

West Kirby Flood Alleviation Proposals

Feedback from local engagement during
October 2015



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Introduction

Wirral Council is looking to reduce flood risk in West Kirby and is exploring how best to do this working with experts such as the Environment Agency.

In October 2015, the Council provided a number of engagement opportunities for local residents, businesses and anyone with an interest in the Council's proposals to find out more and to provide their feedback before the Council moves forward with developing the proposals further. This initial engagement was intended to provide local stakeholders with an understanding of:

- The risk of tidal flooding at West Kirby and how that risk might change in future;
- The different ways that flood risk can be reduced;
- The Council's proposals for reducing flood risk in West Kirby;
- How the proposals will be taken forward by the Council, including how the proposals will be funded.

We particularly wanted to gather feedback on the option that the Council considers the best solution to reduce the flood risk, which is the construction of a permanent flood defence structure. We wanted to know what is important to local people about the public realm in West Kirby. We also wanted to ensure that the Council's responsibility to consider how the risk of flooding in West Kirby can be reduced is understood by local people.



Local Engagement Activities – October 2015

In October 2015, the Council produced an information leaflet and a feedback form which were widely circulated in the local area between Monday 12th October 2015 and Friday 23rd October 2015. People were able to complete the feedback form online at www.wirral.gov.uk/wkfloodplan or they could hand in a paper copy at one of three drop-in sessions which took place on Tuesday 13th October, 5pm-8pm at West Kirby United Reformed Church and on Monday 19th October 5pm-8pm and Thursday 22nd October, both at West Kirby Library.

The drop-in sessions were well attended and representatives from the Council, AECOM and the Environment Agency were on hand to answer questions.

People could also post their completed feedback forms in one of the boxes provided at exhibition displays in West Kirby (first at Morrisons then at West Kirby Library) over the course of the two week engagement period.

Residents potentially directly affected by the flood risk received an individual letter letting them know about the engagement activities and encouraging them to attend and participate. A flyer and posters with information about the drop-in sessions and exhibition displays were distributed in West Kirby and the wider constituency before the engagement period began, and details published on the Council's website. The drop in sessions were also publicised in the local press. The Environment Agency held a drop-in session at West Kirby Library on Saturday 26th September 2015 to raise awareness about flood risk and handed out flyers about the Council's engagement activities to people who were interested in finding out more.

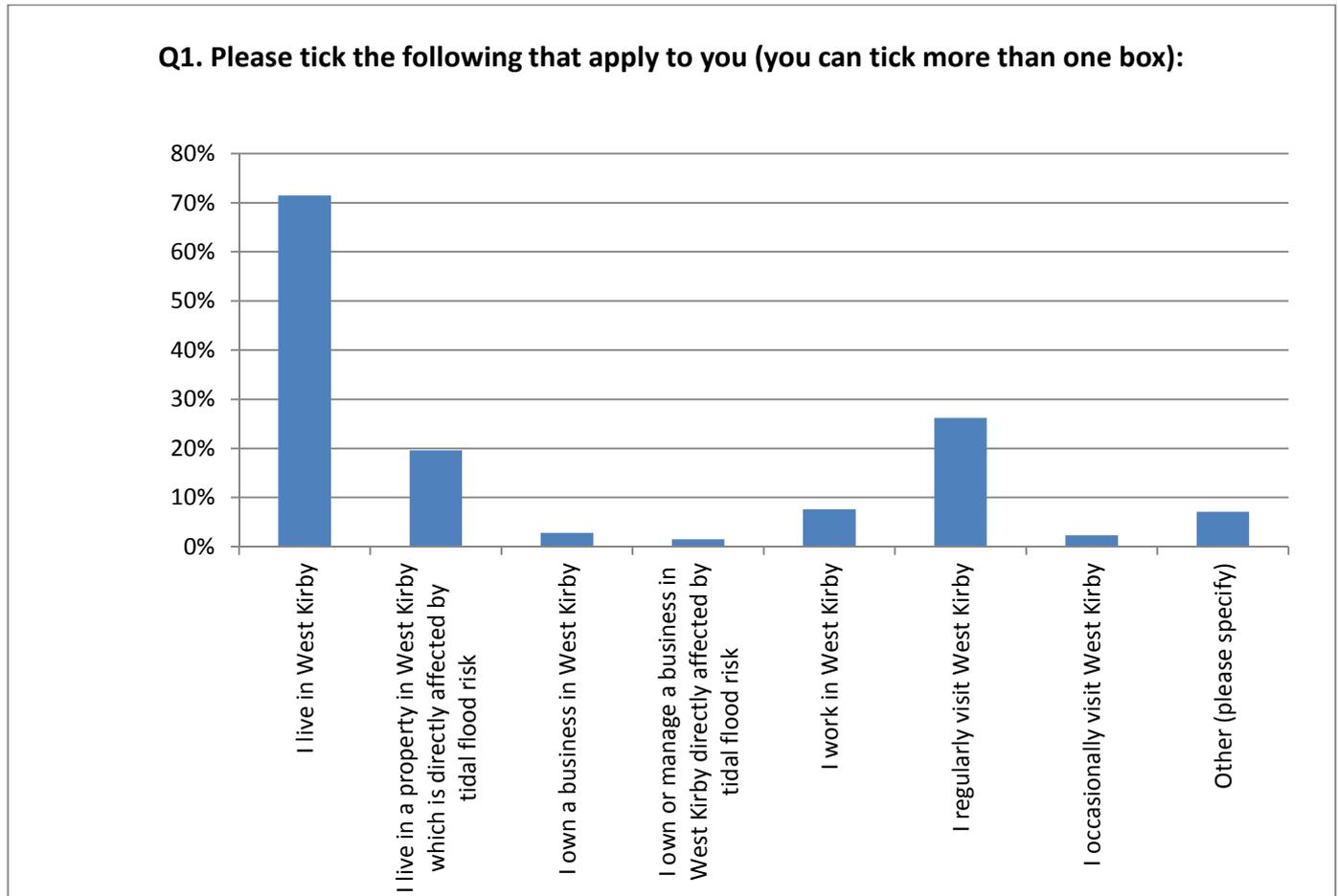
Just over 400 people completed the feedback form by the deadline of Friday 23rd October. This feedback is extremely important as it has provided the Council with evidence to support the decision-making process relating to what is known as a Planning Screening Opinion. The Planning Screening Opinion helps the Council at an early stage to understand the environmental impacts that the preferred option (in this case a new flood defence structure) might have on aspects such as ecology, landscape and visual impact and includes consideration of evidence about levels of public support. The Screening Opinion also helps to identify any issues that will require further work in the planning application. A favourable Planning Screening Opinion is a key element of the Council being able to secure grant aid funding from the Environment Agency for the project.

