



RIVER MEDWAY (FLOOD RELIEF) ACT 1976

INQUIRY INTO THE ENVIRONMENT AGENCY'S REVISED SCHEME FOR THE LEIGH FLOOD STORAGE AREA, KENT

SUBMISSION BY YALDING PARISH COUNCIL

Yalding Parish Council fully supports the proposal submitted by the Environment Agency (EA) to increase the volume of the storage area at Leigh by approximately one third. However, we would urge the Inspector to address the fact that the EA's Statement of Case only refers to the potential benefits for Hildenborough and Tonbridge; it does not consider the impact on the downstream communities such as Yalding and Collier Street as is required by the River Medway (Flood Relief) Act 1976.

INTRODUCTION

Yalding Parish comprises the villages of Yalding and Laddingford, together with their respective catchment areas, and the hamlet of Benover. Yalding village is situated at the confluence of the River Medway with its tributaries the Rivers Beult and Teise.

The River Medway flows through the flood meadows adjacent to Yalding village, The River Beult flows through the centre of Yalding village crossed by a single track, medieval bridge locally referred to as Town Bridge, and the River Teise flows adjacent to the village of Laddingford, in part, next to the highway. All three rivers flow through the catchment areas of the villages and the hamlet of Benover.

Yalding Parish has a history of major flooding, but it was the floods of 13th October 2000 and 25th December 2013 that highlighted the devastation caused by flooding and the disruption to the lives of our residents and their families. In December 2013, 263 properties in the Parish were subject to severe flooding and most of those residents were displaced from their homes and from the Parish for between 9 and 12 months. The then Prime Minister, David Cameron, visited Yalding village to see for himself the damage and disruption and stated that this must never be allowed to happen again.

BACKGROUND

Following the severe floods over the winter of 2013/14, Government Ministers and the Leader of Kent County Council (KCC) agreed to fund the development of flood defence schemes to be prepared by the EA to protect the areas worse flooded in Tonbridge, Hildenborough, East Peckham, Yalding, Collier Street, East Farleigh and Wateringbury.

The project included the proposal to raise the Leigh Flood Storage Area (LFSA), together with the renewal of the gates and control mechanisms, and a scheme to control flooding on the River Beult. The investigation and outline design work were to be funded by the EA, KCC, Maidstone Borough Council (MBC) and Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council (TMBC).

The proposal was that the completed, entire project estimated cost was likely to be in the order of £35 million with the Government funding available to the EA to be in the order of £17 million. KCC had agreed that it would stand by its commitment to fund the remaining £17 million but, to be equitable, all parties involved and effected by flooding could contribute particularly in helping finding other outside sources of funding.

These defences, it was thought, would provide a significant reduction to flood risk in the Middle Medway and the Lower Beult, especially to Yalding village; however, following the modelling of the proposed River Beult part of the scheme, it became apparent that there would only be a benefit to 32 properties (some of which did not currently flood) with no benefit to Yalding village itself.

It was agreed to abandon the Lower Beult part of the scheme but to move forward with the Leigh FSA proposals.

In 2018, a scheme of Property Level Resistance (PFR) was introduced for the benefit of 246 properties in Yalding and Collier Street parishes; the installation completed late 2020. However, a further 46, mainly historic properties were, due to their construction, unable to benefit from PFR.

The frequency of flooding is increasing and several events, although not as severe as 2000 or 2013 but none the less coming close to properties, have been experienced over the past two winters. We have been reprieved on more than one occasion by a shift in the predicted rainfall.

PROTECTION OF COMMUNITIES DOWNSTREAM OF TONBRIDGE

The River Medway (Flood Relief) Act 1976 refers to the LFSA and flood relief and in particular to land in the parishes of Tonbridge and Hildenborough and further downstream. However, there is no proposal in the EA's submission to make any changes to the operating procedures of the structure to increase the benefit to those downstream communities, of which Yalding is one.

We would suggest that having a new, larger FSA is a good opportunity to review the operating procedures at Leigh. Can the EA use the models that were used when considering the Beult and Teise reservoirs to test the new structure? If so, can the EA please test what the results might be in "bigger Beult, smaller Medway" events.

CONCLUSION

There still remains 313 properties in a Flood Zone 3 area in Yalding and Collier Street parishes subject to serious flooding. PFR will protect many of those properties during smaller events but would be overwhelmed during floods such as those of 2000 and 2013. There are 46 properties that, due to their construction and the costs involved in building any defences, will remain at the mercy of another flood and the stress and upheaval this will bring.

We, therefore, reiterate our whole-hearted support for the scheme. We would respectfully urge the Inspector to grant permission but to, please, ensure that the enhanced structure is operated for the benefit of all communities on the River Medway downstream of the LFSA and not just to minimise flooding in the Tonbridge area.

Our homes and our rural communities are as important as the urban area of Tonbridge and its parishes and must not be sacrificed to flooding.

6th APRIL 2021