

**To:** City Executive Board  
**Date:** 13 June 2018  
**Report of:** Head of Planning, Sustainable Development & Regulatory Services  
**Title of Report:** Response to the consultation on the planning application for the Oxford Flood Alleviation Scheme (OFAS)

## Summary and recommendations

**Purpose of report:** To ask CEB to note and endorse the content of the City Council's technical and corporate response to the consultation on the planning application for the Oxford Flood Alleviation Scheme.

The planning application has been submitted to the County Council as a minerals and waste application, The City Council are being consulted at a district level. The City Council is providing comments from the council's planning specialists on air quality, archaeology, contaminated land, flood mitigation, green belt & planning policy, heritage & urban design, noise and trees & landscaping. The response also includes the Council's comments as a landowner and stakeholder

**Key decision:** No  
**Executive Board Member:** Councillor Hollingsworth, Planning  
**Corporate Priority:** None  
**Policy Framework:** None

**Recommendations:** That the City Executive Board resolves to:

1. **Note** the contents of the Council's response to the consultation; and
2. **Endorse** the Council's response to the consultation

## **Appendices**

Appendix 1	Site Location Plan (and outline of sites for proposed development)
Appendix 2	City Council's response to the consultation on the planning application for the Oxford Flood Alleviation Scheme (OFAS)

### **Introduction and background**

1. Oxford City Council has been working closely with the Environment Agency (EA) and local partners for the last 3 years, to progress the Oxford Flood Alleviation Scheme (OFAS). It has been an active part of the OFAS Project Board and fully supports the £121m scheme's outcomes, which if operational would reduce the likelihood of flooding for 1,500 properties in Oxford, with over 1,200 benefiting from a standard of protection greater than a 1 in 100 (1%) annual risk of flooding.
2. Flooding within Oxford currently causes transport disruption, with closures of the railway line and main roads to the west (Botley Road) and the south (Abingdon Road) of the city. These roads are important for access to the city by cars, buses (including Park and Ride) and bicycles. The scheme would greatly benefit the City by reducing this risk and offer greater resilience to important utilities such as the sewer network, electricity sub-stations and broadband communications.
3. The scheme would work by creating more space for water within the existing western floodplain of the city. The scheme addresses flooding from the main channel of the River Thames and from the Hinksey and Bulstake Streams. The scheme is approximately 5km long and runs from north of Botley Road down to south of the A423 southern by-pass where it re-joins the River Thames. In some areas new flood walls and embankments will be built, and in others existing temporary defence locations will be utilised as a permanent solution.
4. Investment of £56million has been secured from partners including Oxford City Council, Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership, Thames Regional Flood and Coastal Committee, Oxfordshire County Council, and Thames Water. The remaining £65million of the funding is committed by Government.
5. As well as reducing flood risk in Oxford, the Oxford Flood Alleviation Scheme would create a wildlife corridor that links existing wildlife sites and improves overall biodiversity. The scheme would create at least 15 hectares of new priority wildlife habitat, including for freshwater species.

## Location of Development

6. The planning application site encompasses the area of land for the proposed flood alleviation scheme in the following areas:
  - Floodwalls to the north of Botley Road, at Seacourt Park and Ride and adjacent to Bullstake Close allotments
  - Floodgates at Helen Road, Henry Road and Seacourt Park and Ride
  - Modifications to the Seacourt stream
  - A new spillway east of the Seacourt stream
  - A two stage channel from south of the Botley Road to the south of the southern bypass road (A423).
  - New cycle and pedestrian bridges – West Way (south of Botley Road), Willow Walk (between Osney Mead Industrial Estate and North Hinksey Village), North Hinksey Footbridge, Devils Backbone (between New Hinksey and South Hinksey Village) and various smaller ford crossings within the central part of the proposed channel.
  - Raised defences at Ferry Hinksey Road
  - A new channel between North Hinksey Causeway and Hinksey Stream
  - Various scrapes (ephemeral lakes and flood storage areas) adjacent to the proposed channel
  - Raised defences around South Hinksey Village (to the north and south)
  - Culverts and workings around the Old Abingdon Road
  - Culverts to the east and west of the railway in the vicinity of the southern bypass
  - Flood defences to the east of New Hinksey (between the Abingdon Road and the River Thames)
  - Flood defences at Hinksey Park
  - Various control structures and small ancillary buildings associated with the work
7. Some of the above development falls outside of Oxford City's administrative area and falls within the Vale of White Horse District. For completeness (and given the importance of this scheme to the City of Oxford) the entire scheme is considered in this report and in the Council's responses.
8. Site location plans of the proposed development are included as **Appendix 1**.
9. The application site includes land that falls within the Oxford Greenbelt, Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), Special Sites of Scientific Interest (SSSIs), protected open space and locally designated nature reserves.
10. The site lies within areas which could impact upon the Oxford view cones, the setting of listed buildings and Conservation Areas.
11. The impacts of the construction phase of the scheme are also outlined in this report and have been considered by the applicant in their submission to the County Council.

