

Axminster Millbrook Flood Improvement Scheme

Report of the Head of Planning, Transportation and Environment

Please note that the following recommendations are subject to consideration and determination by the Cabinet (and confirmation under the provisions of the Council's Constitution) before taking effect.

Recommendation: It is recommended that Cabinet:

- (a) approve the Axminster Millbrook Flood Improvement scheme at an estimated cost of £998,000;**
- (b) increase the Planning, Transportation and Environment (PTE) 2016/17 capital programme by £490,000, funded £100,000 from the DCC revenue budget for flood prevention works, £50,000 from the PTE revenue flood risk management budget, £240,000 from external grants and £100,000 from external contributions. Also, increase the PTE 2017/18 capital programme by £371,000, funded £321,000 from external grants and £50,000 from the DCC revenue budget for flood prevention works.**

1. Summary and Purpose of Report

This report highlights the flooding experienced in Axminster in 2012, when over 40 properties suffered internal flooding and the ongoing risk to over 160 properties from the Millbrook ordinary watercourse. It also details the scheme proposals to significantly reduce the risk of this occurring again and recommends that Devon County Council (DCC) continues to support the delivery of these essential flood improvements through its capital programme.

2. Background

As a result of the severe storm event in July 2012 and the overtopping of the Millbrook ordinary watercourse, over 40 properties suffered internal flooding in Axminster. The main areas affected were The Cricketers and Willhay Lane, with flood water depths of up to 900mm recorded inside some properties. This had devastating consequences for some property owners who had to move out of their homes for over 6 months.

Detailed investigations and assessment work undertaken since 2012 have identified that over 160 properties are at risk of flooding from a 1 in 100 year event, which is the proposed standard of protection for the scheme design. Based on the criteria set out in the Local Flood Risk Management Strategy for Devon, the Axminster Millbrook catchment should be considered one of our highest priorities for flood improvements.

3. Scheme Proposals

The proposed scheme was split into 2 phases to suit funding and delivery opportunities. Phase 1 included the construction of a flood defence wall upstream of the Willhay Lane culvert to reduce the risk of any overtopping being conveyed towards the properties. This work was carried out and funded by DCC in 2015 and is included as an essential partnership contribution towards the overall scheme and the consideration of Defra Flood Defence Grant in Aid.

Phase 2, now referred to as ‘the scheme’, includes upsizing of the existing culvert under Willhay Lane and, to avoid passing the flood risk on to others (i.e. Network Rail), the culvert is then extended to connect with the existing culvert arrangement under the London to Waterloo railway line. A tree catcher has been installed upstream of the culvert to prevent blockage and channel widening works downstream of the railway, towards the main River Axe, required to improve conveyance have both been carried out as advanced works to the scheme.

4. Consultations/Representations/Technical Data

Throughout the investigation and design process it has been necessary to liaise very closely with Network Rail to ensure the works do not have any negative impact on the railway. This has required significant additional works, including design checks, approvals, increased infrastructure and supervision, which has caused a considerable increase in scheme design and construction costs.

There has also been a close working relationship between DCC’s Flood Risk Management team, the DCC Engineering Design Group, the Environment Agency, East Devon District Council, Axminster Town Council and relevant landowners. Public updates on the investigations and scheme development process have also been provided via the local media.

5. Financial Considerations

The additional works required to satisfy Network Rail and associated risks have significantly increased the cost estimates for this scheme. Early estimates were in the order of £490,000 and, on this basis, approval for £240,000 Flood Defence Grant in Aid (FDGiA) was granted from Defra. However, recent estimates, which take account of new requirements and assessment of risk, have increased to £861,000, including £100,000 for contingency. A funding variation has been submitted to the Environment Agency to request an additional £321,000 FDGiA and has been approved; an additional £50,000 has, also, been allocated from the DCC revenue budget for flood prevention. Despite the increased costs the scheme still attracts a very high cost benefit ratio, so ensuring its ongoing viability.

The full breakdown of funding sources for the scheme is shown below. Relevant revenue allocations will be capitalised and monitored through DCC’s capital programme.

Funding Source	Prior to 2016/17	2016/17	2017/18
Prior costs incurred by DCC – including phase 1	£137,381		
DCC PT&E Flood Risk Management revenue budget		£50,000	
Flood Defence Grant in Aid		£240,000	£321,000
Local Levy		£50,000	
DCC revenue budget for Flood Prevention Works		£100,000	£50,000
East Devon District Council		£50,000	
Total	£137,381	£490,000	£371,000
		(including £100k contingency)	

6. Sustainability, Equality and Public Health Considerations

All of the flood improvements mentioned in this report will be developed in accordance with the Equality and Environmental Assessments produced in support of the Local Flood Risk Management Strategy. All elements of the scheme have been assessed at the appropriate stage using the corporate, integrated assessment tool, with relevant equality and environmental impacts identified and acted on as necessary.

The works outlined in this report are all designed to improve the protection afforded to the community and individual properties currently at particular risk of flooding and, thereby, support health and wellbeing. More than just protecting the properties alone, it should be noted that flood water has the potential for transporting contaminants, such as sewage; so, reducing flood risk has clear health benefits.

7. Legal Considerations

All works will be carried out in accordance with the powers and duties assigned to DCC under the Flood and Water Management Act 2010, the Land Drainage Act 1991 and any other relevant legislation. The lawful implications and consequences of the proposals and relevant actions will be taken into account through their development.

8. Risk Management Considerations

Flooding is already identified as a high risk in the corporate risk register and these works are intended to address that. All works will be assessed to ensure that all necessary actions are carried out to safeguard the Council's position.

The current standard of protection is estimated to be up to the 1 in 5 year event and this scheme aims to improve this standard up to the 1 in 100 year scenario.

The need to gain approvals from Network Rail could delay the start of the scheme and increase costs.

9. Discussion

The delivery of these essential flood improvements will provide a significantly greater standard of protection and reduce the frequent risk of flooding to over 160 properties in The Cricketers / Willhay Lane area of Axminster.

Further considerations regarding the flood risks associated with the main River Axe are under review by the Environment Agency and will not compromise the benefits from these flood improvements.

10. Options/Alternatives

Through the initial investigations, an initial long list of options to reduce the level of flood risk emanating from the Millbrook watercourse was identified and considered. In view of the ongoing threat of flooding and the growing expectation of assistance, the option to do nothing was discounted.

The currently proposed works were deemed to provide the most advantageous and cost beneficial scheme, which will maximise protection and resilience for the community. This process was scrutinised by the Environment Agency's National Project Assurance Service (NPAS) to justify and approve the allocation of Defra grant in aid.

11. Reason for Recommendation/Conclusion

The severity of flooding experienced in Axminster in 2012 and the extent of ongoing threat to a large number of residential properties justify this as a high priority catchment for attention and investment. It is, therefore, recommended that the proposed scheme is approved for delivery through the DCC capital programme to secure these essential flood improvements and, thereby, reduce the risk of flooding to this community within Axminster.

Dave Black
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Electoral Divisions: All

Cabinet Member for Highway Management and Flood Prevention: Councillor Stuart Hughes

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Local Government Act 1972: List of Background Papers

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Background Paper	Date	File Reference
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Nil

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