



# The Leigh expansion and Hildenborough embankment scheme

## History of flooding from the River Medway

Over the centuries, many towns and villages have developed in the floodplain of the River Medway and so flooding has always been a key risk.

Historic records show that a major flood occurs approximately every 15 years with floods in the 1920's, 1947, 1960, 1963, 1968, 1974, 1979, 2000/01, and 2013/14.

All of these floods had a significant impact – damage to property, disruption to business, upheaval to people's lives and the continued uncertainty of the threat of another flood.



## What is the Leigh Flood Storage Area?



In 1982, the then-Southern Water Authority finished constructing the Leigh Flood Storage Area (FSA) to reduce the risk of flooding to approximately 1,200 homes and businesses in Tonbridge and Hildenborough. The FSA works to store the peak of a flood upstream and release it in a controlled manner once the peak has passed.

The FSA covers 278 hectares stretching from Leigh upstream towards Penshurst. It is formed of a 1.3 kilometre long, 5 metre high earth embankment across the Medway valley.

The River Medway itself passes through 3 steel gates built into the embankment. These gates can be moved to control the amount of water flowing downstream by either letting the river flow normally, or restricting the flow to hold water in the storage area.

## The River Medway (Flood Relief) Act 1976

The operation of the FSA is governed by the River Medway (Flood Relief) Act 1976. A document under this Act (known as the 'Scheme') sets out the maximum level to which water can be stored. Under the Scheme, the operators of the storage area (now the Environment Agency), can store water to 28.05m Above Ordnance Datum Newlyn (AODN).



At the time of construction, landowners who owned land within the boundary of the FSA (as set out in the Act) were paid a single compensation payment, and the area affected by the FSA was described in the land registry deeds for the property. This noted that the area within the boundary could be flooded to any depth and for any duration required.

## What's happening now?

Climate change will increase the risk of flooding in the coming years so the Environment Agency is progressing a project to increase the capacity of the Leigh FSA to reduce the risk to more homes and businesses in Tonbridge and Hildenborough. To do this we are planning to increase the stored water level to 28.6m AODN. This will require an amendment to the maximum water level set out in the Scheme under the Act.



### What is the process to amend the Scheme under the Act?

The process that the Environment Agency will follow to request an amendment to the stored water level is set out below:

1. The Environment Agency will contact key organisations as described in the Act, all landowners within the current flood storage area and anyone who will be brought into the flood storage area through its expansion, to explain the proposals and seek their views. We will write to all the landowners to set this out and offer a meeting to discuss and answer any questions and seek views. This information will be provided in writing following the meeting.
2. Before submitting a proposed Scheme to the Minister, the Environment Agency will supply a copy of the proposed Scheme to those described above and notify them of the date on which they plan to submit the proposed Scheme to the Minister for approval.
3. The Environment Agency will then write to the Minister with the proposal.
4. The Minister will refrain from making a decision for one month. If in that time there are no representations, the Minister can then take a decision on whether to approve the Scheme. If there are representations which cannot be resolved, a local inquiry or hearing will be held to review the evidence and make a recommendation to the Minister, who will then make their decision.

### How will landowners in the FSA be affected?

- Whilst we are expanding the flood storage area, due to the landscape, most of this extra capacity will be gained closest to the control structure where we will store water up to 55cm deeper than now. Approximately 16.4 hectares of extra land around the edge of the flood storage area will be needed as part of the expanded scheme but this will allow the FSA to hold 24% more water.
- The agreements to flood land within the existing FSA remain unchanged and no further compensation is due as the original compensation was made for the lifetime of the storage area.
- Any land outside of the current FSA boundary (as stipulated within the Act) but which is brought into the FSA as a result of the expansion may be eligible for compensation for any damage. This can be discussed in more detail at meetings with landowners.

The Environment Agency are keen to work with landowners and organisations impacted by this change to understand any concerns as early as possible.

If you have any questions about the scheme, do get in touch with the project team by emailing:

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