

SHEFFIELD COUNCIL'S CURRENT FLOOD PROTECTION CONSULTATION

RESPONSE FROM SHEFFIELD GREEN PARTY

(Submitted to the Council on 28/10/16)

Introduction

This document contains Sheffield Green Party's response to Sheffield City Council's current consultation on future flood protection measures in the areas of the Upper Don, Sheaf and other local rivers. The document contains both an Overview Statement from us (see A below) and our answers to the Council's specific consultation questions (see B below).

A. Overview Statement by Sheffield Green Party

Summary

The 2007 floods caused huge devastation in Sheffield, and tragically the loss of two lives. What isn't widely known is that the city nearly experienced a repeat in 2012. In the past few years, there have been significant floods in other areas, including west and north Yorkshire, Cumbria and Somerset.

Global warming is certainly happening. The last two years were the warmest globally since records began, and 2016 will probably be warmer still. Rising temperatures almost certainly mean more significant rainfall, which will increase the risk of flooding. Future floods could be devastating for people, the economy and the environment. So Sheffield Council, together with other people, certainly needs to take action in relation to flooding.

While we're pleased to see attention being given to flooding, we believe the Council's current consultation is deficient in at least two significant respects. First, its scope is limited, with the main focus on specific actions relating to flood protection, rather the broader approach that's needed covering both flood protection and prevention – see our arguments below. Secondly, the consultation seems to indicate that the Council is mainly focusing on flood protection proposals which could involve large-scale engineering solutions and might be inappropriate and unnecessary in some of the locations considered. Given the importance of this issue, we believe the Council should conduct a further public consultation in the future, with more specific proposals, so that interested people can consider them in some detail.

Focusing on the first, the Council's current consultation relates to action to **protect** the city against flooding, ie steps that will reduce problems once water levels have already risen. But the current consultation hardly mentions action to try to **prevent** the risks of flooding increasing in the first place, both by reducing the rate of global warming and reducing the likelihood of Sheffield's rivers becoming too full. The Council and other people need to focus on this too. Important preventive steps are summarised in the section below. Steps like these need to be included in Sheffield's strategy to avoid future flooding, so that that strategy covers both prevention and protection. They also need to be incorporated in all the city's other major strategies, including the Sheffield Local Plan, and the Council's transport, housing and environmental strategies.

The benefits of such action will be seen not just in terms of the reduced likelihood of flooding, but also in relation to lower energy bills, improved health and wellbeing for Sheffield residents, reduced traffic congestion and less air pollution. In addition, it's important to have strong communities, which can respond to risks of flooding, actual flooding and the aftermath of flooding incidents. So there should be action to increase neighbourliness and good community links, to help local communities deal with flooding emergencies and the emotional impact of recovery after such events.

Flood prevention

Action to try to prevent flooding should include action both within the city and over a wider geographical area.

The latter would include action to stop rivers and streams in the whole Don catchment area becoming too full. This would involve Sheffield working with other local authorities and with national and regional agencies to manage the land in the catchment area sustainably, both in the upland areas and at lower levels.

Within the city boundary, the Council should have a leading role in relation to flood prevention action under such headings as:

- Transport, for example making it much easier for people to reduce their use of cars, by improving arrangements for walking, cycling and public transport;
- Housing, including better insulation, and incentives for builders, residents and businesses to install renewable energy;
- Developing the city's economy in such a way that its carbon footprint is reduced;
- Managing the land within the city's boundaries in such a way that it reduces global warming and flood risk, for example:
 - stopping intensive agriculture
 - restoring the peat moorlands around Sheffield
 - increasing substantially numbers of Sheffield's trees
 - managing rivers and streams sensibly (preferably using 'slow the flow' techniques rather than lots of concrete), and
 - avoiding widespread use of hard surfacing in gardens and other open spaces;
- Increased energy generation from renewable sources, with action to ensure that fossil fuels are left underground;
- More information and advice to householders, communities, businesses and other organisations on action they can take.

