

Bid to halt flood plans

Petition launched over flood defences

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A PETITION has been launched calling on East Lothian Council to pause the Musselburgh Flood Protection Scheme.

Organisers claim the plan is based on "incomplete data" from experts appointed by East Lothian Council and are calling for more nature-based solutions to be considered.

They say that walls will be introduced down the River Esk and mature trees are at risk of being felled, arguing that the scheme is centred on "hard engineering" and bridge replacement.

They claim: "The outline design of the scheme will be presented in June for public approval of a flood scheme that will introduce walls down the River Esk and along the coast from the mouth of the river to the Brunstane Burn.

"The mature trees that line the river are all at risk of being cut down."



Ewan McDowell prepares to sign the petition, calling for a pause to the Musselburgh Flood Protection Scheme, which was highlighted by Marina Naylor and Roger Crofts at the Store Bridge on Saturday. The wooden sign is a mock-up of the heights of a bund/wall – 1.9 metres at its highest – which could be put at lower Eskside West, where residents fear trees might have to be removed to make way for the flood barriers

"The experts want us to engage in arguments about what constitutes a 'wall' and what does the ideal wall look like.

"Meanwhile, the only option available is a flood scheme that has from day one cen-

tered on hard engineering and bridge replacement.

"Only eight per cent of the current proposal relates to nature-based solutions.

"In consultation meetings, no alternative vision, with

nature at its heart, is being offered to the people of Musselburgh.

"If it is pushed through now, the scheme will already be out of step with modern thinking about nature restoration, ecol-

ogy and biodiversity, even before the first digger appears on the banks of the river."

They said: "There are alternative approaches that work

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tied to one of the trees along the River Esk at Musselburgh, which claims that "we are going to lose many of them" if the flood protection scheme gets the go-ahead

Flood plans petition

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with nature and East Lothian Council must bring these to the table. These should be provided by independent experts who work with environmental approaches first and foremost, not as an afterthought.

"What's the rush? Let's go carefully and get this right."

They are urging people to sign the petition to tell the council to pause the scheme until residents can be given "a real choice about how best to protect against the risk of flooding while working with nature to protect our river and our shore".

"We need to raise our voices now, because this scheme will change Musselburgh forever," they add.

More than 1,000 supporters have signed the petition which is available online and via paper copies.

Roger Crofts, a retired civil servant and environmental adviser, who lives near the Esk, joined others at the Store Bridge (Shorthope Street footbridge), one of three bridges earmarked for replacement under the scheme, and Fishermarrow Harbour on Saturday to highlight their concerns and urge people to sign the petition.

He claimed: "At present, the consultants have only talked about hard engineering: barriers down the river and along the coast with fixed foundations, a tree catcher up the river by the A1 bridge, and the use of two small redundant reservoirs on the South Esk.

"They have consistently dismissed what are globally known as nature-based solutions aimed at slowing water flow into and down the river such as placing wood, known as leaky dams, across the rivers and streams at key points, blocking field drains, planting trees and digging ponds.

"Their reason is that it would have no effect on the scenario 4, which is the extreme case. Unfortunately, that is what East Lothian Council and its consultants call 'the preferred scheme'.

"At least the consultants have now heeded representations from scientists that alternative scenarios should be considered, hence their scenarios 2 and 3. But even in these schemes, there is no allowance for the internationally accepted types of nature-based solutions.

"It is ironic that these approaches are now being used extensively

down south, led by the Environment Agency, whereas SEPA do not seem to be adopting this naturally sensitive and sensible approach in Scotland.

"So what many people are asking for, following our straw poll at a locally organised public meeting a few weeks ago and emphasis by the very significant response to a petition, is a thorough assessment of nature-based solutions to be undertaken, reported on publicly and included in the designs to be displayed to the public in June.

"Without that, the people of Musselburgh have no basis to consider the various options in a modern and realistic way to safeguard our town from flood risk."

David Sugden, Professor Emeritus in the School of GeoSciences at the University of Edinburgh, has lived in the Esk catchment area in Midlothian for many decades.

'Horried'

He claimed: "I must say I am horrified by such an insensitive and old-fashioned scheme to control floods.

"The plan to build walls on both sides of the river in Musselburgh will damage the environmental quality of one of the urban gems of East Lothian. It seems a harsh approach to a problem that can be tackled by more environmentally sensitive nature-based approaches.

"There seem to be two issues inflated in the current proposals, namely sea-level rise and flooding of the River Esk. The problems are different, operate on different timescales, and require different solutions. For example, reduction in the risk of flooding by the Esk is one that could be solved by a catchment approach to run-off, farming and forestry, and could be achieved in the near future at modest cost.

"The rate of future sea-level rise in the Firth of Forth is still uncertain and there is a risk of overreaction.

"For example, the loss of ice in Greenland will not materially affect Scotland because, although global sea level will rise, there is a gravitational counter effect in the North Atlantic caused by the loss of ice mass in Greenland.

"I trust there is still time to investigate alternative approaches."

A spokesperson for the Scottish Environment Protection Agency

(SEPA) said: "Nature-based solutions are an extremely important part of flood risk management in Scotland. They involve balancing and integrating the restoration of natural features and processes alongside more traditional engineering methods to help reduce flood risk to communities.

"These solutions are being actively investigated for the Musselburgh Flood Protection Scheme by the local authority. Delivery of such solutions, including more detailed assessments of the potential for natural flood management and other engineering to reduce flood risk, is the responsibility of local authorities, not SEPA."

The initial outline design will be unveiled at a major public event on June 20 and 21. It will form part of a 3D animation to "maximise the potential for delivering a clear vision" of how the scheme's physical defences – which could be concrete or glass walls, embankments, sand dunes or rock armours – environmental changes and river restoration will look within the town's existing historic and build landscape.

Individuals, businesses and other interested parties will have the opportunity to seek clarification on aspects of the initial outline scheme and provide feedback.

The project team will then compile a report to allow work to start on the revision of the outline design based on feedback collected.

It is expected that recommendations will be brought to the council's elected members for consideration and approval next January.

The flood protection plan, costing £43.5 million – 20 per cent East Lothian Council and 80 per cent Scottish Government Flood Programme – aims to introduce defences against a one-in-200-year risk of flooding in the town.

Another two separate projects have been brought together with the flood protection plan – future-proofing the ash lagoons sea wall at a cost of £52.4 million, with talks ongoing between the council and ScottishPower; and parts of the Musselburgh Active Town project to provide enhanced footpaths, pathways and cycleways with £122,000 from Sustrans.

The petition is at change.org/p/tell-east-lothian-council-to-pause-the-musselburgh-flood-protection-scheme