

Oxford Flood Alleviation Scheme



Statement of Community Involvement

December 2021



Supported by the Local Growth Fund

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Appendices

Appendix A: May 2016 Oxford FAS consultation response document

Appendix B: Summer 2017 Oxford FAS consultation report

Appendix C: Oxford FAS spring 2021 engagement summary report

Appendix D: Engagement Log

Document History

This document has been issued and amended as follows:

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5	Dec 21	Update following review	KG	EA	EA	1.2

1 Background

1.1 Introduction

This report has been prepared by Jacobs on behalf of the applicant, the Environment Agency. It is written to support a full planning application for a scheme to reduce the risk of flooding to Oxford, creating more space for water within the western floodplain of the city – the Oxford Flood Alleviation Scheme (OFAS). The Environment Agency is working in partnership with Oxfordshire County Council, Oxford City Council, Vale of White Horse District Council, Thames Water Utilities Ltd, Thames Regional Flood and Coastal Committee, Oxford Flood Alliance, Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership, National Highways and University of Oxford, to deliver the OFAS.

The report sets out the engagement that has been done so far and how this has informed the evolution of the proposals and design of the scheme. Attention has been paid to all comments received and responses made and concerns addressed as appropriate. The extensive engagement and consultation undertaken has enabled stakeholders to contribute towards the scheme and be constructive in influencing the final proposals.

1.2 The flooding problem in Oxford

In 2010 the Environment Agency published the Oxford Flood Risk Management Strategy, which provided a detailed study of the flood risk from rivers in Oxford. The strategy described how flood risk can be managed in Oxford over the next 100 years. Additionally, Oxfordshire County Council, as Lead Local Flood Authority, developed a Local Flood Risk Management Strategy for Oxfordshire in 2016 to set a long-term programme for reducing flood risk in the county.

Many properties, both residential and commercial, as well as roads, the railway and utility infrastructure are at risk of flooding from the rivers in Oxford. If nothing was done to manage flood risk, approximately 2200 properties would be at risk from internal flooding in a major flood that has a 1% chance of happening each year (1% Annual Exceedance Probability (AEP)). The Environment Agency's existing flood risk management activities reduce this, but around 1,600 properties still remain at risk. The Oxford Flood Alleviation Scheme is designed to reduce the likelihood of flooding for all homes and businesses currently at risk of flooding from the River Thames in Oxford.

The scheme will provide a varying reduction in risk from river flooding across the city. All properties currently at risk from flooding from the River Thames will benefit from a reduction in risk in the more frequent, less severe floods. Over 1,050 properties will benefit from a standard of protection greater than a 1% AEP from the scheme on opening. Whilst the lifetime of the development is 100 years, the scheme will remain in place beyond this timescale but the reduction in risk will gradually reduce over time due to the impact of climate change.

Climate change is not only increasing the extent of flooding but also the frequency and scale of disruption to the city. If we don't take action the impacts of climate change mean that in just over 50 years approximately 5600 properties will be at flood risk in the same flood event.

1.3 Consultation requirements

Because of the significance of the disruption caused by flooding in Oxford, the scale of the proposals needed to reduce this and the requirement of an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), the partnership agreed that extensive engagement and consultation should take place during the design of the scheme. The purpose of this was to ensure that the comments of stakeholders and communities were understood and could be incorporated into the design of the scheme, where possible. The consultation that has taken place has followed best practice, guidance and principles as set out in national planning policy and in the local authorities' own Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) documents. We have, however, recognised the value of engagement and have gone far beyond the normal levels of pre-application consultation, engaging with local residents, businesses and stakeholders, and genuinely, where possible, reflected their concerns and comments in our final proposals.

While there is no legal obligation to carry out pre-application consultation and engagement, applicants are encouraged to do so.

1.4 Planning our engagement

We plan our engagement through a process of identifying what stakeholders want from us, understanding how much engagement is required, and our aims from the engagement. We engage widely with as many communities as possible, and we engage with groups and individuals proportionately to their request or concern. We do this through proactive engagement which provides opportunities to inform and involve others, and reactive engagement instigated by others such as enquiries and requests for information.

Our aims are to:

- Build and maintain a good working relationship with all scheme partners.
- All those interested and affected are aware of the scheme, that we are working in partnership, and how to get involved.
- Stakeholders are aware of the flood risk in Oxford and understand the need for the flood alleviation scheme.
- Stakeholders understand that we have considered feedback on local concerns, issues and priorities, and are aware of what they can and can't influence, and why.

We use a variety of techniques and channels to disseminate information and engage. We collect feedback at our events which are fed back into our planning process to improve our engagement. Most recently we have used a wider questionnaire to understand preferences for virtual engagement necessitated by the Coronavirus pandemic.

Collecting stakeholder preferences

In March 2021 we created a SmartSurvey questionnaire to inform our engagement planning. We collected information for 1 month. This was advertised directly to our mailing list and on our social media platforms. We asked respondents 3 questions: their level of knowledge about the Oxford Flood Alleviation Scheme; what they wanted to know about the Oxford Flood Alleviation Scheme and how they wanted to be engaged with. Each question was accompanied by a comment box.

Most responses were received in the first few days, or just before the survey finished following a reminder social media post. We received 268 individual responses that we used to plan our virtual spring engagement.

Most people had at least basic knowledge of the Oxford Flood Alleviation Scheme. Top preferred methods of engagement were: dedicated webpage, newsletter, diagrams and videos. Top interests were: design updates, wider flood management, construction and long-term vision. We used this information to plan our May 2021 virtual engagement. Respondent answers and comments were used to decide on the content and format of the engagement.

Equality and diversity

We carried out full Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessments to examine how we can avoid or remove any disproportionate impact of the scheme on people who live, work and study in Oxford.

The Equality analysis seeks to identify and assess the impacts of the scheme on those with protected characteristics, as well as maximise equality opportunities and foster good relations with protected groups in the local area.