Flood protection

We've argued above that the Council's consultation is deficient in at least two significant respects. Having said that, we agree that further consideration should be given to options for temporary flood water storage areas in various open spaces in the Upper Don and Sheaf catchments (such as Oughtibridge Sports Ground and Endcliffe and Millhouses Parks) and for flood defence walls and flood corridors in the areas of those river basins. However, we reserve the right to comment further on these and other options in the light of the results of the Council's current consultation (including from people who know the specific localities well), the conclusions of the statutory Environmental Impact Assessment and the future consultation on more specific proposals that we believe is needed.

The consultation doesn't mention a number of other actions to protect against flooding. For example, more potential flood-risk areas in built-up areas could be turned into "pocket parks" (like those at Nursery St and Sidney St) that can hold extra water during periods of heavy rain. Also, the Council could provide more information and advice about measures that households and businesses can take to help prevent flooding, eg collection of rainwater in water butts, ensuring permeable surfaces in gardens, and installing living green roofs on buildings.

In addition, we want the Council to take urgent and significant action in relation to flood prevention in line with our arguments above.

Given the importance of getting these proposals right, the Council should conduct a further public consultation exercise with more specific and refined proposals, probably in the next year or so.

B. Sheffield Green Party's response to the Council's specific consultation questions

[NB: The consultation questions are shown in italics below. Our responses are shown in regular font.]

1. Do you agree with the objectives of the Sheffield Flood Protection Programme?

Objectives - Protect our communities: Strongly Agree

Objectives - Grow our economy: Neither agree nor disagree

Objectives - Transform our waterways: Neither agree nor disagree

Comments: We should only be trying to develop our economy in a way that reduces our carbon footprint, ie widespread and urgent action is needed to reduce our carbon emissions. Measures to tackle climate change should be at the top of everyone's priorities.

2. Which aspects of Sheffield's rivers do you value most? Please tick all that apply, or add your own thoughts about the value of the rivers to your community and the city.

Supporting a wide variety of plants and wildlife Yes

Walking and cycling alongside the river Yes

Enjoying the river's heritage and history Yes

Improving the quality of environment for homes and businesses near to the river Yes

Your thoughts about the value of the rivers to your community and the city:

Sheffield's rivers are a sadly underused resource. The Five Weirs Walk is good, but has had lots of problems in recent years with roadworks, etc. Other rivers lack public access in many

places and are often hidden from view in culverts or behind buildings etc. The Council should work with others to increase access to the riversides for walkers and cyclists.

Your Flooding Experiences

3. *How has flooding affected you? Tick all that apply.* Flooding to the homes and workplaces of some of us. Substantial disruption to transport/travel for many of us.

4. *Please share your experiences of the impacts of flooding in Sheffield:*

Your experiences: Our members have experienced a range of problems. Some have reported that there has been an increase in flooding difficulties in recent years, perhaps because the water table has risen.

Options for Reducing Flood Risk from the Sheaf and the Don

5. *Please take a moment to look at the information and maps. These introduce all of the types of flood protection being considered, and the options that are currently emerging as those best suited to the Upper Don and Sheaf catchments. Overall, do you agree with the range of options that are being considered? (If you have additional suggestions, please write them in the comments box.)* We agree that those mentioned should be considered further; but additional options should be considered also – see our Overview Statement above.

Comments: Climate change is increasing rapidly and we urgently need to carry out measures that will protect us in a flood. For example, land management (including tree planting, managing farmland to hold back water, and creating small ponds and timber dams in rivers) in the areas around Sheffield can be used to capture and store water, and help it to slow down and soak away before reaching the rivers. However, initiatives that risk major damage to important woodlands and green spaces should be avoided unless they are widely agreed to be needed; and every effort should be made to prevent damage or felling of mature trees. In the city centre we should prioritise measures that have multiple benefits, eg uncovering culverted stretches of river can reduce flooding risk, but also improve wildlife habitat and amenity for city residents. Finally, this consultation doesn't mention the Council's current policy regarding street trees, which contribute to flood prevention and protection.

