

Thames Valley Flood Scheme – Consultation outcomes report

Appendix A: Our response to wider comments and suggestions

The Thames Valley Flood Scheme consultation outcomes report provides our responses to the issues raised in the consultation and explains how we are considering this feedback in the development of the Thames Valley Flood Scheme.

This appendix summarises the comments and questions received in the consultation that relate to issues wider than the scope of the Thames Valley Flood Scheme and our responses to each. The purpose of this document is to provide context behind the policies and principles guiding the project.

Questions and comments from consultation	Our response
What are the planning policies for development in floodplains and what is the Environment Agency’s stance and role on this?	<p>Planning policy on development in floodplains is set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The framework explains the vulnerability of different types of development to flood risk and steers development to areas of lower risk of flooding. Where this is not possible, new developments must be safe for their lifetime and not increase flood risk to surrounding areas.</p> <p>Local planning authorities are responsible and accountable for determining proposals for new development in their local areas. The Environment Agency is consulted by local planning authorities on planning applications in flood risk areas and gives advice relating to their acceptability in terms of policy and flood risk, in-line with both the NPPF and development plan policies.</p> <p>We are clear in our advice that house building, and most other forms of development, is not appropriate and should not be permitted in functional floodplains, where water has to flow or be stored in times of</p>

Questions and comments from consultation	Our response
	<p>flood. However, we acknowledge that it is not always possible or practical to prevent all new development in flood risk areas. In places like this, partnership work between the Environment Agency, communities, developers and planning authorities is essential to ensure that necessary development is safe and resilient to flooding and does not increase risk to others.</p> <p>Our advice has been effective, with 97.1% of applications decided in-line with Environment Agency flood risk advice between 1 April 2020 and 31 March 2021.</p>
<p>What resources are available to help communities become more flood resilient and what actions is the Environment Agency taking to contribute to creating climate resilient places?</p>	<p>The Environment Agency is committed to helping communities become more resilient to the effects of flooding and climate change.</p> <p>We provide several resources on GOV.UK to help homeowners, residents and businesses check their flood risk and know what to do before, during and after a flood. Since 2018, we have been investing £5.4 million to further expand the Environment Agency flood warning service to cover all communities in England at the highest risk of flooding from rivers and the sea.</p> <p>We have taken steps to improve local and national response to flooding through the establishment of the National Flood Response Centre and improved weather and flood forecasting capabilities.</p> <p>Following the Multi Agency Flood Plan Review in 2018, we have taken action to support Local Resilience Forums and ensure they have robust plans in place to respond to flooding incidents in their respective areas.</p>

Questions and comments from consultation

Our response

In the 2020 Budget, the government announced a Flood and Coastal Resilience Innovation Programme to test and demonstrate ways to help communities become more resilient to flooding and coastal change. In March 2021, 25 areas across England were awarded funding by Defra to develop innovative solutions to flood and coastal resilience in their communities. These 25 pioneering projects will receive a share of £150 million, an average of £6 million each, as part of this new programme. The programme will run for 6 years and will be managed by the Environment Agency.

What are the differing roles and responsibilities between the Environment Agency, [Lead Local Flood Authorities \(LLFAs\)](#) and others for managing flood risk in the UK?

Many different public and private bodies are involved in flood and coastal erosion risk management (FCERM), each accountable for different aspects of risk management. The [National Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Strategy](#) sets out the different roles and responsibilities and describes how organisations and communities can work together to tackle flood and coastal risk in a co-ordinated and effective way.

How are costs associated with the scheme assessed and how will it be funded?

It is too early to estimate how much the scheme will cost. We will gain a greater understanding of how much each option will cost as we develop more detailed proposals. We will assess the economics using the [HM Treasury Green Book](#) and the [Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management appraisal guidance](#) (FCERM appraisal guidance).