The Human Rights assessment is carried out to identify any interference with human rights and ensure there will be no breach of human rights obligations.

We completed these assessments considering the impact on stakeholders with regards to the planning, construction and operation phases of the scheme, as well as our methods of communication.

These assessments showed that the planning, construction and operational scheme will not negatively impact stakeholders' human rights nor those with protected characteristics as defined in the Equality Act 2010. We identified a series of actions to reduce any impacts even further.

Planning events

Event venues are chosen depending on their accessibility. They must have disabled access, accessible toilets on site and seating. The timing of events is staggered to allow people with different schedules to attend. Events are advertised in a variety of formats.

Access to online consultation

In order to make sure those who did not have a computer or who were not comfortable with an online consultation hard copies were made available in libraries and council buildings. In addition we held events at libraries with laptops in which we could guide people through the online consultation.

Virtual engagement with hard to reach groups

In early 2021, we contacted 107 Oxford groups and organisations to understand how best to engage with hard to reach communities.

We had responses from 6 organisations, one of which provided responses from 7 members who each asked questions about the scheme (total 12 responses). Social media was the largest suggested method of communication. Some organisations said they would follow us. One group suggested videos with subtitles and sign language.

1.5 Advertising our events

Our Communications and Engagement strategy described a variety of different approaches to engagement and consultation to ensure that we reached as many people as possible.

Depending on the type of event, location and participants, a number of appropriate methods are used to ensure people were aware of events and encouraged to attend. This includes:

- Invitations via letter and email.
- Scheme and partner webpages.
- Scheme newsletters.
- Articles in local newsletters and news media.
- Leaflet drops.
- Posters at local hubs and notice boards.
- Scheme and partner social media.
- Virtual meetings.
- Contact through relevant groups, societies and community organisations.

An example of the advertising material is shown below in the form of a postcard providing information about the scheme and details of a drop-in event.



Figure 1 – 2 examples of event promotion postcards



Figure 2 – An example of the advertising material on social media.

1.6 Withdrawal of 2018 Compulsory Purchase Order and planning application

In 2019 Oxfordshire County Council discovered that the A423 Kennington Railway Bridge needed to be replaced. Our original design for the scheme included installing new culverts close to the bridge to carry water under the road above. After considering our options, we agreed that the best way forward was to withdraw and then re-submit our planning and compulsory purchase order applications, to incorporate the necessary changes. We withdrew our planning application in March 2020. This provided us with the opportunity to adapt the design of the scheme to align with Oxfordshire County Council's replacement bridge, reducing disruption and ensuring the projects work together.

1.7 Coronavirus pandemic

The outbreak of Covid-19 in March 2020 brought with it severe restrictions to face to face events and meetings. We have had to continue our engagement with stakeholders and communities using alternative digital methods.

While many face to face meetings have been cancelled, others have continued virtually. Where this is the case, we have attended virtual events such as an annual flood forum and parish council meetings during this period. Please refer to section 3.15 for more information on our activities since the pandemic.

2 Policy

2.1 Introduction

This chapter identifies the guidance and policy in relation to pre-application consultations. Whilst the application is submitted to Oxfordshire County Council, a review of Oxford City and Vale of White Horse SCI documents is included for completeness, as they will be involved in the consultation process, so it is important to understand their position to ensure we are in conformity with it.

2.2 National planning policy

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2021) states that:

“39.. Early engagement has significant potential to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the planning application system for all parties. Good quality pre-application discussion enables better coordination between public and private resources and improved outcomes for the community.

40. Local planning authorities have a key role to play in encouraging other parties to take maximum advantage of the pre-application stage. They cannot require that a developer engages with them before submitting a planning application, but they should encourage take-up of any pre-application services they offer. They should also, where they think this would be beneficial, encourage any applicants who are not already required to do so by law to engage with the local community, and where relevant, with statutory and non-statutory consultees, before submitting their applications.

41. The more issues that can be resolved at pre-application stage, including the need to deliver improvements in infrastructure and affordable housing, the greater the benefits. For their role in the planning system to be effective and positive, statutory planning consultees will need to take the same early, pro-active approach, and provide advice in a timely manner throughout the development process. This assists local planning authorities in issuing timely decisions, helping to ensure that applicants do not experience unnecessary delays and costs.

42. The participation of other consenting bodies in pre-application discussions should enable early consideration of all the fundamental issues relating to whether a particular development will be acceptable in principle, even where other consents relating to how a development is built or operated are needed at a later stage. Wherever possible, parallel processing of other consents should be encouraged to help speed up the process and resolve any issues as early as possible.”

National guidance through the NPPF has helped to shape our approach to consultation, and we are in full compliance with the principles of it.

2.3 Revised Oxfordshire SCI adopted May 2020

The Oxfordshire SCI sets out Oxfordshire County Council's policy, and the standards it will seek to achieve, to ensure meaningful and effective consultation, engagement and involvement of consultees, stakeholders and other interested members of the community in the consideration of planning applications.

It identifies the applicants' important role at pre-application stage, particularly where a proposal is likely to have an impact on local communities, they encourage applicants to liaise with those communities as early as possible, which is the approach we have taken with our proposals.

It goes on to state that "by engaging the public prior to formally submitting a planning application, there is more scope for the details of the proposals to be adjusted to take into account local views. The applicant also has a role in helping the public to fully understand proposals, as having a good knowledge of what is being proposed is essential for effective participation in the consultation process." Our consultation events have provided exactly this opportunity and where practical, views and comments have been reflected in the final proposals.

Oxfordshire County Council's validation requirements require the applicant to produce their own SCI for certain applications. Our application is an application for new development which includes the extraction of material and the movement of waste, so an SCI is required and should demonstrate how we have complied with the County's requirements for pre-application consultation, which amongst other things this document seeks to do.

