

THE ENVIRONMENT AGENCY &amp; TAUNTON DEANE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**CONSTRUCTION OF FLOOD EMBANKMENTS, ROAD RAMP AND THROTTLE STRUCTURES ON THE HILLFARRANCE BROOK AND VILLAGE STREAM, FLOOD DIVERSION CHANNEL LINKING THE VILLAGE STREAM AND ALLERFORD BROOK AND MINOR IMPROVEMENTS TO THE ALLERFORD BROOK, LAND TO THE WEST, NORTH AND EAST OF HILLFARRANCE, TAUNTON AS AMPLIFIED BY ENVIRONMENTAL REPORT RECEIVED 23RD DECEMBER, 2002 AND LETTER DATED 6TH JANUARY, 2003 WITH ACCOMPANYING DRAWING NO. 2456-SK122**

16550/24960

FULL PERMISSION

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**PROPOSAL**

The proposal is intended to alleviate the flooding problems which are experienced by residents of Hillfarrance. The settlement has been flooded at least 7 times in the last 34 years from two ordinary watercourses, the Hillfarrance Brook and Village Stream. The flooding problems can be traced back to the 17th and 18th centuries with the building of two corn mills, Hillfarrance Mill and Ford Mill. This entailed the diversion of the natural Hillfarrance watercourse to provide the necessary head to drive the mills. The Hillfarrance Brook is now perched above its natural floodplain, and when viewed from Ford Bridge (upstream of Hillfarrance) it is clear that the channel would not naturally follow its present alignment. During flood events the excess floodwater reverts back to the original floodplain. Unfortunately this natural floodplain of the Hillfarrance Brook effectively runs through areas that have now been developed for housing. Downstream of Hillfarrance at Allerford, the existing flooding problems arise from the construction of the Bristol - Exeter railway embankment (and earlier the Great Western Canal) across the floodplain and the deteriorating flow capacity of the existing field and railway ditches and channels. Minor road and field flooding commences as a result of events of less than a 1 in 1 year return period, and damage to property commences as a result of events with a 1 in 2 year return period. In excess of 40 properties are at risk from a 1 in 100 year event flood from the Hillfarrance and Allerford Brooks. Property at Allerford is at risk of flooding during the 1 in 10 year event from the Allerford Brook, and from the River Tone during a 1 in 100 year event. The railway line is at risk of inundation from a 1 in 25 year event from the Allerford Brook.

Due to the repeated disruption and misery caused, and the residual health and economic effects on the residents, the project to provide a flood defence for Hillfarrance has been granted 'Accelerated Scheme' status by DEFRA. Various options have been fully appraised and the preferred option forms the subject of the current application. Two other possible options were appraised in considerable detail:- i) a southern diversion comprising a restriction of the flow to the Village Stream and improvements to the flow capacity south of the settlement, and ii) flood detention upstream of Hillfarrance to reduce the peak flows in the Hillfarrance Brook and Village Stream to a level at which the majority of property damage could be avoided. The latter scheme could only have been carried out at significant cost and the former would have had greater environmental effects and be slightly costlier than the preferred option. The preferred

scheme the subject of this application comprises:- i) the construction of a new flood diversion channel linking the Village Stream and Allerford Brook to the north of the settlement, including flood embankments, ii) the construction of a flood embankment, road ramp and throttle structures on the Hillfarrance Brook and Village Stream to direct flood flows over a new spillway into the new flood diversion channel, iii) the construction of a highway bridge and footbridge over the new flood diversion channel, iv) minor improvements to the Allerford Brook between the settlement and the River Tone and v) the creation of new hedges and planting of trees along the length of the new flood diversion channel. Most of the structures will be constructed of reinforced concrete, although in order to blend their appearance to their surroundings, it is proposed that they be faced in brick or stone to match construction of nearby buildings and constructions. The main objective of the scheme is to reduce the frequency of property flooding from once in two years to the indicative standard, providing a defence from flooding to 40 properties in the settlement. The design is sufficiently robust to cater for the 1 in 200 or 1 in 100 year plus 20% increase in flows within the freeboard allowance. The principle behind the scheme is that the flood flows which currently flow through the settlement would be directed to and conveyed along a new flood channel cut through farmland to the north of the settlement. The channel need only be taken sufficiently far downstream of the settlement to a point where flood levels would be lower than property levels in the settlement. In extreme events, the flow, similar in peak value and volume to that which would have been conveyed via the village roads, will be conveyed safely to join the floodplain downstream of the settlement. The scheme is a stand-alone project although there is the opportunity to extend the scheme later to take account of any climate changes. There has been overwhelming public support (by public meetings and display) for the preferred option. The programme is for the works to be completed in the autumn/winter of this year.

