



Thames Valley Flood Scheme

Consultation outcomes report

April 2022

We are the Environment Agency. We protect and improve the environment.

We help people and wildlife adapt to climate change and reduce its impacts, including flooding, drought, sea level rise and coastal erosion.

We improve the quality of our water, land and air by tackling pollution. We work with businesses to help them comply with environmental regulations. A healthy and diverse environment enhances people's lives and contributes to economic growth.

We can't do this alone. We work as part of the Defra group (Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs), with the rest of government, local councils, businesses, civil society groups and local communities to create a better place for people and wildlife.

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Executive summary

We are in the early stages of developing a large-scale scheme for managing flood risk across the Thames Valley. We held a public consultation on [Citizen Space](#) for 12 weeks from 26 May to 20 August 2021 and received a total of 264 responses from a wide range of public, private and third sector respondents.

In November 2021, we published our consultation output [report](#), which provided information on how we approached the consultation and summarised the issues that emerged from the responses.

The purpose of this document is to provide our responses to the issues raised in the consultation and explain how we are using the feedback gathered to further develop the Thames Valley Flood Scheme. This document also provides information on next steps following this report.

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Introduction

The Thames Valley Flood Scheme is investigating a catchment-wide approach to managing flood risk in the Thames Valley. We held a public consultation on [Citizen Space](#) for 12 weeks from 26 May to 20 August 2021 and received a total of 264 responses from a wide range of public, private and third sector respondents.

Following the consultation, we published a consultation output [report](#), which provided information on how we approached the consultation and summarised the issues that emerged from the responses.

The consultation feedback suggested respondents were largely supportive of the project's [objectives](#), [ambitions](#) and [approaches](#), but several important issues and suggestions were also raised. The responses received have given us a better understanding of the wide range of views, preferences and questions from those across the Thames Valley [catchment](#).

This report explains how we are using the feedback and suggestions received in the consultation to influence the project.

Main points raised in the consultation and our response

The tables below summarise the feedback received in the consultation and explain how we are considering this feedback in the development of the Thames Valley Flood Scheme. The tables are organised by theme and are split into feedback received for the general consultation questions and for the sustainability appraisal scoping report.

See [Appendix A](#) for a more detailed summary of comments and suggestions received in the consultation that relate to issues wider than the scope of the Thames Valley Flood Scheme and our responses to each.

See [Appendix B](#) for the glossary of terms.

General consultation questions

Theme	Summary of main points raised in consultation	Our response
Development in the floodplain	Calls to prevent building new developments on the floodplain in the Thames Valley	<p>The Environment Agency is a statutory consultee on planning matters and has a key role in advising planners and developers to avoid inappropriate development in flood risk areas and enable climate resilient development. For more information on planning policies for development in floodplains and the role of the Environment Agency, see Appendix A.</p> <p>While preventing new development is not part of the scope of the Thames Valley Flood Scheme, we have added an approach for consideration to reduce the impacts of development through re-designation or reuse of land in affected areas to reduce run-off and increase floodplain capacity in the long-term.</p>

Theme	Summary of main points raised in consultation	Our response
Additional information	Calls to provide more information to the public on scheme risks, benefits, impacts, timing and site-specific information	We will share more details on these aspects of the scheme once we have established which approaches will be most effective and have identified specific areas of interest for developing the scheme.
Project objectives	Suggestions that the scheme objectives should be principally focused on reducing flood risk	Flood risk has always been the primary objective of the project, but we are reviewing how to make this explicit in our communication materials.
Communications and engagement	Requests for a short version option of consultation materials	For future consultations, we will offer a short version of the information and survey. We will continue to provide more detailed information for those who are interested.
	Requests for more information on planned future engagement with communities and other organisations	As the scheme progresses and becomes more location specific, we will engage with local communities. We will keep communities informed of any planned engagement, including future consultations, using our newsletter, which we will issue when we have new information to share.
Resilient communities	Calls for the scheme to help communities in the Thames Valley become more flood resilient	<p>We have added two further approaches to consider as part of the scheme: enhancing flood warnings and improving emergency flood response arrangements.</p> <p>We will also look for opportunities as part of the scheme to raise awareness of flood risk, encourage people to sign up to flood warnings and make a flood plan. We will</p>