6. *Our current work is showing that due to the nature of the Upper Don and Sheaf catchments, the most appropriate options are focused on the balance between flood storage areas and flood defences. Do you agree in principle that we should try to find spaces to temporarily store flood water in areas of existing flood plains along the rivers, in order to reduce flood risk and potentially minimise the impact of flood defences downstream within the city? (If you have additional suggestions, please write them in the comments box.)* Neither agree nor disagree

Comments: We agree in principle that some temporary flood water storage areas are needed along Sheffield's rivers, and the various options should be explored further. However, we consider that the Council should disseminate more information about the likely effect of such measures, eg for Endcliffe and Millhouses Parks, including the implications of constructing flood protection barriers and any changes to ground levels. At present, we believe that the Council's initial proposals for storage areas and associated structures in some locations may be too large, and should be replaced by a larger number of smaller storage areas and structures in suitable locations.

Your Views on Potential Flood Storage Options

7 Do you agree that the following flood storage options should be considered for further investigation in the Sheaf Catchment? (please add any comments in the Comments box)

Sheaf Catchment options - Mayfield Flood Storage Area: Disagree

Sheaf Catchment options - Whiteley Woods Flood Storage Area: Disagree

Sheaf Catchment options - Endcliffe Park Flood Storage Area: Agree

Sheaf Catchment options - Totley Brook Flood Storage Area: Disagree

Sheaf Catchment options - Abbey Brook Flood Storage Area: Neither agree nor disagree

Sheaf Catchment options - Millhouses Park Flood Storage Areas: Agree

Comments: These options need to be considered in principle. However, as our response to Q6 indicates, we currently believe that the Council's initial proposals for storage areas and associated structures in some locations may be too large, and should be replaced by a larger number of smaller storage areas and structures in suitable locations. It's important that the pros and cons of various options are evaluated carefully and that further genuine consultation is undertaken before any firm decisions are taken. An additional point is that flood protection action in these areas that also leads to better pedestrian/cycle routes and facilities should be considered.

8 Do you agree that the following flood storage options should be considered for further investigation in the Upper Don Catchment? (please add any comments in the Comments box)

Upper Don Catchment options - Wharnccliffe Side Flood Storage Areas: Agree

Upper Don Catchment options - Oughtibridge Sports Ground Flood Storage Area: Agree

Upper Don Catchment options - Coronation Park Flood Storage Area: Agree

Upper Don Catchment options - Beeley Wood Flood Storage Areas: Neither agree nor disagree

Upper Don Catchment options - Loxley Flood Storage Areas: Neither agree nor disagree

Upper Don Catchment options - Rivelin Flood Storage Areas: Neither agree nor disagree

Comments: As our response to Q7 implies, these options need to be considered in principle. But we currently believe that the Council's initial proposals for storage areas and associated structures in some locations may be too large, and should be replaced by a larger number of smaller storage areas and structures in suitable locations. It's important that the pros and cons of various options are evaluated carefully and that further genuine consultation is undertaken before any firm decisions are taken. An additional point is that flood protection action in these areas that also leads to better pedestrian/cycle routes and facilities should be considered.

Your Views on Potential Flood Defence Wall Options

9 We would like your views on the height of walls that could be acceptable for various sites along the Sheaf and Porter. We have identified some possible wall heights (low, medium, high) and would like you to indicate the highest wall that is acceptable to you at the following sites: (please add any comments in the Comments box)

Walls - Sheaf and Porter - Sharrow Vale to Ecclesall:

Walls - Sheaf and Porter - Matilda Street:

Walls - Sheaf and Porter - Lower Porter:

Walls - Sheaf and Porter - Abbeydale Road to Little London:

Walls - Sheaf and Porter - Broadfield Road / Antiques Quarter:

Walls - Sheaf and Porter - Queens Road to Lower Sheaf.

Comments: If walls were to be constructed, it would seem sensible if they were sufficiently high to minimise the likelihood of water levels exceeding them, bearing in mind that flooding risks are increasing because of global warming. But it's also important to ensure that the

construction of walls in Sheffield doesn't increase flooding risks further downstream, eg in the lower Don part of Sheffield (including Meadowhall) and further east. Where walls are necessary, transparent material for them should be considered, so that views of the river aren't completely obstructed.

