Comments from Oxford Flood Alliance on the Oxford FAS route options consultation

1. We reiterate our strong opposition to Option A in Area 7, principally because of the impact on the resident boat community. Option C would seem to be the most straightforward, least controversial and perhaps likely to be the cheapest.

2. In an attempt to reduce the overall cost and scale of the scheme, we would like to see exploration of the idea of reducing the works required in the northern sections: we wonder whether by doing work in the Sandford reach and under the railway at Kennington/Redbridge (and maybe under the Botley Road) it might be possible to do much less than at present proposed upstream of Redbridge but still achieve real benefit.

Thirty to forty years ago, the stream upstream of the Devil's Backbone was both wider and deeper, and field ditches which are now blocked and/or partially obscured were kept open and functioned better. To some extent the scheme proposals in this area can be seen as an attempt to catch up on the lack of maintenance in the intervening decades; could it be that by restoring things to how they used to be - and keeping them that way - we might achieve enough? This could have a significant reduction in the volume of spoil required to be removed, which is so very expensive.

We attach a draft document from a few years ago to give a flavour of our ideas.

We accept that new culverts under Willow Walk and the Devil's Backbone may well be essential.

We are not against the proposals for this area *per se* but believe that if a satisfactory result can be obtained with less disruption, treading on less toes, and at a cost which could make the whole project more certain by being more affordable, then that discussion is well worth having. Such discussion would be based round modelling results. So we ask, how does the cost benefit analysis of excluding work in Areas 1-3 compare with including them? What would be the cost benefit of (a) restoring the present watercourses, both Stream and field ditches, to the state they were in many years ago - i.e. wider, deeper and clearer, and then (b) adding the sort of features suggested in our document, such as swales and berms, to the existing Stream and maybe the Drain in these Areas 1-3?

When the modelling for the whole scheme is done we ask that it should be done and presented in such a way as to show the incremental flood risk reduction

benefits of adding each step (Area) and the various options, including the do-less options we have suggested here, as one goes upstream, and the cost implications thereof.

3. In Area 4, we favour Option 4B as being likely to be the most efficient way of moving water through Redbridge.

4. Areas 5/6: we favour Option B, with a completely separate channel with better potential to take flood water from the Thames and pass it around the Sandford Weir gates.

5. We would like to see wildlife benefits wherever possible and affordable within the scope of the scheme.

6. We oppose the creation of a rowing or similar lake. This would increase flood risk (as a permanent body of water occupying flood plain, displacing groundwater storage capacity) and over time would attract vehicles, buildings, tracks, all with associated flood risk.

7. On the other hand, small ponds or scrapes, dependent on filling with water naturally, could be included at low cost, without increasing flood risk and with considerable wildlife benefit: we are in favour of those.

8. If it has not already, we suggest that the possibility of using spoil for noise barriers along the A34 be considered. Also for golf courses. We hope you will examine the use of river and rail (specifically Hinksey Sidings, for the area north of the old Abingdon Road at least), as well as road, for removing spoil.

9. We note the inclusion on the consultation maps of an (albeit indicative) bund which encloses and protects the area being mooted as an extension to Seacourt P&R. Protecting a car park by taking land out of the flood plain is a potentially contentious suggestion. The inclusion of a protective bund on this map seems premature - planning permission has not yet been applied for and there is no certainty that it will be granted.

10. The current application made by Network Rail (NR) for track raising and installation of a compensatory culvert(s) has highlighted all too clearly (if that were needed) the compelling need for academic scrutiny and community scrutiny of the modelling.

The methodology must be clearly explained and the assumptions, for example whether the model is based on ‘as is’ or on ‘if cleared’, set out.

The results should be presented to the public and to planning authorities in a way that non-experts can readily understand: that would not be difficult (for example, in

the present NR case, before and after histograms for specific locations showing AOD flood depths for each flood return frequency would have been helpful).

It is imperative that the modelling should be scrutinised by the public, community groups and academic experts, both on paper and at meetings with the computer simulation available. Otherwise (a) it may be wrong and (b) people (including us) won't trust it.

11. Last, but by no means least, the crucial importance of maintenance. You know the emphasis we put on this, based on our eight years of working on flooding in the area and many before that living here. Even now there are still many structures and watercourses that need attention. The new scheme, being a 'natural' one will be subject to quite rapid deterioration: properly maintained a natural scheme has many advantages e.g. for wildlife and public acceptability, but adequate maintenance is vital. That must be both properly funded and properly organised for at least 100 years. As you know, we are in favour of some sort of 'trust' (legal form as yet unspecified) of local stakeholders to oversee maintenance.

Oxford Flood Alliance 29 February 2016