Oxford Flood Alleviation Scheme

Newsletter **March 2019**

We are working with local partners to deliver a new flood scheme for Oxford, which will reduce flood risk to homes, businesses, and major transport routes into the city. The scheme is designed to provide a long term solution to manage flooding in Oxford for the next 100 years, taking climate change projections into account.

The scheme will enhance the existing floodplain to the west of Oxford, most of which is farmland and flood meadow. We will dig out material to lower the floodplain, creating a natural looking stream which will always carry water, and a wider shallower area to the side of this that will be seeded and only carry water in times of higher flows. This will create more space for water away from built-up areas, reducing flood risk in the city whilst fitting with the existing landscape.

Scheme update

Our planning application for the Oxford Flood Alleviation Scheme is being considered by Oxfordshire County Council and we are hoping a planning decision will be made by summer 2019.

Separate from the planning process, we are talking with landowners and other affected parties to reach agreements over the land we'll need to use for the scheme to function. It's always our aim to reach land agreements directly, but as a precaution, we also run a Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO). This process allows land and rights over land to be acquired when they are needed in the public interest. When landowners or other affected parties object to a CPO, it is a normal part of the CPO process to hold a Public Inquiry. We have now had confirmation from Defra that they intend to hold a Public Inquiry and a date is being confirmed for this. Due to the timeframes needed for this part of the process, the earliest construction of the scheme will start is in 2020.

Our environmental vision

Since the very start of the design process, we have been working to ensure the scheme brings additional environmental benefits to the area and uses an approach that respects and works with the natural environment. By fully integrating environmental design in this way, we have developed a scheme that will reduce flood risk to the city over the next 100 years, and include over 20 hectares of water-dependent habitat. The second-stage channel will be seeded to create floodplain grazing marsh and landscaped to include an extensive network of backwaters, scrapes and ponds. Floodplain grazing marsh sites typically support bird species of high conservation value. The freshwater features will help improve diversity of plants and invertebrates.

The scheme will include over 20 hectares of floodplain grazing marsh with ponds and scrapes

Freshwater Habitats Trust Project Officer, Francesca Dunn, said *"Creating new habitat will benefit Oxford's freshwater life, from larger animals such as Otters to smaller species like the rare Depressed River Mussel. Together we will help reverse species declines and restore the exceptional freshwater biodiversity of the Oxford area."*

Wildlife like the depressed river mussel will benefit from the creation of a new channel

The areas between and around the ponds, scrapes and backwaters will be seeded with a wetland meadow grass and wildflower mix, 80% grass seed and 20% wildflower seed. This will include locally found species such as lady's bedstraw, yellow rattle and ragged robin.

The new channel will link up existing wetland sites, creating a wildlife corridor to the west of Oxford. The area will be managed by summer grazing and an annual vegetation cut to reduce woody growth.

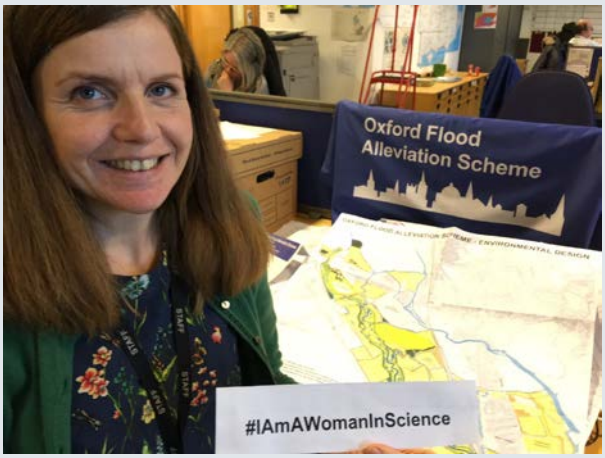
In addition to creating new habitat as part of the main scheme design, we will create a wide variety of habitats to mitigate for environmental impacts caused during construction of the scheme. This will ensure there is an overall gain for plants and animals. We will create 18 hectares of species-rich floodplain meadow, 12 hectares of native deciduous woodland and over 2km of hedgerow, planted between North and South Hinksey. Trees will be planted within the hedgerow and managed so that they can grow to full height.

We will also improve habitat in existing rivers and streams. The removal of Towles Mill weir, in conjunction with a separate scheme at the upstream end of the Seacourt Stream, will allow fish passage around the west of Oxford for the first time in over a century.

We are committed to ensuring the scheme is maintained for its lifetime and that it will continue to provide wider environmental benefits in the long term. Our aim is for the scheme to provide a true sustainable green legacy, in line with the government's 25 Year Environment Plan to improve the environment.

Women in science

11 February was Women in Science Day. We marked the day with social media posts featuring a few of the many women working on the Oxford Flood Alleviation Scheme, celebrating careers based on varied science backgrounds including environmental planning, conservation, landscape design & plant science. #WomenInScience



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