The County SCI requires that we must show that we have actively engaged communities which may be affected by the development and how the views emerging from that engagement have affected the final proposals. We are further required to carefully consider the timescales for public engagement to ensure that views and suggestions which emerge from the process can be taken into account in formulating the final design of the development.

2.4 Statement of Community Involvement in planning - Oxford City Council July 2015

Oxford City Council's document strongly encourages applicants to discuss development proposals with Oxford City Council before applying for planning permission. Applicants are also encouraged, especially for major applications, to engage with the community and relevant stakeholders, to a degree proportionate to the nature of the proposal, at the earliest appropriate opportunity. Oxford City Council have been consulted and provided formal pre-application response to the Environment Agency. Further to this, as set out elsewhere in this document, we have engaged with a whole range of stakeholders and the community.

Whilst the application is not being submitted to Oxford City Council, if it was submitted to them then it would be a major application due to its site area. Therefore we have complied with the guidance set out for these type of applications whereby applicants are strongly encouraged to contact those who live, work and/or undertake other activities in the surrounding area who may be affected by the proposals, to inform them of their plans and to identify/discuss any potential issues and opportunities so that the submitted proposal acknowledges and addresses community concerns, even if it cannot fully resolve them.

Whilst the document acknowledges that there is no legal obligation for applicants to undertake consultation at the pre-application stage, failure to consult properly is likely to lead to objections being made by interested parties later on in the process which could be material to the determination of a planning application. We have where possible taken on board comments to reduce issues that may arise during the determination period.

Oxford City Council's SCI further encourages a statement setting out how consultation has been carried out and any changes made to the proposals as a result, to be submitted with the planning application, and should be easy for the community to find so that they can easily see the feedback. Developers are also encouraged to feedback directly to the community via a second round of pre-application engagement, before submitting the application to the council, to explain any changes to the proposal and how concerns have been addressed. The Environment Agency has followed this advice and done exactly that with several rounds of consultation and using input from this to inform proposals.

Applicants are encouraged to make local councillors aware of their proposals so that they can help to bring it to the attention of their constituents at the earliest stages. Similarly, applicants are encouraged to contact local representative groups who may be able to help raise awareness and explain the proposals to the community and may also be able to provide representative views from a community perspective and provide local insight.

2.5 Vale of White Horse District Council Statement of Community Involvement October 2020

Whilst this document is not as explicit in providing guidance for applicants wishing to undertake pre application consultation and engagement, there is a paragraph that is relevant and supports our approach to consultation.

Section 19 is on pre-application and states "The pre-application stage encourages applicants to carry out early engagement with the local community and the council, before submitting a planning application. We encourage the early discussion of schemes in the form of a pre-application....."

2.6 Summary

We describe in this document how we have engaged with communities, parish councils, landowners and environmental stakeholders throughout the design of the proposal. It was important for us to gather information from interested parties as well as understand their issues so that we could take them into account during the design of the scheme. We believe we have not only fulfilled but gone beyond the requirements of the 3 council's SCIs through our consultation process and continuous engagement activities. We describe how we have achieved this in this document.

3 Public consultation and community engagement

3.1 Introduction

This chapter sets out how we have involved the public in the development of the scheme and have sought their comment to inform proposals.

3.2 Newsletters

We have produced 23 editions of our digital newsletter since 2015, sharing the latest news on the scheme. These newsletters are our main form of providing information to communities. They are popular amongst our stakeholders – we send each newsletter to over 900 recipients. Each edition triggers multiple new people asking to sign up to be added to our mailing list.

We also regularly feature articles in community newsletters, including the Botley and Hinksey Sprout and the South Hinksey Echo.

3.3 Social media

Particularly since the pandemic, we have had to evolve some of our primary methods of communicating with stakeholders and communities. Where we would usually hold face to face events, as described above, we have adapted to more digital methods.

A large part of our engagement with the wider public is through the use of social media. Our channels include Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube. We post to Facebook, Twitter and Instagram regularly.

We continue to use a dedicated scheme email account for people to send in questions. We operate a 10-day response deadline to ensure that people can rely on us to provide timely requested information.

3.4 Public events - summer 2015

We shared our outline proposals at a series of 4 public events in the summer of 2015. The dates and locations of the events were:

These events were attended by around 300 people who were asked to share their comments, experiences and ideas and ask any questions of partners and the project team.

The feedback from these events, along with further groundwork investigations and analysis enabled the alignment of the scheme to be developed further.

As a result of these events, we divided the route of the new channel into areas, numbered 1 to 7, and in each area, we identified alternative alignments for the route of the new channel. By splitting the route into separate areas people could focus on areas which were of particular interest or importance to them. These areas are shown on in Figure 3 below.

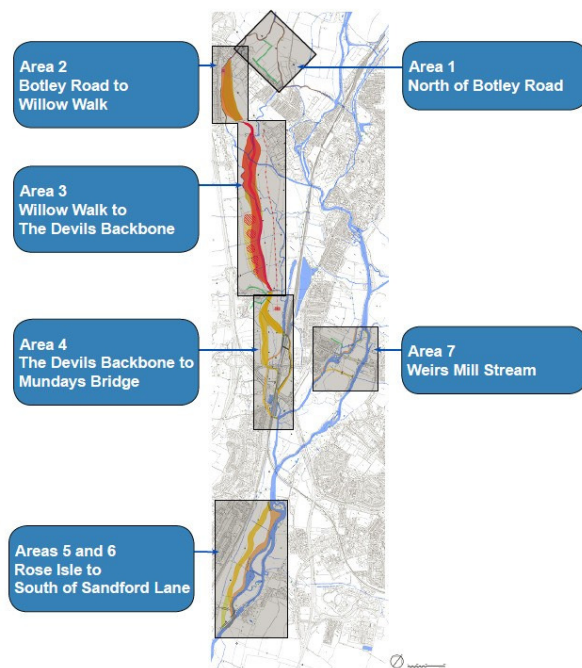


Figure 3 (left) - showing areas 1-7 of new channel

3.5 Consultation January – March 2016

We undertook public consultation events between 19 January and 1 March 2016, as well as online to obtain public views about route options for the Oxford Flood Alleviation Scheme. The consultation was live online for 6 weeks, within which time we also held 5 public events. Information on the scheme was displayed showing route options, and providing some detail on other topics such as the environmental benefits, funding and maintenance.

