

The Leigh expansion and Hildenborough embankment scheme

Spring/summer 2024

Project overview

The Environment Agency is working with Kent County Council, Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council and the Kent and Medway Economic Partnership (previously the South East Local Enterprise Partnership) to reduce flood risk to over 1,400 homes and businesses in Tonbridge, Hildenborough and downstream communities.

The Leigh expansion and Hildenborough embankment scheme has 2 aspects: increasing the capacity of the Leigh Flood Storage Area (FSA) and constructing a new embankment to protect homes in Hildenborough.

Recent progress

Apologies for the lateness of this spring newsletter. It was ready to be issued just as the election was announced. At which point we entered the pre-election period when government communications must be limited. So we've given it a little refresh and update.

Last winter was the third wettest winter on record for the Kent and South London area. This meant we came close to operating the Leigh flood storage area on a few occasions. Although the wet weather and ground conditions slowed down the works, we are still planning to complete the project by the end of 2025, weather dependent.

Hildenborough

The water levels have now reduced and Southern Water has started laying the new sewer pipe diversion to enable the main flood works. There is still a potential that some dewatering may be needed, though this is weather dependant. So the dewatering system will remain in place until Southern Water complete their works.

If dewatering is needed, they will need to discharge groundwater into Hawden Stream. This will be filtered and discharged through hoses. The flows in the stream will be monitored visually by the team on site. They don't expect any adverse impact in the Hawden Stream however, if this does occur, they will stop the discharge until the levels have subsided. They are aiming to complete the works by the end of 2024.

Footpath closures

The footpath at Cattle Arch reopened in March. The SR435 footpath that runs over the embankment next to the control structure is closed so that we can carry out works safely. We expect to reopen it in October 2024.

Leigh FSA expansion

All 3 new gates for the Leigh control structure have now arrived on site. Due to their size, they had to be delivered in sections and welded together on site.

Once assembled, each of them weighs around 12.5 tonnes which is equivalent to the weight of a single-decker!



One of the gates being delivered



Welding the gates together on site

Next steps

Leigh FSA

We have started the electrical works needed at the control structure before we start removing the first gate.

Gate replacement works will take place during the summer months and the flood storage area will continue to remain operational throughout the works.

We expect to finish works at Cattle Arch by the end of September 2024, and will plant up areas of vegetation that we had to remove to do the works



Hildenborough

VolkerStevin will be working in tandem with Southern Water. Over the coming months we will set up our site compound. We'll then install a temporary access road and a temporary crossing over the Hawden Stream which we'll use to access the area for the new defence.

Vegetation and tree clearance has started in preparation for the piling works. Further tree clearance along the Hawden stream will be carried out over the next few weeks.

When undertaking any work of this kind ecological supervision is always in place. During the hand searches of the rotting logs and scrub we uncovered a variety of wildlife including smooth newts, a common toad and a grass snake. All of them were safely relocated to new homes close by.



Working together

Over the spring we attended the Hildenborough Parish Council AGM and held a public drop-in event. It was lovely to meet so many of you and share experiences and ideas. Thanks to everybody that took the time to come out and see us on such a wet evening!



In April, members of the project team joined the Leigh Parish Council Annual General Meeting to give a short presentation about our works. It was great to see so many people there and answer questions about the scheme. Thank you to everybody who joined us at this event.

10 members of the Upper Medway Internal Drainage Board (IDB) joined the team at the Leigh FSA recently to find out more about the structure and our work on the scheme, followed by a visit to the Leigh control structure.

Improving the image of construction

The Considerate Constructors Scheme (CCS) promotes high standards and accountability within the construction industry. A representative from the CCS team recently visited the Leigh site and we are pleased to report that the site is considered Excellent with a score of 44 out of 45.

To provide feedback call the freephonenumber 0800 737 1423, with our site reference: 134154

How to get in touch or find out more

We are pleased to announce that Liz Faulkner has joined the VolkerStevin team as our new Public Liaison Officer. If you would like to find out more about the project or would like to join our electronic distribution list for future updates, please contact Liz and the project team at:

LEHES@environment-agency.gov.uk