10 We would like your views on the height of walls that could be acceptable for various sites along the Upper Don and Loxley. We have identified some possible wall heights (low, medium, high) and would like you to indicate the highest wall that is acceptable to you at the following sites: (please add any comments in the Comments box)

Walls - Upper Don - Oughtibridge:

Walls - Upper Don - Winn Gardens:

Walls - Upper Don - Hillsborough:

Walls - Upper Don - Loxley:

Walls - Upper Don - Loxley Confluence:

Walls - Upper Don - Neepsend to Kelham Island:

Comments: If walls were to be constructed, it would seem sensible if they were sufficiently high to minimise the likelihood of water levels exceeding them, bearing in mind that flooding risks are increasing because of global warming. But it's also important to ensure that the construction of walls in Sheffield doesn't increase flooding risks further downstream, eg in the lower Don part of Sheffield (including Meadowhall) and further east. Where walls are necessary, transparent material for them should be considered, so that views of the river aren't completely obstructed.

Your Views on Rural Land Management

11 We would like your views on which of these options you believe should be used as part of our programme. (please add any comments in the Comments box)

Programme Options - Planting trees in upland areas: Strongly Agree

Programme Options - Restoring peatland: Strongly Agree

Programme Options - Working with farmers and communities to pilot land management techniques: Strongly Agree

Comments: We regard these actions as high priority, because they can play a significant part in flood prevention and safeguarding biodiversity. Also, we assume that the feasibility of using upland reservoirs more substantially is being considered? (We hope that the Council will have consulted with existing partnerships relating to the moors to the west of the city, and also drawn on the substantial experience of relevant initiatives, eg Moors for the Future and current projects on Dartmoor, Exmoor and the North York Moors.) Finally, large-scale grouse-shooting (and any unsustainable associated treatment of land) should be halted.

Your Views on Flood Corridors

12 Do you agree that the following flood corridor options should be considered for further investigation? (please add any comments in the Comments box)

Flood Corridor Options - Penistone Road: Neither agree nor disagree

Flood Corridor Options - Little London: Neither agree nor disagree

Comments: These options should certainly be considered in principle, provided that the pros and cons are carefully evaluated and further genuine consultation is undertaken before any firm decisions are taken.

Your Views on Improving Resilience

13 Do you agree that the following resilience options should be considered for further investigation? (please add any comments in the Comments box)

Options - Further Investigation - Better emergency planning: Strongly Agree

Options - Further Investigation - Householder resilience advice: Strongly Agree

Options - Further Investigation - Establish a network of flood action groups: Strongly Agree

Options - Further Investigation - Establish a network of support groups: Strongly Agree

Options - Further Investigation - Improved flood warning systems: Strongly Agree

Comments: It's important to have strong communities, which can respond to risks of flooding, actual flooding and the aftermath of flooding incidents. So there should be action to increase neighbourliness and good community links, to help local communities deal with flooding emergencies and the emotional impact of recovery after such events. The above options should certainly be considered, provided that the pros and cons are carefully evaluated and further genuine consultation is undertaken before any firm decisions are taken and action is implemented. In the short term, information and advice should be offered soon to householders and businesses in high-risk flood areas, ie before longer-term measures are implemented.

Your Alternative Options

14 Please share any alternative options you believe should be considered:

Comments: This consultation focuses only a number of selected actions relating to flood protection. The Council, with other bodies, also needs to take much more action in relation to flood prevention, together with protection actions not covered by this consultation. Such action should include measures relating to transport, housing, economic development, land management, open spaces, energy generation, and the provision of information and advice to relevant residents and organisations – see our Overview Statement above.

About You

15 Are you? A large group of Sheffield residents.

16 Do you live within the flood risk area? Some of us do.

17 Which of these best describes your ethnic or cultural background? Our members have a variety of backgrounds.

18 What is your age? Our members are in various age groups.

19 What is your postcode? We have members throughout Sheffield.