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working locally and nationally to
protect and enhance a beautiful,
thriving countryside for everyone to
value and enjoy

CPRE Oxfordshire response to Oxford Flood Alleviation Scheme options consultation, February 2016

The western flood plain of the Thames around Oxford is an essential part of the historic entrance and landscape of Oxford. It provides a green corridor into the heart of Oxford, providing both biodiversity and recreational opportunities within the urban environment. These green corridors following the rivers and streams through Oxford are an iconic part of the character of Oxford. *It is important, therefore, that everything possible must be done to preserve and enhance these green corridors.*

The repeated severe flooding on the Abingdon Road in recent years is clearly a considerable problem and measures must be taken to reduce, if not eliminate, the events. However, the expense and disruption of the planned channel (which ever option is adopted) are considerable and we believe that other options have not been sufficiently explored. Current thinking on flood protection adopts a 'whole catchment approach'. Such an approach involves considering the entire river system and, in particular, the headwaters of the catchment. For example a very relevant study by Acreman et al (2007) suggested flood peaks on the Cherwell river could be reduced by restoring the historic flood plains. Flood plains not only provide storage of flood waters but also, if properly managed, provide havens for biodiversity (terrestrial and aquatic), recreation opportunities and rural employment. *We would like to see a comprehensive study of the whole of the upper Thames (and tributaries) to explore the contribution to flood management of restoration (and enhancement) of the historic flood plains and water meadows of the upper Thames.*

It is of course self-evident that there should be no further industrial or domestic development within the flood plains of the Thames basin.

If, after a comprehensive study, some sort of enhancement of the channel to the west of Oxford is deemed necessary, every effort must be taken to minimise its impact on the character and integrity of the west Oxford flood plain. There are important natural and historic features, such as old orchards and mature trees near Weirs Mill Stream, which should be protected.

While we acknowledge and welcome the commitment in the plan to restore the natural environment with the flood plain, we believe the plan underestimates the massive disruption this major civil engineering project will cause and believe it will be many years, if ever, before this beautiful and tranquil part of Oxford will be restored. Within the consultation there have been fine words but few firm plans on how to minimise disruption and ensure restoration. ***We would therefore like to see much more effort and planning going into the minimisation of the disruption and positive restoration of the natural and historic environment of the west Oxford flood plain.***

This large civil engineering project (including the removal of large amounts of spoil to create the channel) will inevitably require new infrastructure for access and storage. CPRE is concerned that these access facilities will become permanent leading to further urbanisation of this rural corridor. ***We would strongly urge that access and storage facilities are removed after the completion of the project and the area restored to a pristine state.***

To the layman's perspective any structure which hastens the flow of water around Oxford will inevitably increase the potential for flooding downstream. During the consultation very little information was given concerning the downstream effects of the project. ***Any further stage must include a comprehensive assessment of these downstream effects and information meetings for the downstream communities.***

In conclusion, while CPRE fully appreciates that the Thames and its tributaries must be positively managed to ameliorate the serious flooding that has occurred in Oxford, we feel a very limited approach has been taken in the planning for the current alleviation scheme. We believe a whole catchment approach should be taken. We further urge that complex assessments of the operation of the proposed channel and its downstream impact must be subject to a rigorous and independent review.

The Thames corridor is a valuable resource for Oxfordshire and indeed is emblematic of Oxfordshire and Oxford. Every effort should be made to preserve and enhance the natural character of the Thames corridor which, in the process, should provide for improved flood protection, improved wildlife habitats, improved recreational facilities and enhanced rural employment opportunities.

Yours sincerely

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