



Slowing the flow in the rivers Ouse and Foss; a long-term plan for York

A summary of consultation responses

August 2018

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

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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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Purpose of this document

This report provides a summary of the consultation 'Slowing the flow in the rivers Ouse and Foss; a long-term plan for York'. The aim of this document is to explain why and how we ran the consultation as well as summarising the responses that we received and what action we will be taking as a result.

Introduction

'Slowing the flow in the rivers Ouse and Foss; a long-term plan for York' is a study looking at how river flows could be slowed and managed in areas upstream of the city to counter the effects of climate change over the next 100 years. Slowing the flow could also reduce flood risk to smaller communities in the area. It also provides opportunities to enhance the natural environment, create habitat, and improve the amenity value and commercial value of land. Many of these opportunities will require working in partnership with private, public and charitable bodies to achieve multiple benefits.

The online consultation was an opportunity to follow-up on feedback received in 2017 on our published summary of Slowing the Flow, and for any interested party to formally make comment on the study. We were seeking views from partners, landowners, the public and other bodies on the general principles of the study and on our proposal for how to progress. We were also asking for information about any current or future work proposed that might be aligned with our objectives which could be developed in partnership.

How we ran the consultation

The consultation ran for 6 weeks from 8 May 2018 to 19 June 2018. We consulted using the Environment Agency's online consultation tool Citizen Space and also provided an option for people to return answers by email or post. The consultation was advertised with direct emails to interested parties; through the York Flood Alleviation Scheme newsletter; in the York Hub building; and informally in other meetings and conversations. We also asked that people pass the invitation on to other parties as they saw fit. We know from the responses that some people did find out about the consultation in this way.

We received 17 responses in total. Seven were from members of the public and small businesses, 3 from local authority officers, 2 from councillors or MP's, 2 from societies or volunteer groups, 2 from academic research groups and 1 from a representative organisation. Whilst this is a relatively small number of responses, it covers a wide range of interests. Previous discussions on this subject have often been within the city of York, so it is particularly valuable to see a number of respondents from North Yorkshire and from those who own land outside the city.

We had one additional comment from a York councillor who did not wish to respond fully but asked that a specific area of land to the east of York was considered as a potential flood storage area.

Key findings and actions we will take

The overall feeling from the consultation was very positive. The majority of respondents (76%) supported our ambition to achieve, as far as is possible, a consistent standard of hard flood defences through the city of York and then provide additional protection and climate change mitigation through other measures in the wider catchment. The other respondents supported this approach 'in part'. None opposed the idea in principle, but did emphasise the need for further study into the causes of increasing flood risk, for further work to identify the most effective slowing the flow measures in this catchment, and the need to consider flooding as part of a wider economic and environmental picture.

The character and content of the written comments shows that respondents are well informed and often professionally involved in Natural Flood Management (NFM), flood risk management and the agricultural economy. A number of specific sites and land management methods are proposed and over half of respondents have skills, resource or expertise that could help develop NFM sites.

The responses to questions 7 to 10 show that there are a number of ongoing projects that relate to Slowing the Flow and a large number of opportunities. The responses to questions 11 to 14 generally support our proposals to work with the Dales to Vale network and to use Flood Risk Management Plans to record actions, albeit with some notes of caution sounded.

Following this consultation, we will:

- Carry out investigations into the feasibility of optimising or building new flood storage areas to reduce flood risk in York and other communities, and engage with a wide range of parties at an early stage. This consultation confirms that there is a strong interest in this subject and a need to consider a number of perspectives from the beginning.
- Continue to work with our partners on developing smaller NFM and Slowing the Flow measures. This consultation has not identified any ongoing work that we were unaware of, but it has shown that there is a large pool of skills and resources available and a range of sites in which partners have some interest. We will develop a case for a Foss Catchment Project Officer to help facilitate and support bringing some of these things together to develop new sites.
- Continue to develop plans for a flood storage area on the Foss as part of the York Flood Alleviation Scheme. Our plans align with a specific site mentioned by some respondents.
- Work with the Dales to Vale network as a key forum for discussion of Slowing the Flow and for the development of new projects. As cautioned by some respondents, we will bear in mind the nature of the network and we will ensure that where necessary actions or plans remain within the control of an appropriate single body. If a Foss Catchment Project Officer is appointed, we will recommend that they sit within North Yorkshire County Council, but report progress to the DVRN, using their network to progress measures.
- Use the Flood Risk Management Plans to record and track specific actions. As this is not a document that all parties know or refer to we will ensure that progress and developments are communicated through other methods too.

This study was focused on work upstream of York for the benefit of the city, but, as several respondents noted, there are similar issues to be considered downstream of York on the Ouse and also around the River Wharfe. We are also aware of work in other parts of England that could be relevant to Yorkshire. We will ensure that lessons are shared across areas and that issues such as 'convergent flood peaks', where rivers come together are fully considered.

Responses to Questions 5 to 14

Questions 1-4 were about the respondent and the survey

The Slowing the Flow study is designed to dovetail with the York 5-year Plan. Our ambition is that the 5-year Plan will achieve, as far as is possible, a consistent standard of hard flood defences through the city of York. Additional protection and climate change mitigation will then be addressed through other measures in the wider catchment.

