

Lower Mole Flood Alleviation Scheme Spring 2021 Engagement Report - Executive summary

Over 5,250 unique visitors accessed our interactive website during our 8-week engagement with the community on the future of the Lower Mole Flood Alleviation Scheme. We would normally meet with the community face to face, which was not possible due to the COVID pandemic restrictions. However, through our online platform we were able to reach larger numbers than we have done during the previous face to face engagement, resulting in a significant amount of feedback. We have published these findings in this report.

The feedback we have received has enabled us to gain a thorough understanding of the community's positions, interests, needs and expectations. We are using this knowledge to develop the options.

Six options to update the scheme

The Lower Mole Flood Alleviation Scheme is now approaching the end of its design life and needs to be updated so that it maintains the same standard of flood protection whilst ensuring it is the best scheme for the environment, people and wildlife. There are six main water level control structures (sluice gates) and we need to make decisions on their future.

We have developed six options to update the scheme using feedback from the community in June 2019 and the results from further surveys. We shared these options with the community during this latest engagement exercise in spring 2021:

- Option 1: do nothing.
- Option 2: do minimum.
- Option 3: gate replacement.
- Option 4: Molember gates replaced with fixed crest weirs.
- Option 5: remove all gates, but replace Island Barn sluice gates.
- Option 6: remove all gates, passive flood relief channel with rock ramps.



Location of water control structures

Please refer to section 2.2 of the report for a detailed description of each option.

Our engagement aims and process

The reasons why we engaged with the community in spring 2021 were:

- For stakeholders to further understand the operation of the scheme, the need for change, and the environmental, cost and carbon implications.
- To share the short-list of potential options with the community and wider public, encouraging feedback and conversation between all parties.

- To successfully engage with the community and wider stakeholders to help our project board make decisions about the future of the scheme.
- To develop and strengthen stakeholder relationships.

We decided the best way to engage with the community during the pandemic was through an interactive website, which we launched on 3 February for 8 weeks up to 1 April. We extended the engagement period from 7 to 8 weeks in response to feedback from the community.

To publicise the website we carried out a large scale mailing of 6,000 letters to the area around the scheme, displayed several consultation posters along the scheme and worked with Elmbridge Borough Council and Surrey County Council to help raise awareness of the website within the community.

Visitors to our website

We received over 5,400 visits to our website over the 8-week engagement period, made by 5,250 unique visitors. We have received:

- 334 survey responses.
- 375 quick poll responses.
- 265 responses to our ideas board.
- 261 questions to our website and inbox.
- 21 map pin responses.

The majority of respondents (86%) had already heard about the plans to update the scheme before visiting our website. Respondents either fully (56%) or partly (42%) understand the scheme and potential options for updating it after visiting our website. We have also connected with members of the community who have not previously commented on the scheme as 74% of respondents have not commented in the past.

Support for the scheme

Over half of respondents (54%) stated they strongly support or support the plans to update the scheme. Well over a quarter (29%) of respondents stated they are strongly against or against plans to update the scheme, and under a fifth of respondents (17%) felt neutral about the plans. For further details please refer to section 4.6 of the report.

The greatest support is for Option 3 (236 mentions) compared against the other options. The key reasoning for the community's support for Option 3 being that the option maintained the existing water levels, and offered continued protection of properties from flooding. Option 6 has the second highest support (44 mentions), with the top reasons for support being lower cost and providing the best flood protection. For further details please refer to section 4.7 of the report.

Feedback from the community

Respondents informed us about their top priorities for updating the scheme which include:

- Maintaining water levels.
- Maintaining the standard of flood protection.
- Improving and preserving biodiversity, wildlife and the environment.

For further details please refer to section 4.6.1 of the report.

Concerns regarding options which result in lower water levels is the main issue highlighted by respondents. Respondents to the survey are most concerned about the potential impact of water level reduction on:

- Recreational use of the river, river access and local amenity.
- Biodiversity, and the natural environment.
- Aesthetics of the area, and the visual impact.