## **CONSULTATIONS AND REPRESENTATIONS**

COUNTY HIGHWAY AUTHORITY with regard to the physical alterations to the public highway and the new accesses to the public highway, work shall not commence on these until detailed plans have been submitted to and approved by the Highway Authority. COUNTY ARCHAEOLOGIST the Environmental Assessment reports that there exists potential for the exposure of archaeological remains and possibly retrieval of Palaeo-environmental evidence. Any archaeological issues can be dealt with during the construction process. This can be secured by a condition requiring that prior to work commencing the applicants secure the implementation of a programme of archaeological work in accordance with a written scheme of investigation. WESTERN POWER DISTRIBUTION it would appear that this channel may have an affect on a number of 11 kv and 33 kv poles and the 132 kv tower line at Hillfarrance. All costs to deviate these lines would be chargeable to the developer. All new and existing Western Power Distribution equipment on site should be assumed to be live until proved otherwise and confirmed in writing. In particular the developer must comply with the requirements of the Health and Safety Executive guidance laid down in HS(G)47, 'Avoiding danger from underground services'. Work taking place in the vicinity of equipment is regulated under the Electricity at Work Regulations 1989, the Health and Safety Act 1974 and the CDM Regulations 94. Safe working procedures should be defined and practiced. If there are overhead lines crossing the site, the developer must

comply with the requirements of the Health and Safety Executive guidance laid down in GS6, 'Avoidance of Danger from overhead electric lines'. SOMERSET ENVIRONMENTAL RECORDS CENTRE no SSSIs, NNRs, County Wildlife Sites (CWS), County Geological Sites recorded at or adjacent to the application site. There is one SSSI and five CWS within 1 km of the application site. SOMERSET WILDLIFE TRUST recommend that any consent be conditional upon the various ecological safeguards set out in the Environmental Report being carried out, both in terms of the direct impacts of the scheme e.g. on plants and vegetation and also the potential indirect impacts upon the Langs Farm SSSI.

LANDSCAPE OFFICER seems acceptable so far, will assess details of landscape proposals when submitted. Subject to excavations near to hedgerows being appropriately managed, have no further comments. LANDSCAPE OFFICER (WILDLIFE) the environmental report and proposed mitigation works appear reasonable and should overcome any possible disturbance to wildlife habitats. RIGHTS OF WAY OFFICER rights of way crossings have all been sorted out and provisions made to ensure that the legal routes remain within the law. DRAINAGE OFFICER no objections. ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH OFFICER any imported soil for the construction of flood embankments should be either of 'greenfield' origin or, if unknown or of 'brownfield' origin, should be tested for contamination by a suitable laboratory for substances as specified in the appropriate guidance and achieve levels of substances suitable to the end use.

BRADFORD-ON-TONE PARISH COUNCIL (adjacent parish) no comment. OAKE PARISH COUNCIL are wholeheartedly behind this scheme and thoroughly support the application.