The online consultation was undertaken to make it more accessible to a wider and more diverse audience and allow those who were unable to attend events in person to comment. The 5 events were held in the areas affected by flooding previously, or in areas close to the possible route for the scheme. This included one event held in a community downstream of the scheme, where we knew there was significant interest. We also held meetings with landowners, tenants and interest groups along the possible routes.

876 people visited the drop-in events with almost 80% telling us the events were useful or very useful. We received over 300 written responses to the consultation from people who attended one of our events or who completed the online consultation.

Some of the notable outcomes from our analysis revealed:

- There is widespread support for the scheme as a solution to Oxford's flooding problem.
- There is some anxiety amongst those living on the River Thames downstream of Oxford that the scheme will pass on the flooding problem to their communities. There is a misunderstanding that water could be carried around Oxford more quickly and on to lower reaches of the river.

- There is interest in taking a wider catchment approach to flood management. Some respondents were concerned that the solutions focus too much on Oxford when other areas are also vulnerable to flooding.
- People told us they consider one of the benefits which can arise from the scheme is the opportunity to protect or enhance wildlife spaces and natural habitats.
- Ensuring the landscape is considered sensitively and natural habitats preserved features in many of the comments. There is a strong preference for avoiding or minimising any disturbance to specific species.
- People have questions about channel maintenance. Some respondents believe that flooding is worsened by poor maintenance or because stretches of the River Thames channel are not routinely dredged. Some respondents raise concerns about the future maintenance of any new flood channels.
- An important outcome from our consultation was an understanding of which options were preferred or opposed from the range of possible options.

The responses to the consultation fed into our analysis of the options, which also considered technical issues as well as economic, environmental and social impacts. The overall concept and scheme boundaries were located within 7 separate areas with the boundaries defined by key topographic features, various options for the route alignment were presented to the public for each of the areas. Based on the responses and the socio-environmental analysis and economic considerations the preferred route in each of the 7 areas was selected and combined to provide the overall route.

The overall feedback from the public favoured a natural appearing new channel which minimises impact on existing environmental features and maximises additional habitat creation. Features such as recreation or large water bodies were not popular with the majority of the public. This is discussed further in Section 7 of this document. Appendix A includes a document which explains in detail these consultations and the outcomes of them.



Figure 4 – Photographs showing consultation undertaken January-March 2016

3.6 Downstream community focus groups May 2016

We held 3 focus groups during May 2016. We wanted to see what understanding there was amongst the downstream communities of the Oxford Flood Alleviation Scheme, and what these communities thought about the scheme. These workshops were organised following the public consultation earlier in the year at which it became clear that there misconceptions

about the scheme and concerns about increased flood risk. A full report has been published which documents the meetings and is available in Appendix B.

3.7 Sharing the route of the scheme June 2016

The results of the January to March 2016 events along with the technical analysis enabled us to produce the preferred option, this was displayed at an event at Oxford Town Hall. The purpose was to share information, announce the route of the scheme, following the January to March 2016 public consultation. The route and proposals were shown via a number of infographics, including posters, digital flythroughs and a giant floor map with the route of the scheme superimposed upon it, as seen in the following photograph.



Figure 5 – Photograph showing floor map at information event, June 2016

3.8 Pop up shops

14 events and ‘pop up’ shops were held in 2016 and the first half of 2017, with the aim of engaging with the public to raise awareness and keep people informed and to let them know about the June-July online detailed design public consultation and events. The detailed design elements of the scheme were explained, questions answered and myths busted. Details of the locations and dates are as follows:

3.9 Parish Council meetings

Environment Agency project team members attended a series of parish council meetings during the development of the scheme. The main focus for these meetings was to raise awareness, provide information, keep the groups informed and listen to any concerns. We met with a number of the parish councils on multiple occasions providing updates and sharing new information as we had it. We often attend parish council meetings upon request when a parish has particular concerns they wish to discuss. Many of these concerns arose following the submission of our first planning application. We investigated these concerns thoroughly and in some instances were able to make changes to our design (detailed in section 6).

Parish Councils we met with included Wallingford, Kennington, Lower Radley, Marcham, North Hinksey, South Hinksey, Vale of White Horse and Sandford.

3.10 Drop in events May 2017

We planned 4 drop in events as part of our detailed design consultation. A snap General Election meant our plans had to be altered and to ensure these already promoted events could go ahead we used them as an information sharing exercise, and to promote the forthcoming online consultation. We provided updates on planned archaeological investigations, funding, materials management and other useful information.



Figure 6 – Photographs capturing drop in events May 2017

3.11 Online public consultation Summer 2017

An online public consultation was held between 22 June and 20 July 2017, to obtain public views about detailed design options for the Oxford Flood Alleviation Scheme. These included the design of new bridges, location of benches and cycle racks and style of information boards. We also asked for information on how people use areas of the scheme that might be impacted by construction, and for general feedback.

The consultation responses found that bridge options 2a and 2b were the most popular. Many people considered it important that the bridge was sympathetic to the surrounding environment. These options are shown in the picture below.



Bridge Parapet Option 2a

Bridge Parapet Option 2b

Figure 7 – preferred bridge handrail options from public consultation

Most people were in favour of benches and cycle racks in certain locations. Northway cycle path was most popular for cycle racks and Willow Walk was most popular for benches. However, a few people were not in favour of either and mentioned perceived urbanisation of rural areas.

