**Hinksey and Osney Environment Group: Oxford Flood and Environment Group**

**Press release April 2023**

**Oxford, UK, deserves a better flood scheme**

A coalition of environmental groups and experts are calling on the Environment Agency to design a better flood scheme for Oxford by removing the environmentally destructive 5k channel from the £176 million pound scheme.

As the planning application reaches the second consultation, leading hydrology experts are seriously concerned about the EA’s continued failure to address fundamental flaws in the design and modelling of the scheme.The EA has admitted that the flood scheme is untested on this scale, that the 2018 flow modelling was limited by available computing power, and their attempts to remedy this have been unsuccessful.

Meanwhile four requests from the planning authority concerning a less damaging alternative have received minimal responses, and the environmental groups will be pressing for answers.

This meeting might be the last opportunity for the public to debate the scheme before a decision by the planning authority. **Brian Durham, South Oxford floodplain resident** said: “South Oxford needs a tried and tested design exploiting the natural flood plain and creating efficient openings in man-made obstructions, capable of being delivered without the delay of a public inquiry.”

Following challenges in the first round of consultations, the EA has admitted there will be a minus one per cent biodiversity loss, while the law requires a 10% net gain. 91%, comprising over 200 respondents, to the last consultation explicitly objected to the channel that will destroy the irreplaceable MG4a Hinksey Meadows while accepting 85% of the scheme. Thousands of mature trees and miles of ancient hedgerow will also be lost for a minimal reduced flood risk that could be achieved by other means.

133 acres of greenbelt will be lost and 450,000 cubic tonnes of soil and gravel that has been storing carbon for a millennium will be lost.

Among the casualties will be the scouts will will become homeless as a result of the loss of land owned by the Ferry Hinksey Trust. **Canon Dr Chris Sugden, Chair of Trustees of Ferry Hinksey Charitable Trust** said: “The Trustees are in favour of a flood scheme for Oxford but we want one that uses a tried and tested design.”

The meeting will be chaired by West Oxford Green Party Councillor Lois Muddiman and will feature a range of speakers including Professor Kevan Martin of the Thames Valley Wildflower Meadow Project. He said. “Wildflower meadows are hotspots of botanic diversity and their deep-rooted perennial plants capture and store carbon in their soils more securely than forests, which are prone to disease and fire. Unfortunately in the last 100 years we have destroyed most of these ancient meadows - only 4 sq miles remain in the UK."

The Oxford Flood Alleviation Scheme (OFAS) proposes to divert flood water away from central Oxford via an historic and  agriculturally productive natural floodplain.  The speakers will outline the devastating environmental and economic cost of the project, the loss of access for the public for 5 years and the impact on pollution and traffic.  Detailed economic analysis by independent sustainability consultants and planners shows that the scheme remains poor value for money. In economic terms not having a channel, or a shorter one that doesn’t impact Hinksey Meadows, makes more sense than the expensive experimental channel that lacks public support.

**Sources**

·      The OFAS planning application including Regulation 25 letter and Technical Note responses can be seen at <https://myeplanning.oxfordshire.gov.uk/Planning/Display/MW.0027/22>