ELEVEN LETTERS OF SUPPORT urge everyone involved to do their utmost to ensure the scheme is approved as soon as possible as the long term forecast gives extreme weather and are faced with higher floods, claims not able to be met by insurance companies and for homes literally being destroyed; if the project is delayed the cost will rise; the village has been flooded for years, particularly recently with the onset of global warming; if measures not put into effect dread to think what will become of properties, will not be able to insure them or sell them; strongly support; essential for the future of the village where three-quarters of the properties are at risk to recurrent flooding; when flooding occurs, flood water passes through the village at high speed to a considerable depth, which is extremely dangerous with real risk of loss of life, the village becomes cut off and inaccessible to even the emergency services and water enters the main drain and raw sewage flows out;

## **POLICY CONTEXT**

Policy 60 of the Somerset and Exmoor National Park Joint Structure Plan Review states that areas vulnerable to flooding should continue to be protected from development

which would cause a net loss of flood storage area or interrupt the free flow of water or adversely affect their environmental or ecological value.

## **ASSESSMENT**

The watercourse and adjacent floodplain on which the proposed works are to be undertaken do not have any environmental designation. The adjacent watercourse and floodplain are designated (SSSI and County Wildlife Site) but the proposed scheme will not adversely affect those areas. This was a factor considered in the adoption of the preferred option. The core of the settlement is a Conservation Area and an Area of High Archaeological Potential, with a number of Listed Buildings. There will be no adverse affect on these. The scheme will create habitat listed under the National Biodiversity Action Plan, leading to a net gain in such habitat. No trees subject to Tree Preservation Orders will be removed. It will be necessary to remove some sections of hedgerow to construct the flood diversion channel, although none of these is classified as 'important' under the Hedgerow Regulations 1997. The proposed additional hedge and tree planting integrated within the scheme will enhance and extend the existing wildlife habitat. Short term negative ecological impacts will be avoided by timing the works to avoid the bird breeding and fish spawning seasons. The structures are to be designed to ensure that they do not impede the safe movement of otters or divert them onto the roads.

The agents state that the preferred option the subject of the current application mirrors the current flooding mechanism and therefore inherently should not change the existing frequency or depth of flooding for the worse outside the protected area. They do however say that the Oake to Bradford-on-Tone road will continue to flood, although it will generally not be made worse by the scheme, and that it is proposed to include flood warning signage as part of the scheme. Property and roads within the hamlet of Allerford are also still likely to flood following the scheme, although the threshold of flooding is to be raised by improvements to the existing drainage. The application will provide a scheme which does not raise the depth of flooding on the Bradford-on-Tone to Oake road and provides a highway route into Hillfarrance which does not flood.

There are no formal flood defences at present for Hillfarrance and this scheme will put in place flood defence of an appropriate standard. Flooding in the River Tone and River Parrett catchments is a major issue. The flooding in recent years has been very severe in some locations and there are now a number of initiatives being undertaken to try to develop solutions to the problems on a catchment wide basis. The appraisal carried out for this scheme has been progressed to ensure that it is consistent with the requirements of the various initiatives. Detailed analyses undertaken in the appraisal for this application have been used to inform the plans being prepared concurrently for the overall catchment. The result of the scheme will be to remove 7 ha of agricultural land from the flood plain, exclude 1000 m of public road, 750 m of public footpath and the churchyard from fluvial flooding and protect the Bristol - Exeter railway line, the Anchor Inn and some 40 residential properties from flooding. There will also be wider community benefits through the scheme by the creation of an improved and flood free vehicular access route into the village. My recommendation is therefore one of permission.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

Permission be GRANTED subject to conditions of materials of structures and bridges, landscaping, retention/protection of hedges, detailed plans of physical alterations to the public highway and the new accesses to the public highway, programme of archaeological works and works to be carried out in accordance with the Project Appraisal Report. Notes regarding any imported 'brownfield' soils to be tested for contamination and advisory notes with regard to Western Power Distribution structures and equipment.

**In preparing this report the Planning Officer has considered fully the implications and requirements of the Human Rights Act 1998.**

**CONTACT OFFICER: 356461 MR J HAMER**

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