Question Five: Do you support this approach?

All respondents agreed with the approach with the majority (13/17) answering 'yes', and the other four answering 'in part'. Some of the key points raised were:

- Natural flood management provides low-cost, climate resilient solutions to help hard flood defences cope with expected higher-frequency flood events
- Land next to becks and dykes that frequently floods and is therefore unsuitable for agriculture could be used to plant trees. Tree planting also provides other environmental benefits
- We can't keep building higher flood defences, we need a holistic approach
- A consistent level of hard protection supported, no point in defence with gaps in it
- It is pivotal to consider the entire Ouse catchment
- The process potentially could impact farming considerably and needs to be considered highly. Productive land is very important and needs to remain viable and farmers will need compensating
- Action needs to be coordinated and involve the local Internal Drainage Boards
- It is hard to support a plan without full details

The study recommends further investigation of large washlands and reservoirs in the Swale, Ure, Nidd and Ouse, to optimise the use of existing water storage areas find opportunities for new ones. Any physical works would be developed and consulted on through the statutory process.

Question Six: Would you or your organisation like to be involved in these early investigations?

The majority of respondents (11/17) answered 'yes', two respondents answered 'no', one respondent answered 'no response' and 3 respondents answered 'more information'. Some of the keys points raised were:

- Planting trees in flood plains can be counter-productive, with water storage a better option. Water storage also helps to prevent synchronising flows.
- If productive farmland is to be used then farmers must be recompensed and land must be drained immediately after downstream danger has passed.

We had suggestions of areas that respondents believe may be suitable to implement slowing the flow measure, and some respondents specifically stated that they would like to be kept informed and involved with any engagement.

A very large number of Natural Flood Management sites and measures will be required before a meaningful reduction in flood risk is achieved. These measures could be immediately in or alongside watercourses, but could also involve slowing runoff down slopes or improving soil structure to increase water absorption. Changes could be made in parallel with other improvements and could be eligible for government funding.

Question Seven: Do you or your organisation have Sites in the Foss or Swale, Ure, Nidd, and Ouse catchments where you would be interested in investigating the application of natural flood management measures?

Seven respondents responded positively to this question, although only one specified a particular site both in their control and available immediately. Others noted that they have an interest in a range of sites, covering the Swale, Ure, Nidd and Foss and the Ouse downstream of York.

Question Eight: Do you or your organisation have skills, resources or expertise that could help develop natural flood management sites?

Over half (10/17) of respondents suggested that they have some skills, resources or expertise that could help to develop natural flood management sites. As some of the respondents represent larger societies or groups, this is a very positive message suggesting that we can access large pools of professional and voluntary resources.

Question Nine: Do you or your organisation have ongoing projects that either include natural flood management or which could be developed to include it? - Please provide details

Three respondents answered that they had ongoing projects that include natural flood management.

Question Ten: Do you or your organisation have proposed projects that either include natural flood management or which could be developed to include it?

Three respondents answered that they have proposed projects, with one respondent noting a range of options within their academic programme.

We propose to use the Dales to Vale River Network as the primary forum in which to develop natural Flood Management proposals on the Ouse and Foss catchments. The Dales to Vale Rivers Network is a catchment partnership which brings together local people, communities, organisations and businesses to make decisions on managing the interconnected bodies of water in the catchment area. Their new catchment plan for the Swale, Ure, Nidd, Ouse and Wharfe catchments identifies a 'wish list' of projects that will move the catchment towards its aim of creating clean healthy environments that support people and wildlife.

Question 11: Do you support our proposal to use the Dales to Vale River Network?

Fourteen respondents answered 'yes' to this question, whilst two respondents answered no.

Question 12: If no, what other approach should be considered?

Of the two respondents that answered no to the previous question, one answered 'setting up a new specific group' and suggested that to implement NFM over a large area a specific land-owner/manager group would need to be set up. The other did not propose an alternative group and described Dales to Vale as 'a great organisation', but raised concerns over the future staffing and funding that they will need in order to be effective in building relationships and delivering change.

Three respondents answered 'yes' to Q11 but did comment on the need for the group to have clear governance and good communications with all relevant parties.

Flood risk management plans (FRMP) explain the risk of flooding from rivers, the sea, surface water, groundwater and reservoirs. They set out how Risk Management Authorities (RMAs) will work together with communities to manage flood risk. FRMPs bring together information about all sources of flooding and the actions being considered to manage the risk and improve resilience. We propose to record actions and progress for 'Slowing the Flow' in the Humber River Basin District FRMP.

Question 13: Do you believe this is suitable as a primary way to record and track progress of Slowing the Flow actions?

Fifteen respondents answered 'yes' to this question, one respondent answered 'no' and one respondent did not provide a response.

Question 14: If no what other methods should be considered?

The respondent who answered 'no' to the previous question specified that the Environment Agency should lead as they are the only body with the necessary breadth of skills and statutory responsibilities.

The person who gave no response commented that the FRMP should be used if it is helpful, but that they didn't know what other tools are available.

Respondents who had answered 'yes' to Q13 also commented on the need for good communications, the need to learn from the River Hull Strategy, and made specific references to other national targets and the identification of Strategic Flood Risk Areas within the FRMP.

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