## Consultation and Communications

12. The EA has carried out consultation throughout the preparation of the scheme. Numerous public exhibitions and events were completed by the applicant between June 2015 and December 2017. The City Council, Vale of White Horse District Council and Oxfordshire County Council have also been consulted as planning authorities (as well as the City Council and others being partners to the scheme). Local business interest groups, landowners, residents and 'downstream' communities have been consulted on the proposals. Publicity on the proposals has included leaflets, newsletters, on-line consultation and social media.
13. The summary below provides a further outline of the proposed scheme following on from the background provided above.
14. All of the documents and information relating to the application proposals are available on Oxfordshire County Council's website:  
  
<http://myeplanning2.oxfordshire.gov.uk/swiftlg/apas/run/Wphappcriteria.display>
15. To view the documents you need to input the County Council's reference number for the application which is MW.0028/18.

## Summary of Proposed Development

16. The OFAS proposes to lower parts of the existing floodplain around Oxford and create a new channel for holding water, modify existing rivers and build flood walls and embankments. The proposals would reduce flooding by creating more space for water in the floodplain to the west of the City. The scheme proposes to address flooding from the main channel of the River Thames and floodplain North of Oxford and from the Hinksey, Seacourt and Bullstake Streams.
17. The proposed scheme would have a length of approximately five kilometres and would run from north of the Botley Road to south of the Southern Bypass (A423) where it would re-join the River Thames (in Kennington). The proposed works would be focused between the A34 to the West and the mainline railway south of Oxford Station to the East. Smaller scale works are proposed between New Hinksey and the River Thames.
18. The proposed scheme would lie in areas that are predominately flood meadows and farmland but would also pass through gardens, allotments and access tracks.

It should be noted that the proposed scheme does pass through and impact on SSSI and SAC sites (including those with protected species such as Snakeshead fritillary and Creeping marshwort. In the southern portion of the development, the proposal would pass through the Old Abingdon Road Culverts which are a scheduled monument and are of national significance.

19. An Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) has been carried out with the scheme and a detailed Environmental Statement has been submitted to Oxfordshire County Council.

20. The proposals would involve the creation of the new channel to the West of Oxford in the form of two stage channel. This is a channel that is deeper in the middle and always contains water and a wider channel that is designed to fill with water immediately after a flood event (and provide flood plain storage). The proposals also include flood embankments and walls, notably to the North of Botley Road in the vicinity of Seacourt Park and Ride as well as to the East of Abingdon Road and the New Hinksey area. Culverts are proposed under the Old Abingdon Road and in the area around Redbridge which is highly constrained by existing infrastructure. Culverts are also proposed around the existing railway close to the Southern by-pass (A423) (to enable water to drain on either side of the railway).
21. New bridges are proposed which would be higher than existing bridges and enable water to pass underneath as well as accommodate the new flood channel. These new bridges would in many cases replace existing cycle and pedestrian bridges but would bring them up to an improved standard. New flood gates are proposed (notably around at Seacourt Park and Ride, Helen Road and Henry Road in West Oxford). These gates would allow access during normal water level conditions.
22. Improvements to wildlife areas are also proposed to provide new habitats. The proposals include information relating to protected species and specific requirements relating to the conservation of rare plants and animals in the area of the application site.
23. The proposals include significant landscaping with a view to softening the impact of the proposed development and creating a naturalised landscape feature.
24. It is proposed to remove Towles Mill Weir (near to the Old Abingdon Road) to improve the movement of fish within the river network.
25. Small ancillary buildings and control structures are required to enable the functioning of the flood scheme and monitor how effective it is.