Information boards were popular. Most people wanted information about plants and animals. A few people commented that the presence of information boards could spoil natural areas.

Key times and types of use were identified for transport and walking routes that are likely to be impacted during construction.

We received some general feedback about the scheme. The main topics were the design of the scheme, the look of the scheme area, preserving archaeology, environmental opportunities and potential impacts, flood risk, construction and opportunities for access improvements.



Figure 8 – Visualisation showing Willow Walk, as an example of the side view you might see once the bridge is in place

All of the consultation responses were published on our website. The results of this consultation and feedback from the local planning authorities were used to help inform the completion of the final design for the scheme. As part of this process, we reviewed all of the responses to the consultation to assess how popular the various options are with the general public. Where possible this was fed into the evaluation of the options and incorporated into the design along with a range of other information. This included assessing a range of factors such as: environment and landscape opportunities and constraints, value for money, sustainability, operation and maintenance, health and safety, funding opportunities and practical considerations during construction. Where conflicts arose from differing views in the feedback, we tried to incorporate the majority view where possible.

A summary of these consultations is included in this document as Appendices A and B.

3.12 Library drop in events June and July 2017

In June and July 2017 3 library drop in events were held. These events were held during the online public consultation in order to assist people who may not have access to computers, are not computer literate or who may struggle to complete an online consultation, improving accessibility.

3.13 Community groups

Throughout the development of the scheme we have continued to engage with community groups and Parish Councils representing the community. Meetings have been held to answer questions and respond to concerns relating to the scheme. For some groups we have established a single point of contact to ensure that views are represented and conveyed through a single route.

We held a drop in event for Botley Road residents and badger group members on 11 August 2017 at the West Oxford Community Centre. We discussed the realignment of the wall and the embankment around Seacourt Park and Ride and at the back of homes north of Botley

Road and took on board any feedback local residents had about mitigation for residents and local wildlife.

We invited Botley Road and Osney Island residents to a drop in event for them in December 2017. For Osney Island residents, the latest modelling results were as shared and included information on permanent and temporary works and what reduction in flood risk they can expect to benefit from as well as the limitations on improving protection on the Island. We invited Botley Road residents to share more detailed information on the plans for the flood wall and embankment at the back of their homes. Allotment holders were engaged ahead of this drop-in, but this event gave them a second opportunity to discuss any queries with us.

The Environment Agency is a member of the [Oxford Area Flood Partnership](#), a group formed in 2003 to reduce flood risk in the Oxford Area. The partnership meets 4 times a year and we provide an update on the scheme for information. The partnership also hosts the Oxford Annual Flood Forum, attended by a member of the Oxford Scheme project team. This annual forum is held in Oxford Town Hall and is an opportunity to provide the community with an update on the scheme and take any questions. Attendees can find out more about the scheme through our display material at the event and can sign up for our newsletter updates.

The South Oxford Community Centre organises annual community forums, which we have been attending for several years. The events are always well attended and we are able to brief residents about the scheme progress and take questions.

The West Oxford Community Association is also a popular community hub who has supported us by distributing information and material to their residents via newsletter and mailout.

We have attended many meetings and offered site visits to residents in affected areas when there are particular issues they would like to discuss. In particular, we have engaged with resident groups in Kennington, North Hinksey and South Hinksey regarding construction impacts. A chronological list of these meetings is available in Appendix D.

3.14 May 2021 engagement

By necessity our engagement in 2021 had to be virtual.

In May 2021, using the information we collected from stakeholders and communities outlined in section 1.4, we launched a [new website](#) on the Defra approved Citizen Space platform. We also created new diagrams and subtitled informational videos. In response to feedback from the questionnaire, our main focus was on updates since the last planning application. We provided an online form by which people could submit any questions they had about the scheme. This was live for a 2-week period, during which time we received around 182 questions from 71 people. There were some additional questions sent in directly to our inbox.

Promotion of the virtual event included sending postcards to 27,000 properties in Oxford and the areas close to the proposed scheme. Around 60 posters were also pinned up around the scheme area and placed in lock sites along the River Thames through Oxfordshire. The event was advertised on social media, through our own and partner accounts, and on

GOV.UK. Partners published adverts for the event in their newsletters, including Your Oxfordshire, Your Oxford and the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership newsletter.

Internal staff, partners, MPs and councillors were briefed on the event and encouraged to share details with their networks.

Our methods for handling the responses we received included publishing regular [FAQs on our Citizen Space website](#) as well as producing a follow-up Q&A video. We produced a report summarizing the outcomes of this engagement (Appendix C).

3.15 Future consultation

The formal consultation aspect of our engagement with the public is now complete although we will continue to engage with stakeholders. Where appropriate, we will attend targeted community events, speak at some parish council and community meetings, and continue to work closely with our environmental stakeholders. We continue to proactively request to attend meetings and to respond to requests from community groups to progress this engagement.

We will continue using social media to keep the public updated about scheme progress and to reach a wider audience, across different demographics. We will continue to send out our regular scheme newsletter to keep people informed with scheme progress.

4 Landowner discussions

4.1 Introduction

We have had extensive discussions with landowners from early stages of the project and throughout the development of the scheme. We wanted landowners to understand the purpose of the scheme and to contribute their ideas towards the design. For mitigation purposes some aspects of these discussions have to remain confidential. We also held workshops in November 2016 and January 2017. The agenda for both workshops was the same, with different landowners and tenants attending each.

4.2 Workshops

The workshops provided an update on the progress of the project and an opportunity for the Environment Agency to gain landowners' views.

It was clarified that the meetings would be an opportunity to understand the scheme and share views but that it would not be a chance to discuss compensation, fee negotiations or legal negotiations.

