Council, said on Wednesday: "Since early this morning, Oxfordshire highways staff have had cleaning machines out and about, clearing road drains of any dirt left over from the flooding."

"Inspectors have been taking a closer look at roads affected and teams have been out clearing any debris on road surfaces."

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