

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENT AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

TO:	STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT PLANNING & TRANSPORT COMMITTEE		
DATE:	9th July 2019		
TITLE:	PETITION FROM RESIDENTS - OBJECTION TO ENVIRONMENT AGENCY LOWER CAVERSHAM FLOOD REDUCTION SCHEME		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	COUNCILLOR A PAGE	PORTFOLIO:	STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING AND TRANSPORT
SERVICE:	COMMERCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES	WARDS:	BOROUGH WIDE
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JOB TITLE:	STREETCARE SERVICES MANAGER	E-MAIL:	sam.shenan@reading.gov.uk

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 To report to the Strategic Environment & Planning Committee the receipt of a petition objecting to Environment Agency Lower Caversham Flood Reduction Scheme.

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 That the Committee notes the report and thanks Mr Goddard for the submission of the petition.
- 2.2 That the petition and its contents be recorded as an objection to the Environment Agency Proposed Lower Caversham Flood Reduction Scheme.
- 2.3 That the Council continues to work with the Environment Agency in order to raise concerns that need to be addressed as part of the design process while recognising the reduced flood risk benefits the scheme would create.
- 2.4 That the Committee notes that the scheme would require planning permission where the proposals would be assessed against the Council's planning policies and other material considerations.
- 2.4 That the Environment Agency be invited back to a future Strategic Environment Planning & Transport Committee to present the progress on the Lower Caversham Flood Reduction Scheme.

3. POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 A petition was submitted to the Full Council on 25 June 2019. Councillor Page, Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning & Transport acknowledged receipt of the petition which was referred to this Committee.
- 3.2 The Strategic Environment, Planning & Transport Committee includes consideration of matters concerning 'Flood Prevention' within its terms of reference.
- 3.3 The Borough Council under the Flood & Water Management Act 2010 is the lead flood authority for this area.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 The Council has received a petition from Mr Paul Goddard, which contains 430 signatures, on behalf of persons at different addresses.
- 4.2 The petition reads as follows:

'Opposition to the Environment Agency's Flood Defence Proposals

We oppose the Environment Agency's (EA) flood defence proposals for Caversham.

There has been no reported property damage attributed to the River Thames flooding but the EA are proposing measures that will drastically affect the environment!

The proposed walls 4 to 5 kms in length will have no planting within 4 metres of them and this threatens all the hedges and trees at the north of Christchurch Meadow and anywhere else the wall is to be constructed.

The proposed Conveyance Channel will destroy the "Sandy" play park and as a culvert it will be a significant safety hazard close to a children's play area. It will also need the removal of most of the mature trees both sides of Reading Bridge as well as the removal of the iconic Poplar trees on George Street. The loss of ANY TREES supposedly has a detrimental effect in regard of pollution and should be avoided.

The proposals appear to be at odds with what is expected of the EA. You would think that they would want to protect the environment not destroy it.

Experts say that we can expect a net loss of water because of Global Warming and that water storage should be our main goal.

Finally, it is probable that the funding shortfall will be sought from Reading and Berkshire Councils and we urge that you oppose these EA proposals.'

5. THE PROPOSAL

- 5.1 The Committee is asked to note the petition.
- 5.2 The proposed Lower Caversham Flood Alleviation Scheme is an Environment Agency (EA) led scheme that is looking to reduce the impact of flooding to properties and infrastructure in Reading during a severe flooding event.
- 5.3 The Council is a consultee in the process and the final design proposals have not yet been submitted to the Council for formal response.
- 5.4 The Council is working with the Environment Agency and will continue to raise concerns that need to be addressed as part of the design process.
- 5.5 The proposed scheme will require Planning Consent and a full consultation process will follow, as appropriate when the scheme is ready for submission.
- 5.6 It should be noted that if this project was delivered, residents of the Borough would benefit from a reduced level of flood risk.
- 5.7 The Council has not agreed any funding for this project in its capital programme. Funding for the remainder of the EA scheme would still need to be secured and as of yet has not been determined. In relation to a financial contribution from Reading Borough Council the EA confirms that the Council would be just one of the groups that they would discuss the funding requirements with. Exactly what form the contribution would take is still to be agreed.
- 5.8 The Council is committed to reducing the risk from Flooding in Reading, as per our Flood & Water Management Act 2010 responsibilities. All Planning Applications that are submitted to the Council are vigorously assessed in line with the Council's Policies, taking into account the Council's statutory flood reduction obligations and the Climate Change Emergency announced by the Council. An informed decision to support or reject the application will be made at the appropriate Planning Applications Committee.
- 5.9 The Council will invite the Environment Agency to commence a detailed pre-planning application process and to attend a future Strategic Environment Planning & Transport Committee to present their flood reduction proposals.

6. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

- 6.1 The reduction of flood risk to Reading will contribute to the Council's Corporate Plan 2018-21 (refreshed Spring 2019) objectives of:
 - Securing the economic success of Reading
 - Keeping Reading's environment clean, green and safe

- Ensuring the Council is fit for the future

7. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

- 7.1 The EA Lower Caversham Flood Reduction Scheme planning application will be made available on the Council's website for the public to comment on.
- 7.2 The EA are carrying out a series of public meetings to gather concerns raised by the public to address within the scheme design proposals.

8. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 8.1 In addition to the Human Rights Act 1998 the Council is required to comply with the Equalities Act 2010. Section 149 of the Equalities Act 2010 requires the Council to have due regard to the need to:-
- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
 - advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
 - foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- 8.2 There is no overall change to service delivery at this time. Should any future updates/amendments be required, which result in service delivery changes, an equality impact assessment will be carried out.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The Council, as Highway Authority, has a duty under the Flood & Water Management Act 2010 to reduce the risk of flooding.
- 9.2 The Council, as Highway Authority, has a duty under the Highways Act 1980 to maintain the public highway, including highway structures.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 The Environment Agency has secured £11M of funding towards their scheme. This is a combination of Government Grant in Aid and Local Levy through the Regional Flood and Coastal Committee.
- 10.2 It should be noted that the Lower Caversham Flood Reduction scheme has an estimated cost of £ 35M for the full scheme, should it be brought forward in its entirety. Funding for the remainder of the EA scheme would still need to be secured and as of yet has not been determined.

10.3 The Council has not agreed any funding for this project in its capital programme.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

11.1 EA presentation of the Lower Caversham Flood Reduction Scheme to the Strategic Environment Planning & Transport Committee on 18th March 2019.