

# The Leigh expansion and Hildenborough embankment scheme

Winter 2025/26

## 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 1,800 homes and 575 non-residential properties 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

The team has continued to make good progress over the autumn and winter period, despite the challenging weather conditions.



The north gate being lifted into the control structure

## Leigh FSA expansion

The work on the new flood gates continues to progress well. The team successfully installed the new North gate in November. Since then, we have been working on the extensive cabling needed to connect it up to the power supply and control mechanisms.

In February we carried out the first dry lift to test the connections - a key milestone in the upgrade programme.

The team has also been installing the new steel platforms, handrailing and fencing around the North Gate. These are important improvements for day-to-day safety and accessibility. It will also make it easier to carry out essential maintenance works in the future.

## Eel Pass

The Leigh control structure prevents eels from naturally migrating upstream, so our project includes a new eel pass alongside the structure to restore an important migratory route and improve ecological connectivity in the area.

The eel pass is specially designed with roughened surfaces and slow water which allow young eels - known as elvers - to grip and move steadily against the flow. This helps them to climb up and over the embankment before safely re-entering the river upstream.



The new eel pass structure being constructed next to the Leigh control structure

The team are currently installing the concrete trough units that form the main structure of the pass. Once complete, these units will create a continuous, safe pathway for eels to travel along. Despite the wet and muddy conditions on site, progress is good.

### Hildenborough

Despite some very muddy conditions, work has continued at pace across the site, with the team meeting several key milestones. At the pumping station, the team has finished installing the trash screen, handrails, pumps and platforms. They've also carried out an initial test of the system. The discharge tray concrete and handrails are also finished, improving safety and functionality.

Reinstatement works are progressing well, with the outlet channel underway and the gardens now fully reinstated.

### Cattle Arch at Leigh

At Cattle Arch, the team has been making steady progress, with several elements of finishing work now coming together on site. Rabbit fencing works were completed in January, providing essential protection to the ground around the pumping station and helping maintain the integrity of the surrounding landscape.

We are pleased to report that landscaping (grass cutting and seeding) will soon take place across the full site, helping to reinstate the area and support long-term environmental improvements as we move towards the final stages of landscaping.

All these works mark another step forward in preparing the pumping station for full operation and restoring the wider site.

### Community engagement

It's been a productive and rewarding few months for VolkerStevin's Liz Faulkner who has been working hard on meaningful community engagement.



Careers talk to students at Mid Kent College

VolkerStevin believe in making a genuine, positive impact. From school visits and site tours to work with local primary and secondary schools, MidKent and North Kent Colleges, they're proud of the connections they've strengthened.

This year, they've also expanded their support by working with the local food bank and spreading Christmas cheer within the community and at the local hospital.



Tunbridge Wells Hospital ICU Staff with their Christmas treats

Liz said: "These partnerships matter. By engaging with charities, educational providers and local communities, we help create opportunities that benefit everyone. Our work affects the places people live, work and play - and we're committed to ensuring that impact is always a positive one."

We look forward to building on this momentum as we continue to deliver infrastructure that makes a lasting difference."

### How to get in touch or learn more

To find out more about how the two elements of the scheme work, you can view our YouTube animations:

- [Hildenborough embankment scheme - YouTube](#)
- [How the Leigh flood Storage Area works to reduce flood risk](#)

If you have any questions or would like to join our electronic distribution list for future updates, please contact the project team at:  
[LEHES@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:LEHES@environment-agency.gov.uk)

For works-related issues, you can also contact our contractor, VolkerStevin, at:  
[lehesenquiries@volkerstevin.co.uk](mailto:lehesenquiries@volkerstevin.co.uk)

To provide feedback, call our freephone number:  
**0800 737 1423** with our site reference: **134154**