### **Construction Operation and Maintenance**

26. The applicant has provided information relating to the construction phase of the development. The submitted Environmental Statement sets out the negative impacts of the development during the construction and puts forward recommendations in the Environmental Action Plan. If built, the scheme would incorporate reinstatement of planting, creation of new meadow grassland, woodland and wetland habitats to mitigate the impacts of the development.
27. It is proposed to construct the scheme over three years (with the proposed timeline being from late 2018 to 2021). The main earthworks would take place over two calendar years with approximately 15 months of works (it is only possible to work at certain times of year because of ground conditions). Tree felling and clearance is proposed to be carried out during winter to meet legislation and avoid bird nesting season.
28. The proposed working hours during construction are 7am to 7pm Monday to Friday and 8am to 1pm on Saturdays (with piling works restricted to 8am to 6pm). Further

restrictions are also proposed to reduce the impact on special events and busy commuting times.

29. The proposals would require the diverting or closing of some roads, footpaths and cycle routes. The proposed development in the Old Abingdon Road area would require the diverting of the No. 35 Bus.
30. The main access routes during construction would be the A34 via the Botley Road (A420) with a shared access through Seacourt Park and Ride as well as the South Hinksey Interchange on the A34 and the Old Abingdon Road/A4144 Abingdon Road. The proposed development would involve substantial removal of earth which would result in approximately one vehicle movement each on the A34 every 5 minutes during working hours (this peak traffic level would apply for a 21 month period out of the proposed 3 year construction period).
31. Bearing in mind the potential conflicts between the OFAS scheme delivery and the implementation of the Seacourt Park and Ride extension. The implementation strategy for both sets of works will require careful operational alignment and phasing timetables. Those discussions have already started and will continue to take place. This is key, to ensure that the park and rides sites of Seacourt and Redbridge can stay operational with as minimal disruption as possible to their operations and the vital service they provide in keeping the city accessible. There may be some unavoidable disruption, but this should be kept to a minimum in order to not waste time and public funding. It is encouraged that at least one of the two park and ride site are kept fully operational at all times.
32. Members will be aware that the Councils land interests in this project will help minimise the potential difficulties in the implementational arrangements.
33. Road closures on Old Abingdon Road and Kennington Road would be required for a period of approximately 15 months (associated with the delivery of the new culverts in Old Abingdon Road).
34. Specific measures to deal with dust and environmental impacts of construction are proposed along with extensive air quality monitoring.

### **Determination Process**

35. The application has been submitted to Oxfordshire County Council as a minerals and waste planning application. The County Council has consulted the City Council as the District Local Planning Authority (in accordance with Article 24 of Part 4 of the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015 (as amended)). The City Council have been provided until 14<sup>th</sup> June 2018 to comment on the proposals. As part of this consultation process planning officers have sought the technical and professional views of the City Council's specialists to produce the response. The decision on the planning application will be made by the County Council but they will have to take any recommendations made by the City Council (and Vale of White Horse District Council) into account when making their decision.

## **The City Council's Responses**

36. Specialist officers from the City Council's Planning, Sustainable Development and Regulatory Services have been consulted and have provided comments on the proposed scheme. The response also includes the Council's response as a landowner and stakeholder. The complete response and covering letter is set out in **Appendix 2**.
37. The response will be sent to the County Council by 14<sup>th</sup> June 2018 in order that the comments can be taken into account in the determination of the application.

## **Financial implications**

38. This CEB paper has no financial implications associated with it. However it should be noted that the council has already committed funds of £1.5million to the scheme (CEB meeting on 24 March 2016), alongside a further sum of up to £1million (funded by in-kind contributions from land disposal and compensation foregone to facilitate the Oxford Flood Alleviation Scheme, CEB meeting on 13<sup>th</sup> February 2018).

## **Legal issues**

39. The City Council has previously sought and provided advice about the legal process for the determination of the application. There are implications that relate to the transfer of land to the Environment Agency, temporary access across Council land during construction and the role of the Council as a stakeholder of the project. The Council's Constitution sets out that a decision to respond to a consultation by an outside body must be agreed by the City Executive Board where the Leader wishes the Board to approve the response.

## **Equalities impact**

40. The equalities impact of the proposed development has been considered by the Environment Agency as part of their submission and will be considered by Oxfordshire County Council as the determining authority.

## **Conclusion**

41. The City Executive Board is requested to note the contents and endorse the City Council's planning response to the consultation on the Oxford Flood Alleviation Scheme (OFAS) planning application.

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**Background Papers:**

- 1 All documents associated with the planning application being determined by Oxfordshire County Council (Reference MW.0028/18).
- 2 Oxford and Abingdon Flood Alleviation Scheme CEB Report of 24<sup>th</sup> March 2016
- 3 Oxford Flood Alleviation Scheme – CEB report of 13<sup>th</sup> February 2018