Specific topics of discussion were:

- **The route of the proposed channel** - it was explained that there were some constraints on the location of the channel mainly due to utilities. Landowners were also told that the overall width of the channel would have to remain essentially the same in order for the system to work from a geomorphological aspect but asked to identify where they thought the scheme could be tweaked.
- **Environmental features** - landowners were asked to comment on the draft design, but not many comments were received.
- **Impact on agriculture including fences and boundaries** – it was explained that there was an issue with fencing as blockages can cause problems during flooding, but it was acknowledged that some form of compromise would be required, and options are being considered.
- **Access for landowners** - the aim was made clear to ensure that landowners and tenants could continue to farm during the operation of the scheme as far as possible.
- **Access during construction for landowners** - landowners were informed that before the start of construction, information would be gathered and fed back about livestock and the farming use of the land and about the access required by landowners and tenants. During works, constructors would be working with the occupier to facilitate access and discuss management through the contractor and site management.
- **Access for maintenance** - this was discussed, and it was explained that typical activity on an annual basis might include first stage channel vegetation management, silt management and obstruction removal, especially around key structures. The second stage channel would require a degree of vegetation management. There would be an initial establishment period of topping vegetation once or twice every year as well as inspections and survey works at key points.
- **Public access** - the Environment Agency has carried out a green infrastructure study assessing how the scheme fits in with other green spaces in and around Oxford including green links such as footpaths, cycleways and bridleways. Landowners felt that it was inappropriate to ask the public for their opinion about access. There are different

issues surrounding the development of cycle paths and footpaths, but both were seen as negative by most landowners.

4.3 Ongoing discussions

Throughout the development of the design proposal, we have worked to establish dialogue with all potentially affected landowners, continuing to discuss many of the issues that came from the initial workshops. We have contacted over 100 landowners and occupiers that are affected by the scheme. Discussions have centred on design issues and addressing any concerns raised. Wherever practicable these have been considered for inclusion as accommodation works. These have, for example, included the safeguarding of existing private services, provision of access to severed parcels of land, diversion of affected utilities and revision of field access.

We have demonstrated commitment to work with landowners to understand the impact of the scheme on their land, including marking out the route of the channel at the request of 2 of the landowners on their parcels of land, to help them understand the dimensions of the scheme and how they can manage their land once the scheme is operational.

Since submitting the planning application in March 2018 and Compulsory Purchase Order in September 2018 and their withdrawal in 2020 we have kept landowners, tenants and those with an interest in land up to date.

Our engagement with landowners is ongoing and will continue into construction on a whole range of topics. The content of much of these discussions needs to remain confidential.

5 Environmental stakeholder engagement

5.1 Environmental Impact Assessment Scoping opinion

We sent a Scoping Opinion request to Oxfordshire County Council in October 2016 to seek their opinion on whether the proposed scope of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is adequate from their perspective. Their 'scoping opinion' was received in December and is included as an appendix to the Environmental Statement (ES). On the whole they were in agreement with the proposed scope, with one or two details that were clarified.

5.2 Environmental stakeholder meetings

Environmental Stakeholder meetings were held in order to appraise key local interested parties and specialist experts with local knowledge on the environmental aspects of the scheme. These were interactive meetings with the scheme designs to date being presented and feedback from attendees being provided on ideas to minimise impacts and maximise environmental benefits in the designs.

21 January 2016

The purpose of the meeting was to provide an update on the work that had been done on the OFAS to date. The route options were presented and discussed, with any queries being answered and initial feedback sought. In addition, the consultation process and the programme for delivery were explained.

The Oxford Badger Group, Floodplain Meadows Partnership, Low Carbon West Oxford, Oxford Flood Alliance, RSPB Conservation Officer and the Freshwater Habitats Trust were all present at the meeting.

The key issues identified during the discussions were:

- Modelling and downstream impacts.
- Materials management and construction.
- Environment and Recreation.
- Funding.
- Approvals.

6 July 2016

The Environment Agency presented the preferred option for the OFAS. The preferred option includes new embankments and walls at Botley Road, South Hinksey and New Hinksey and a new 2-stage channel to the west of Oxford, running from just north of Botley Road down to the River Thames at Kennington (just south of Iffley Meadows). The idea being to direct the flood water to an area of the floodplain where there are fields, rather than an area where there are residential properties, businesses and infrastructure.

The event was well attended by Hogacre Eco-Park, Freshwater Habitats Trust, Floodplain Meadows Partnership, Oxford Preservation Trust, RSPB, Upper Thames Fisheries Consultative, Low Carbon West Oxford/North Hinksey Parish Council, Oxford Flood Alliance, Friends of Kendall Copse/Kennington Parish Council and Dr Tim King (Biologist).

The main themes coming out of the feedback were:

- Interest in seeing more details in the future.
- Concern about downstream impacts.
- Support for the scheme.
- Concern about environmental impacts, particularly MG4 and trees.

9 March 2017

Attendees included people from organisations such as Freshwater Habitats Trust, Oxford Flood Alliance, Friends of Kendall Copse, Oxford Rare Plants Group, Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, Oxford Preservation Trust, Trust for Oxford's Environment 2, Thames Regional Flood and Coastal Committee and Hogacre Eco-Park.

The content of the previous meetings was discussed, and the timings and results of the EIA scoping process was explained. Surveys completed up to this point were identified and those planned going forward were also discussed.

The following topics were then discussed in detail:

- Ecological Trial Areas.
- Archaeology.
- Fluvial Model.
- Low-flows, existing watercourses and fish passage.
- Groundwater Modelling.
- Floodplain Meadows Partnership.
- Hinksey Meadow – options considered:
 - Whether to take out the channel not delivering flood benefits.
 - Canalise the channel not delivering sufficient flood benefits.
 - Half the width of the channel in the preferred option which works but may have maintenance and aesthetic issues.
 - Quarter the width of the channel which wouldn't provide an efficient hydrology, would bring maintenance difficulties and have aesthetic issues.
- Landowner Meetings.
- Habitat Creation and Environmental Issues.
- Tree removal.
- Bridges.
- Fencing/Hedges.
- Public Access.
- New Hinksey - Badgers are the key environmental issue at this location.
- Construction Impacts.
- Future Management.

