



Part of the
Medway Flood Partnership



The Leigh expansion and Hildenborough embankment scheme

Autumn 2021

This document provides an update on the progress of the Leigh expansion and Hildenborough embankment scheme being delivered in partnership by the Environment Agency, Kent County Council and Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council, as part of the Medway Flood Partnership.

Background

The Environment Agency is working on a scheme to increase the capacity of the Leigh Flood Storage Area (FSA) to reduce the risk to downstream homes and businesses. The scheme also includes a new embankment to protect homes in Hildenborough.

Leigh Flood Storage Area works:

At the end of September 2021, the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs **approved** the Environment Agency's application to increase the maximum stored water level within the Leigh Flood Storage Area from 28.05m AOD to 28.6m AOD.

This approval is essential for both the Leigh expansion and Hildenborough parts of the scheme to progress. The decision means that we can proceed with the scheme which will reduce flood risk to over 1,400 homes and businesses in Tonbridge and Hildenborough.

The River Medway (Flood Relief) Act 1976 sets the level to which water can be stored. Increasing this maximum level to which water can be stored requires approval from the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

The Environment Agency submitted our application to increase the maximum stored water level to the Secretary of State in early June 2020. We were unable to resolve objections so an Inquiry took place between Monday 26 April and Friday 28 May to allow concerns to be heard.

The Inspector submitted her report and recommendations for the Minister in July. The Secretary of State confirmed that a compelling case in the public interest was made. As a result, he has decided to accept the Inspector's recommendation, and approve the application to increase the maximum stored water level in the Leigh Flood Storage Area without modification or conditions.

Hildenborough embankment works:

At Hildenborough, the Environment Agency is continuing to work with residents on the final design and we are currently preparing the planning application for this aspect of the scheme. We expect to submit this to the planning authority in December 2021.

We know that residents have questions about the embankment so we will be holding a virtual engagement event in November where we'll provide an update on the proposals, show indicative landscape visualisations and answer any questions you have about the works. Please sign up to our distribution list to receive more information about this session: LEHES@environment-agency.gov.uk



Next steps:

We expect to appoint contractors for the scheme in spring 2022 with works programmed to begin at the FSA in summer 2022. The full scheme is due to be complete in autumn 2024. This is a year later than originally planned due to the time required for the public inquiry.

The construction programme for the Hildenborough part of the scheme is dependent on the planning decision. We'll provide an update on the programme if and when planning permission is received.

- Hildenborough planning application: submission December 2021
- Construction begins at Leigh FSA: summer 2022
- Full scheme complete: autumn 2024

Reservoir Act works:

Over the summer, the Environment Agency has been carrying out essential works on the Leigh FSA which are required under the Reservoirs Act 1975. The works to the embankment will be ongoing over the next three years and will not affect the operation of the Leigh FSA to reduce the risk of flooding.

The works involve lifting the top soil of the existing main embankment, laying reinforcing materials and relaying soil and seeding grass. Once these works are complete, the embankments will look very similar to how they look now.

Over autumn 2021 we will complete the works in the first working area. We will also lay a haul road on the existing Mud Lane for vehicle access and clear vegetation at the next working area between A21 and main Leigh control structure.

We will move the working compound from Lower Haysden to Powdermill Lane, but we will retain site offices at Lower Haysden. Both car parks will open for normal use.



Reinforcing materials being laid on the main embankment of the Leigh FSA

More information:

You can find out more about the history of the Leigh FSA here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/leigh-flood-storage-area>

If you'd like to find out more about how the Leigh FSA works to reduce downstream flood risk, take a look at our new You Tube animation: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9FVsi0WNa50> or search for "Leigh Flood Storage Area".

If you have any questions about any of the works described in this newsletter, or would like to join our electronic distribution list for future updates, please email the project team at: LEHES@environment-agency.gov.uk