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Medway Flood Partnership



# The Leigh expansion and Hildenborough embankment scheme

July 2020

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.

In December 2019 the Leigh Flood Storage Area (FSA) was put into action for the first time since 2014. We saw prolonged steady rainfall in the week leading up to the impounding, with totals of approximately 80mm for the week.

As a result, the Environment Agency started to store water on 20 December and the FSA was used for a period of 62 hours in total before flows were low enough that we no longer needed to store water. The water level reached in the reservoir was 27.08m which accounted for 60% of its storage capacity.

Several weeks later on 16 February 2020, we needed to utilise the Leigh FSA again and over a period of 66 hours we stored water up to a level of 27.83m which this time accounted for 90% of the total storage capacity.



*Leigh FSA storing water, Feb 2020*

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 YouTube animation: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9FVsi0WNa50> or search for "Leigh Flood Storage Area".

## Project update

The scheme is continuing to progress as planned, despite some disruption from Covid-19. A key piece of work over the past 18 months has been our consultation with landowners and organisations about our proposal to increase the maximum stored water level within the Leigh FSA during times of flood.

Currently we are able to store water to a maximum level of 28.05m Above Ordnance Datum (AOD) as measured at the control structure. Our investigations have shown that storing water to 28.6m AOD will reduce flood risk to 1,470 homes and 100 businesses in Tonbridge. Storing to this level will cover 16.4 hectares of extra footprint but will provide 7.3million m<sup>3</sup> of storage – a capacity increase of 24%.

Increasing this maximum stored water level requires permission from the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Approval for this is essential to enable both the Leigh expansion and Hildenborough aspects of the scheme to progress. Over the last 18 months we have been talking to local organisations and landowners who are affected by the increase in stored water level to explain what it means for them and discuss any concerns they have. We submitted our request to the Secretary of State to increase the stored water level in the Leigh FSA in early June and a decision will be made in due course.



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## Detailed design and planning application submission

At Leigh, slope seepage analysis carried out with Network Rail has showed that no additional works are needed on the Network Rail embankment that runs through the FSA in order to accommodate the increased stored water level. Network Rail engineers were consulted with before and after this analysis, specified the works needed and have accepted our assessment. This means that the combination of concrete walls and additional earth embankments which were proposed at the November 2018 drop in sessions will not be needed.

This is great news for the environment as the scheme will use less concrete, the works will require less construction traffic, and the scheme will result in fewer carbon emissions. It's also great news for local users of the area as there will be less disruption from construction activities.



*Photo of the railway line running through the Leigh FSA during impoundment, Feb 2020*

On the Hildenborough part of the scheme, we have been consulting with residents of Stacey Road on an initial design for the new embankment and pumping station which is proposed at the rear of their properties. These proposals will have fairly significant visual impacts on them and we have taken their concerns on board. As a result we are currently looking at an alternative alignment which will reduce this impact.

This redesign has affected the programme slightly and we have agreed with Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council to split our planning application into two:

- Leigh FSA works which will be submitted in August 2020
- Hildenborough works will be submitted towards the end of this year

Splitting the planning application into two will enable the Leigh FSA works to keep to schedule. The Leigh works need to be in place before the Hildenborough works can begin, and the working windows for parts of the Leigh expansion are restricted to summer months due to increased flood risk in the winter months. The works at Leigh include implementing some safety measures which are legally required under the Reservoirs Act 1975. Splitting the planning application into two will mean that these measures can be delivered in the required timeframe.

### Next steps

- Leigh FSA planning – August 2020
- Design activities concluded - Winter 2020/21
- Hildenborough planning – Winter 2020/21
- Construction begins – Spring 2021
- Construction ends - Autumn 2023

If you have any questions about the scheme or would like to join our electronic distribution list for future updates, please email the project team at: [LEHES@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:LEHES@environment-agency.gov.uk)