The environmental stakeholder meeting was a useful forum in which to discuss the issues detailed above and enabled sensible compromises, reducing the impacts of the scheme as far as possible and enhancing the environment as appropriate. Full details in relation to this is supplied in the accompanying Environmental Statement.

6 Formal pre-application consultation with local authorities

6.1 Local authority formed planning group

In 2015 we formed a planning group with representatives from the Development Management teams of Oxfordshire County Council, Oxford City Council and Vale of White Horse District Council. From that time, we have held meetings as necessary to keep the participants up to date with the progress of the scheme, to share information and discuss any issues that have arisen. This has fostered positive, on-going communication and co-operation between the planners through the pre-planning process, through the last application process and now into the submission of our current planning application.

6.2 Pre application response from local authorities

In May 2017 we submitted a formal pre-application request to Oxfordshire County Council. They responded and included coordinated comments from Oxford City and Vale of White Horse District Councils, as well as the consultees that would be consulted in the event of a planning application. The response from Oxfordshire County Council can be found as Appendix B of the Environmental Statement.

As a result of the comments received from the local authorities and other consultees, we carried out further work and held meetings in order to understand the feedback, address comments where appropriate, alleviate concerns, and undertake further work as necessary. Many of the more significant changes are covered in section 7 below.

6.3 Engagement with local authorities during the planning application process and since withdrawal

During the decision making process for the first application we were in contact with all 3 lead planners and their technical officers to provide any further clarity and information as required.

As consultation responses were received by Oxfordshire County Council planners they kept us informed of issues raised and some meetings were held with consultees to discuss their issues and concerns.

Following the withdrawal of the planning application in 2020 we have continued to keep the planners informed of progress for this planning application and have held informal virtual meetings to explain the proposed changes and updates.

6.4 National Highways (previously Highways England)

During the consultation period for the first planning application National Highways raised concerns with Oxfordshire County Council planners and ourselves about the road closures on Old Abingdon Road and Kennington Road, and the impact diversion would have on the Hinksey Hill Interchange and queuing on the A34. Many discussions took place alongside the highways authority, and traffic modelling was carried out to understand more clearly the impacts. Different traffic management solutions were investigated but all had impacts on the

traffic at the interchange. The solution being progressed as part of this planning application allows for 2-way traffic to keep flowing with a temporary road whilst the bridges at Old Abingdon Road and then Kennington Road are constructed.

This proposal has been discussed with various teams in the highways authority and National Highways.

During ongoing discussions with National Highways they also asked us to investigate alternative options for lorries entering the strategic road network. These have been researched and are outlined in the Transport Assessment, forming part of the Environmental Impact Assessment. We have kept National Highways informed of progress since the withdrawal of the planning application in March 2020.

7 Key Changes to designs as a result of consultation and engagement

7.1 Introduction

As a result of the level of engagement, the number of public events that we have held and the range of people and organisations that have provided input and feedback into our consultation, a lot of different elements influenced the evolution of the scheme proposals, there are simply too many to capture. We have provided a commentary on the headline influences in this chapter.

7.2 Route of the channel

During the summer 2015 public events the project team asked for ideas and concepts which the public considered would benefit the community if they could be incorporated into route alignment and design of the scheme.

Whilst the general alignment of the route was dictated by topographical, environmental and utility constraints in the area, the route was split into 7 specific areas, and a number of route options in each of the areas was developed.

These options were presented to the public in winter 2016 and they were asked to indicate their preferred channel alignment for each of the areas. The feedback from this consultation along with a technical review was incorporated into a 2-stage multi-criteria options appraisal process (MCA). The first phase of the MCA determined the preferred route in each of the geographical areas based on the economic, social, technical, environmental, and institutional objectives of the scheme. The social aspect of the analysis included the feedback from the public and landowners. The preferred route for each area was combined to give an overall route for the scheme. In the second phase the overall route was tested with different channel sizes and each in combination with raised defences to confirm the economic case for the scheme. This also enabled some areas of the scheme to be removed and the length of the proposal to be reduced with the indirect benefit of creating efficiencies for the project. This whole process formed the basis for the scheme that is now proposed.

7.3 Iffley Meadows

The scheme originally included major works to the Weirs Mill Stream to increase the flow capacity of this channel. However, from our conversations with the local community we recognised that this impacted on a number of residential boat moorings, which was deemed to be unacceptable, so we considered other options. These other options impacted negatively on either the boat residents or the adjacent Iffley Meadow SSSI area.

Given these issues, a raised defence to the north of Donnington Bridge Road was proposed which provides similar levels of flood protection as the original design in this area and avoids the disruption to the residential boat moorings. It is this that has therefore been taken forward and included in the proposals for which we are seeking consent.

7.4 Badgers

The Phase 1 Environmental Survey indicated that a number of badger setts were present in a number of the areas of the site. Through the consultation with local residents, we were able to better understand which of the setts are active and population numbers in each area. As far as possible we have designed the works to avoid the areas near the setts. Where this has not been possible, local knowledge, in particular from the Oxford Badger Group, has helped to develop the environmental mitigation strategies for the works in these areas which will affect the badger setts.

7.5 Public access and routes

There are a small number of public footpaths and a bridleway which pass through the planning application site. There are also a number of informal paths throughout the area and permissive paths through the site and within Hinksey Meadow.

A number of comments were received from the public during the consultation events asking about the possible provision of a more formal public footpath in a north south direction.

We will be creating a new track along much of the scheme to allow access for maintenance. A proportion of the track will be made into a permissive path that the public are allowed to use for walking or cycling, except when maintenance or other activities would conflict with this. We are also building new bridges in the scheme area to ensure access is maintained over the new stream and wetland.