Funding for flood risk schemes normally comes from a combination of [Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Grant in Aid \(FCRM GiA\)](#) and other sources. FCRM investment takes place where the risk is highest, wherever it is across the country. Each scheme is carefully

Questions and comments from consultation

Our response

	<p>considered to target where it will benefit the most people and property.</p>
<p>How will the scheme align with other national and local strategies and plans?</p>	<p>This scheme has the potential to make a major contribution to the Environment Agency’s Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Strategy. The scheme will particularly contribute to the following sections of the strategy: ‘Climate resilient places’ and ‘Today’s growth and infrastructure – resilient in tomorrow’s climate’.</p> <p>The scheme also builds on the recommendations made in the following strategies and plans:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• River Thames Catchment Flood Management Plan (2009)• Oxford Flood Risk Management Strategy (2009)• The Lower Thames Flood Risk Management Strategy (2010) <p>There are also strategies and plans that are relevant to the wider objectives of the scheme that will be considered, such as improving recreational opportunities, the environment, habitat and biodiversity. The sustainability appraisal scoping report for the scheme identifies relevant plans, policies and programmes at a local and national level and explains how these will be considered in the sustainability appraisal.</p>
<p>How will the scheme be delivered in partnership?</p>	<p>For the Thames Valley Flood Scheme to be successful, close working with partners, landowners and local communities will be essential. As the scheme progresses and becomes more location specific, we will engage with landowners and local communities to gather local</p>

Questions and comments from consultation	Our response
	<p>knowledge and feedback. We will continue to provide formal and informal engagement and consultation opportunities as the scheme develops.</p> <p>We have also set up a Strategic Partners Advisory Group, which includes members from Lead Local Flood Authorities (LLFAs), environmental groups, utility and infrastructure providers and business groups. This advisory group is key in developing and facilitating networks to achieve the multiple benefits of the Thames Valley Flood Scheme.</p>
<p>Can flood risk be reduced by keeping river channels clear and dredging to increase river capacity?</p>	<p>We can reduce flood risk in many ways, including building flood defences, working with our partners to increase resilience to flooding, and maintaining watercourses - which where appropriate, may include dredging. Dredging means different things to different people. At the Environment Agency, we mean removing accumulated material in the river to maintain the conveyance of the channel. This includes silt that has been washed into rivers from elsewhere as well as rocks and plant life. Other maintenance activities such as in-channel weed clearance, blockage removal and vegetation management are important and may also have an element of dredging.</p> <p>We assess each situation individually and dredge when it is the right solution and provides long-term value for money. Understanding where it will, and will not, reduce flood risk is key. Dredging can, and does, contribute to reducing flooding in some locations, but in others, dredging would be an extremely inefficient and ineffective way to manage flood risk, as the natural processes in many rivers can cause the silt to return and accumulate in the same places very quickly.</p>

Questions and comments from consultation	Our response
	<p>Analysis of data on the depth of the River Thames from 1998 to 2015 indicates that there is no clear trend of sedimentation along the river, and it is generally considered to self-regulate levels of silt.</p> <p>So whilst dredging is part of the solution in some locations, it is far from a universal solution and other measures such as building walls or storage upstream can be more effective. Dredging is also potentially very environmentally damaging, removing important riverine habitats, including fish spawning areas.</p>
<p>Who is responsible for clearing drains and preventing sewer flooding?</p>	<p>Drain clearance and maintenance play an important part in reducing flooding from surface water. Local councils and Highways Authorities are responsible for maintaining some drainage networks, and the water companies are responsible for maintaining the sewage network.</p>
<p>Can we improve existing assets on the River Thames to control flood risk?</p>	<p>At the Environment Agency, we maintain and operate 45 weirs and lock gate structures on the River Thames. These are mainly to support boats to navigate the river, but they also help to manage the flow of water along the Thames during high flows.</p> <p>Our existing maintenance programme considers the most cost-effective way to look after these structures. Improving our maintenance could help existing assets to last longer, but this would not reduce the peak water levels so would not provide any additional reduction in flood risk to communities.</p>
<p>Why not aim to be a net zero contributor before 2030?</p>	<p>The Environment Agency has set a goal to become a net zero organisation by 2030. This means that by 2030, we will aim to</p>

Questions and comments from consultation

Our response

balance the carbon emissions we produce with those we take out of the atmosphere so that we are no longer contributing to climate change.

The Thames Valley Flood Scheme has set an ambitious target of reducing carbon emissions to 80% less than similar schemes between 2019-2020 would have produced. This target helps inform decisions we are making for all Thames Valley Flood Scheme activities.