Other concerns include the impact of lower water levels on property value, property security and privacy, the outflows from the Esher Wastewater Treatment Works and concern about there being a high drop from the riverside paths and tracks to the River Ember. For further details please refer to section 4.6.2 and section 4.6.3 of the report.

Popular ideas from the ideas board and interactive map included improvements to access along the River Ember and River Mole and the introduction of beavers. We will be looking at the feasibility of implementing the ideas submitted by the respondents in more detail as the scheme progresses. For further details please refer to section 4.9 of the report.

Our response to community feedback

We are developing and refining the options by taking into account the feedback from the community, and seeking to mitigate changes in water levels whilst maintaining flood protection. This will include assessing the additional cost of the mitigation measures and the benefits they provide.

In response to feedback regarding lower water levels, we are looking at options to mitigate changes in water levels. As the scheme currently stands, there are sluice gates in place which maintain artificially high water levels in normal conditions, but have to be opened when flows in the river are high. We are investigating the impact of adding passive structures (rock ramps or weirs) to the river to maintain the water levels in options where we are proposing to remove the sluice gates. We are carrying out flood risk modelling to see how this impacts flood risk.

Measures to mitigate concerns regarding visual change and security will be considered in the detailed design, including opportunities for additional planting and fencing. In determining the type and location of the mitigation measures, we would need to ensure they would not increase the risk of flooding.

We will include within the cost of our options an allowance for measures to mitigate the concerns raised around visual impact and security. Agreement on the implementation of the measures will be carried out on a case by case basis with residents during the detailed design phase.

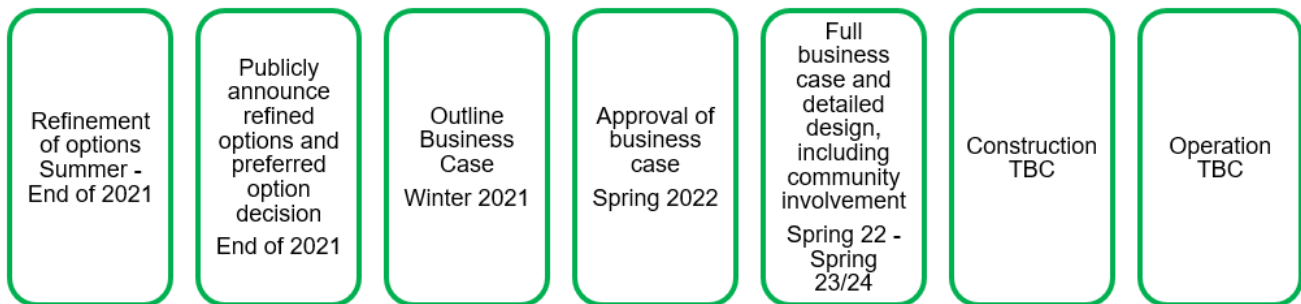
Next steps

Once our options refinement process is completed, we will present the refined options to the Project Board for their consideration and selection of a preferred option. The Project Board includes senior decision makers at the Environment Agency, and they will decide how to proceed with updating the scheme. The Project Board will, as well

as looking at cost, review the amount of benefits an option will deliver and the timescales over which those benefits occur. The Project Board will ensure we are integrating community views as well as the environment and economics into the heart of the decision-making process. Assessed factors include, but are not limited to, environmental and amenity impacts and opportunities, legal obligations, health and safety, and carbon implications. This means the Project Board is not bound to just select the option which provides the best economic value for money.

Following the Project Board review at the end of the year, 2021, we will announce the preferred option to be taken forward for Outline Business Case approval. We will also set out the reasons for our decision.

In order for the project to reach the detailed design and then the construction phase, further work, which includes gaining staged approval for funding, is required. As such it is not possible to provide a detailed timeframe for implementation at the present time. We have shown the main stages in the programme going forwards below. For further details please refer to section 6 of the report.



Keeping in touch

We will update our Citizens Space page as the scheme progresses: <https://consult.environment-agency.gov.uk/ksles/lower-mole-flood-alleviation-scheme/>. In addition, the project inbox FASProject.LowerMole@environment-agency.gov.uk will still be available for any further questions the community may have. This will still be monitored by our project team.