

A major milestone for the Oxford Flood Alleviation Scheme

Planning application submitted to reduce flood risk to the city from the River Thames

The Environment Agency has submitted the planning application to build the Oxford Flood Alleviation Scheme. This is a significant step towards reducing flood risk to homes, businesses and transport links in Oxford.

A major project led by the Environment Agency in partnership with 9 other organisations, the Oxford Flood Alleviation Scheme is one of the biggest flood schemes currently planned in England.

Oxford has a long history of flooding, with significant floods in recent decades damaging homes and businesses and closing the railway and major roads into the city.

Working with the natural floodplain to the west of Oxford, the proposed scheme will create a new stream meandering through a gently sloping floodplain of grazing meadow with wildflowers and wetland. People will be able to enjoy walking and cycling alongside the new stream, and looking out for wildlife in the wetland and meadows.

When water levels in the River Thames are high, the stream will start to fill its floodplain, reducing flood risk to built-up areas of the city.

Oxfordshire County Council will decide whether to approve the application following their online public consultation. People can submit comments on the planning application via the council's ePlanning system at

<https://myeplanning.oxfordshire.gov.uk/Planning/Display/MW.0027/22>.

Joanne Emberson Wines, Flood Risk Manager at the Environment Agency, said:

“The Oxford Flood Alleviation Scheme will reduce flood risk to all properties in Oxford currently at risk of flooding from the River Thames. It’s a long-term solution that will help the city adapt to our changing climate and make it more resilient to future floods.”

“The scheme has also been designed to bring environmental and community improvements to the area, creating a new wetland landscape that will benefit wildlife and local people for generations to come. Submitting this planning application is a huge step in making this a reality for communities in and around Oxford.”

Councillor Emily Smith, Leader of Vale of White Horse District Council, said:

“With climate change, flood risk is increasing, and therefore the need to protect our communities has never been more pressing. The Oxford Flood Alleviation Scheme will provide much needed reassurance to the Vale communities of South Hinksey, Kennington and North Hinksey, which are at regular risk of flooding.”

The Oxford Flood Alliance, made up of local residents affected by flooding, has worked closely with the Environment Agency over many years on the development of the Oxford Flood Alleviation Scheme. A representative said: *“We’re proud to have helped get the scheme to this point; it has been a huge effort across multiple partners bringing their expertise to the table.”*

“We believe the Oxford Flood Alleviation Scheme is the best option for Oxford, its communities, its economy and biodiversity. Risk of severe flooding is increasing all the time and we need to ensure we are in a position to manage this.”

Notes to editors:

- The project team considered more than 100 combinations of options to reduce flood risk from the River Thames in Oxford, working with the community every step of the way.
- The Oxford Flood Alleviation Scheme will be effective against the scale of the largest Oxford flood in living memory - 1947.
- The new stream will be approximately 5km long, running from just north of Botley Road down to south of the A423 near Kennington, where it rejoins the River Thames. Most of this area is farmland and flood meadow.
- The scheme will see improved footpaths, and a new permissive walking and cycling path alongside the stream between Osney Mead and the Devil’s Backbone in South Hinksey.
- The scheme will create over 20 hectares of new wetland habitat and around 16 hectares of floodplain meadow. It will be maintained largely through traditional land management techniques such as grazing.
- We are working with environmental charity Earth Trust on our plan for the long-term environmental benefits of the scheme. This will help make the most of the unique opportunity to improve the local environment and further enhance the new landscape and habitats of the scheme over time.
- Hard engineering will be kept to a minimum, but there will be new structures where needed, such as bridges for footpaths to cross the new stream; culverts (tunnels) for floodwater to pass under main roads; and earth embankments and flood walls.
- The scheme partners are: Environment Agency, Oxfordshire County Council, Oxford City Council, Vale of White Horse District Council, Thames Water, Thames Regional Flood and Coastal Committee, Oxford Flood Alliance, Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership, University of Oxford, and Highways England.
- The scheme is projected to cost £150 million to build, and will save £1.4 billion in avoided damages, by reducing flood damage and impacts on the city over the next 100 years. It is part of the record £5.2bn investment in new flood and coastal defences to better protect hundreds of thousands of properties across the country.
- For more information go to www.gov.uk/government/publications/oxford-flood-scheme/oxford-flood-scheme

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The Environment Agency – the leading organisation for protecting and improving the environment in England – has a 5-year plan for achieving a cleaner, greener and healthier future. Read more about how we are becoming climate resilient, improving the health of air, land and water for people and nature, and supporting sustainable green growth [here](#).