

Understanding whether Little Stoke is fishable

The key indicator is the measured river level at Benson downstream, available from <https://check-for-flooding.service.gov.uk/river-and-sea-levels/wallingford-ox10>.

Little Stoke is on the longest stretch between locks on the Middle Thames (over 7 miles between Benson and the next lock Cleeve). Local knowledge suggests that at times of high water the EA (which manages flood control) tends to use this section as a buffer zone and the levels to build by holding water back in this section. It does this because most of the land in this area is farmland and not built on and thereby it lessens the chances of flooding in more densely inhabited areas. Observed measurements of the rate the river level falls in this section show it is much slower than in some other areas above Benson and below Cleeve, and would tend to support this theory.

The key measure measurement is **4.01m** as measured at Benson downstream. Above this level at the lowest bankside points, the river leaves the channel and encroaches onto the land. I have fished the river at Little Stoke safely with the river at **4.05**. Whether it is safe at levels above **4.10** depends in part on whether this is the highest recent level or whether it is falling from higher levels. If the latter, the banks are slippery and pockets of water remain in the land, the depth of which is not apparent. Neither might the edge of the channel be obvious in such circumstances. Around 4.90-5.00m the water in our section reaches the Ferry Cottage.

Above 4.10 the following is virtually certain:

- Some areas in the top meadow will be under water
- Downstream areas close to the rail bridge and upstream around the gas pipe and multiple areas in 2nd and 3rd meadows will be under water
- The narrow path from the slipway to the start of the downstream section will be under water and neither safe nor usable.

This photo below shows South Stoke slipway - about a mile below our section and in the same section. It was taken on Thursday (28.11.24) afternoon.



To understand what the photo shows you need to be aware of the following:

- This slipway is longer than ours by the boathouse and the height into the normal channel is greater than the Little Stoke slipway. This means what you see here would be much more apparent at Little Stoke with no access to the riverside path on our section.
- The black box (lhs between the trees) is a litter bin on the bank above the normal river channel.
- The slipway into the river is between the 2 sets of 3 parallel posts and the river should start at the last of these posts.
- To the right of the posts the sign which is on the riverbank before the edge of the riverside path (i.e. the path lies beyond this) and the fields which as you see are under water.
- The river normally runs L to R beyond the 2 parallel lines of 3 posts.

Cancelling the 1.12.24 match

This is only the second time in 25 years I can remember we have had to cancel a scheduled Little Stoke Match (the previous occasion was Jan 2013). It is never an easy decision as we exist as a club to fish. The decision was taken as late as possible but on grounds of access and safety.

The facts are these:

- The decision to call off the match was made around 5pm on Friday 29th
- At 5pm on Friday the EA issued a flood warning for the area between Days Lock (above Little Stoke) and South Stoke for flooding of land, property and land in the next 24 hours in this area.
- The fact this EA warning was issued as the river was falling is suggestive of the flood management policy being implemented by the EA.
- The river had peaked overnight Wednesday into Thursday when it was just coming off the top. It took until midday on Thurs to fall below 5.00m. It had been 5.07m, and by Friday 3pm shortly before it was called off it was 4.93m, but with a new flood warning in place.
- 24 hours after the match had been cancelled (Sat at 7.30pm) it was 4.84m, showing that the decision was right and the only one possible. In the previous 24 hours it had fallen by 16cm, the rate of fall had to increase 5x in the next 24 hours to make it safe and accessible. That was never going to happen.

Finally as we all know the climate is changing and we are getting more flood events. This situation is sadly going to become more common.