



Leigh Flood Storage Area. Increasing the height of the Storage Area.

To whom it may concern.

I write as Chairman of the Kent Flood Action Group Forum that is made of community Flood Action Groups from Collier Street, Ightham, East Peckham, Hildenborough, Tunbridge Wells and Headcorn. The group is supported by the National Flood Forum. We have come together to share experiences and good practice and to work with all agencies in finding joined up solutions to the flooding our county and communities' experiences on an increasing scale and frequency.

I am a member of the Medway Flood Partnership Strategic Group that is led by the EA. I am also Vice Chair of the Upper Medway Internal Drainage Board.

The opportunity to increase the size of the Leigh storage is very important not only to protect Tonbridge and Hildenborough in particular but it will also help other communities further down river such as East Peckham, Laddingford, Yalding and as far downstream as Maidstone. There are also potential benefits to communities situated on the Beult, Teise and Lesser Teise. In the areas not directly affected a reduction in water levels all helps in particular those properties who do not meet the criteria for Property Level Protection.

The Medway Rivers Relief Act 1976 specifically mentions operating the Leigh FSA to benefit in particular of the land in the parishes of Tonbridge and Hildenborough. It also mentions areas further downstream and this is recognised in the same section of the procedures, where it is stated that communities downstream of Tonbridge will benefit from the operation of the Leigh FSA due to a reduction in peak flows on the River Medway. This benefit decreases proportionally the further you go down stream as other factors such as flows from other tributaries and the shape of the floodplain, become more influential in determining local flood risk.

The increase in flooding in the past few years in the Medway Catchment has meant a lot of things have been considered including providing Property Flood Protection to some 250 houses in the catchment and more are being planned to be installed in the coming months in East Peckham.

Data produced by the EA shows flooding in 1927,1947,1960, 1963,1968,2000, 2013/14, 2019/20 and 2020/21. So, a lot more flood events and disruption in recent years than in previous years.

The reason that PFR has been introduced is that storage areas that had been proposed and suggested did not get the go ahead in the main due to cost benefit ratios not being met and modelling showing it may cause other areas to flood.

It is our understanding that the Leigh Storage has gone through the all the appropriate planning stages for selection and appropriate funding is available and been secured and so therefore should proceed as outlined in the EA proposals that have been submitted.

PFR has benefitted some properties but there are a number that did not qualify for various reasons and as a result are still at risk and will be because the cost to individual people to provide protection is simply not affordable. The group consider this situation to be less than satisfactory going forward.

It is our understanding that if the storage area increase does not happen the proposed embankment at Hildenborough will not proceed and PFR will be offered. As stated, before we have concerns over this solution for the reason stated.

It is noted that from the EA modelling increasing the storage water level at the barrier is unlikely to have a significant impact upstream of the FSA. However, without it down stream communities are still at some risk. Given the current arrangements communities are and rightly so concerned every time alerts and warnings are issued by the EA. These alerts and warnings are on the increase.

It is also noted that the current proposals are supported by Kent County Council, Maidstone Borough Council, Tonbridge and Malling Council, Tunbridge Wells Council, Sevenoaks Council and the Upper Internal Drainage Board. All of these organisations are involved with flood related matters and we would support all the documentation they have submitted to the enquiry.

The scheme being put forward helps communities, business and helps with the vision of Government and the EA of better protection for all in an ever-changing environment.

It is our view that to meet the challenge of more intense and more frequent heavy rainfall events being posed by climate change we need to be far quicker in investing in works that are proactive in reducing flooding.

The proposals put forward at Leigh meet this challenge and as a group we would fully support the scheme as laid out in the documents submitted by the EA. If the permission is granted the group would like consideration to be given for a Condition to be attached that the operating procedures delivers potential benefits to all communities downstream of the Leigh Flood Storage Area.

David Goff.

Chairman. Kent Flood Action Group Forum.