Theme	Summary of main points raised in consultation	Our response
		<p>share information on how people can make their properties more flood resilient.</p> <p>The Environment Agency has done significant work in establishing and improving the flood warning service and supporting communities at risk. For more information about the work being done and resources available, see Appendix A.</p>
Approaches being considered	Suggestions to use a combination of approaches, with an emphasis on those that provide multiple benefits	As part of our work to identify which approaches to take forward, we will first consider how well approaches could work on their own on a large, catchment-wide scale. We will then consider using a combination of approaches if these would be more effective in meeting the scheme's objectives. The project's objectives and ambitions are wide ranging and show the intent to deliver multiple benefits.
	Calls to use natural flood management approaches over hard engineered approaches	We are investigating how natural flood management approaches could be used at a catchment-scale to reduce flood risk, either as a stand-alone option or in combination with other approaches.
	Concerns raised about some of the approaches transferring flood risk from one area to another	We will carry out a comprehensive flood risk assessment for any approaches we propose to demonstrate that we are not transferring flood risk to other areas.

Theme

Summary of main points raised in consultation

Our response

Calls to ensure that the approaches taken focus on all sources of flooding, not just flooding from rivers, for which the Environment Agency is responsible

While the Thames Valley Flood Scheme is primarily focused on reducing river ([fluvial](#)) flooding, we will work with partner organisations to explore which approaches may support reducing flood risk from other sources and will consider the potential interactions between different sources of flood risk.

For more information on the differing roles and responsibilities between the Environment Agency, [Lead Local Flood Authorities \(LLFAs\)](#) and others for managing flood risk throughout the UK, see [Appendix A](#).

Sustainability appraisal scoping report

We are carrying out a sustainability appraisal for the project, which will set out how social, economic and environmental factors have guided our decisions. It will identify the potential benefits and drawbacks of the different approaches available and will describe how we can avoid, limit or counter these effects. As part of the consultation, we provided a [scoping report](#) and a [scoping report summary](#) for the sustainability appraisal and received 158 responses to at least one of the questions.

Theme	Summary of main points raised in consultation	Our response
Sustainability objectives	Suggestions to consider regulations, policies and programmes which are relevant at a catchment-scale and should be considered further	Relevant plans, policies and programmes highlighted in the consultation responses will be considered when reviewing and updating the sustainability appraisal framework.
	Suggestions to consider location specific regulations, policies and programmes	Local plans, policies and programmes suggested in the consultation feedback may influence location-specific decisions. We will be taking these into consideration when we have a better idea on potential locations for the scheme.
	Suggestions to strengthen the wording for some of the environmental objectives and put more emphasis on nature recovery	We have updated the draft criteria which informs how we consider the objectives to include more on environmental enhancements and we will update our sustainability appraisal objectives accordingly.
Current state of the catchment (social, economic and environmental)	Calls to consider the disparity between projections of future growth for the region versus local authorities' growth aspirations	We recognise the differences between the Office for National Statistics and local authorities' projected growth figures and these will be considered as the scheme progresses and becomes more location specific.

Theme	Summary of main points raised in consultation	Our response
Additional information to assess the likely impacts of the scheme	Calls to assess the interactions between issues to better understand the opportunities and risks	We will assess how issues interact using spatial data on bespoke mapping software.
	Suggestions to consider detailed information on local habitats and species	The sustainability objectives include protection and enhancement of designations at international and national levels and biodiversity overall. As decisions become more localised, we will take local biodiversity into account.
Sustainability of the scheme	Calls to build regular reviews into the appraisal process to ensure we are continually assessing the approaches	We will regularly review the sustainability appraisal framework to ensure the approaches are continually assessed throughout the lifetime of the scheme.

Next steps

The consultation presented 17 potential flood risk management approaches for the Thames Valley Flood Scheme to consider. Based on the feedback received from the consultation, we have added an additional 3 potential approaches for the scheme to consider.

We are now assessing the full list of 20 potential options against the project objectives to determine which approaches are technically and practically possible to take forward. We will first consider how well each approach could work on its own to reduce flood risk on a large, catchment-wide scale. Some of the approaches that do not work as a stand-alone option may still be included in the scheme in combination with other approaches to deliver the project's environmental, recreational and sustainability ambitions.

We will publish a follow-up report later this year which will explain our assessment of each of the 20 approaches and what the next steps will be to develop the scheme.

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