7.6 MG4 grassland

The second stage of the MCA previously mentioned in section 7.2 indicated that the preferred option for the Hinksey Meadow area was a wide and shallow channel to direct flood flows across the meadow. However further consultation with landowners, environmental stakeholders and the public over the importance of this area both ecologically and as an open space resulted in the preferred option being changed to a narrower channel along the western edge of this meadow to reduce the direct impacts on this environmentally sensitive area. Our proposals seek to avoid as much of this area as possible.

The inputs of the Oxford Preservation Trust and Tim King (biologist) helped with the redesign of the scheme from Botley Road to Willow Walk and the introduction of fixed riffles downstream, to minimise impacts on the groundwater levels and the MG4 grassland. The Floodplain Meadows Partnership have assisted with the preparation of the MG4 grassland mitigation plans.

7.7 Downstream impacts

One of the key criteria for the design of the scheme has been the avoidance of any negative impacts to flood risk downstream. During the initial consultation in summer 2015 and January 2016, well attended public drop-in sessions were held in Abingdon which is located downstream of the proposed scheme. The feedback from these events, whilst not changing the design criteria, did highlight the levels of concern on these issues. A number of specific focused meetings and drop-in sessions across the downstream towns and villages were organised to ensure the key messages from the scheme were disseminated as widely as

possible, to reduce public perception of increased flood risk downstream. See also Section 3.3.

7.8 Other ecological issues e.g. creeping marshwort

Throughout the development of the scheme, specific consultation meetings with landowners, local environmental groups and local environmental specialists have identified a number of locations of environmental sensitive flora. This includes creeping marshwort, snakeshead fritillaries and environmentally sensitive plants. Where possible the channel has been aligned to avoid direct impact on these areas. Where this is not possible the information has been used to inform mitigation strategies.

One example of this is the creeping marshwort in one of the paddocks to the south of Willow Walk. At this location the channel was aligned through the adjacent paddock to reduce the impacts of the scheme on this plant. The mitigation strategy for the creeping marshwort was prepared in conjunction with a local specialist ecological consultant.

7.9 Groundwater flood risk

Groundwater flooding was known to be an issue across the area, however, during flooding it is extremely difficult to ascertain the source of flooding once the water is above ground. This makes the modelling of areas such as Oxford difficult as it is often not clear whether flooding is from groundwater, river or surface water during flooding. During the summer 2015 consultation events we asked people to describe their flooding experiences, and this helped to confirm the mechanisms for groundwater flooding in the Osney and New Hinksey areas. This was used to help ensure the hydraulic modelling was accurate.

7.10 Archaeology – Old Abingdon Road alignment options

There is a group of culverts below Old Abingdon Road which are a Scheduled Ancient Monument. Through the consultation process, in particular the formal pre-application consultation with the local authorities and Historic England, other alignment options were reviewed, and the currently proposed option was selected as helping to minimise the impact on the medieval causeway which runs below the current alignment of Old Abingdon Road.

7.11 Bridge parapets

During the summer 2017 consultation the public were provided with a choice of parapet designs for key bridges such as Willow Walk and the Devil's Backbone. The most popular design selected by the public through the consultation has been taken forward for the scheme.

7.12 Main compound

During the formal consultation on the first planning application residents of South Hinksey raised concerns about their amenity during the construction phase of the project. One of the issues raised was the proximity of the main compound to the village.

Alternative options for the siting of the compound were investigated as outlined in the Environmental Statement but the fields just to the north of the village have been retained as the location with the least environmental impact. In order to reduce any impacts on the residents of the village the proposal has been amended to include an indicative layout for the compound, including a buffer between the village and the activities of the compound with mitigation measures to minimise visual and noise impacts.

7.13 Ponds to replace Kennington pools

Kennington Pond is in the Kennington Pools Local Wildlife Site at the southern end of the scheme. The pond is only connected to the river during floods, so water quality is generally good and it supports a range of freshwater plants and invertebrates. When we carry out work on the Hinksey Drain, just south of the A423, the size of Kennington Pond will be permanently reduced so we are planning to create a series of new ponds in the southern half of the scheme that will also only be connected to the river system during larger floods. Following consultation with the Freshwater Habitats Trust, the size of one of these ponds has now been increased so that it better replicates the size and depth of Kennington Pond as it is now.

7.14 Temporary road in the south of the scheme

In our previous planning application, we had planned to close Old Abingdon Road and Kennington Road for a period of time and divert traffic. This was so we could excavate underneath the roads to allow room for the channel to flow beneath. As explained in Section 6.4 above concerns were raised by National Highways about the knock-on impact on to the Hinksey Hill Interchange and the A34. Concerns were also raised by the bus company running the local bus routes in this area.

We have therefore changed our approach here to maintain 2-way traffic flow via a temporary carriageway, through the western area of Kendall Copse and connecting Old Abingdon Road and Kennington Road. This arrangement will allow us to construct our channel and return the roads to their existing alignment without having to restrict road users and public transport passing through this area during construction. This 2-way carriageway will also keep traffic flowing.

The decision to use Kendall Copse for this temporary carriageway was not taken lightly but with limited space available for a proportional solution to maintain road safety this became our agreed solution. Upon completion of construction in this area, the temporary carriageway will be removed and the copse will be replanted.

8 Conclusion

This document has explained the extensive consultation and engagement that has been undertaken with stakeholders, including the public, landowners, environmental stakeholders and other people interested in the scheme, whilst seeking to develop our proposals with their input and explain and talk through any issues.

We have complied with the requirements of planning policy and best practice. Moreover, given the amount of consultation and events held and the resources that the Environment Agency have put into this, we have gone far beyond this in the number, range and extent of the consultation that has been undertaken. This is a reflection not only on the importance of the scheme, but also the weight that as an organisation is placed upon consultation and interaction.

As a result of the consultation and engagement work, our scheme has evolved into one that is not only fit for purpose but is also sympathetic to consultation feedback given.