Local residents and stakeholders have continued to contact us with their concerns and suggestions following the engagement exercise and these will also be taken into account by the Council as they develop the proposals.

Summary of Feedback

The majority of people who completed the feedback form are residents of West Kirby with around 20% of respondents identifying themselves as living in a property and/or owning a business directly affected by tidal flood risk.

Table 1: Profile of those completing the application form

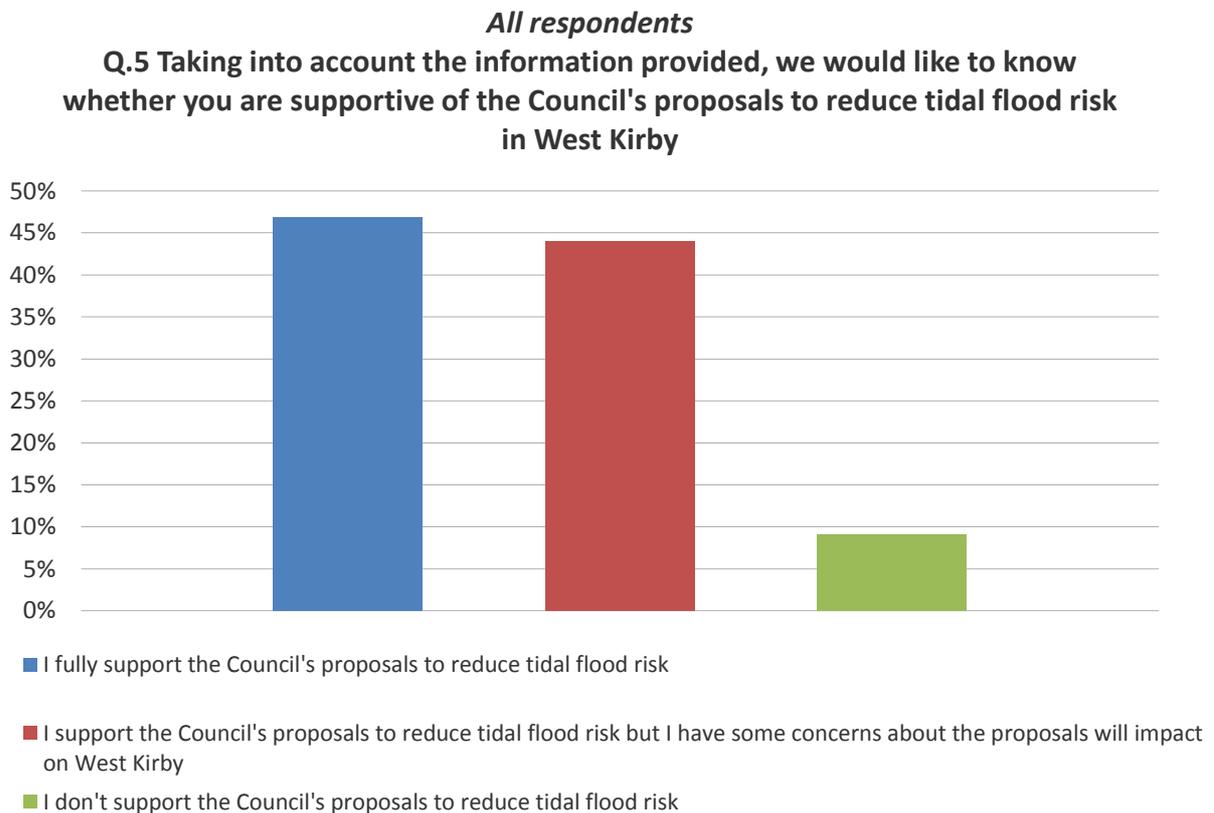


The majority of respondents say they have a good or a full understanding of the tidal flood risks at West Kirby following the engagement exercise.

As shown in Table 2 below, 90% of respondents support the Council’s proposals to reduce flood risk, with around half of these saying that they do though have some concerns about the impact on the local area.

The responses to this question highlighted that there are some residents and stakeholders who do not support the Council’s proposals - just over 9% in respect of the respondents overall to the engagement exercise and 16% of those who identified themselves as being most at risk of flooding. The Council fully understands that some people do not support the proposals and will continue to engage with local residents and other stakeholders to ensure that the project to alleviate the flood risk is taken forward sensitively and with input from those who will be most impacted.

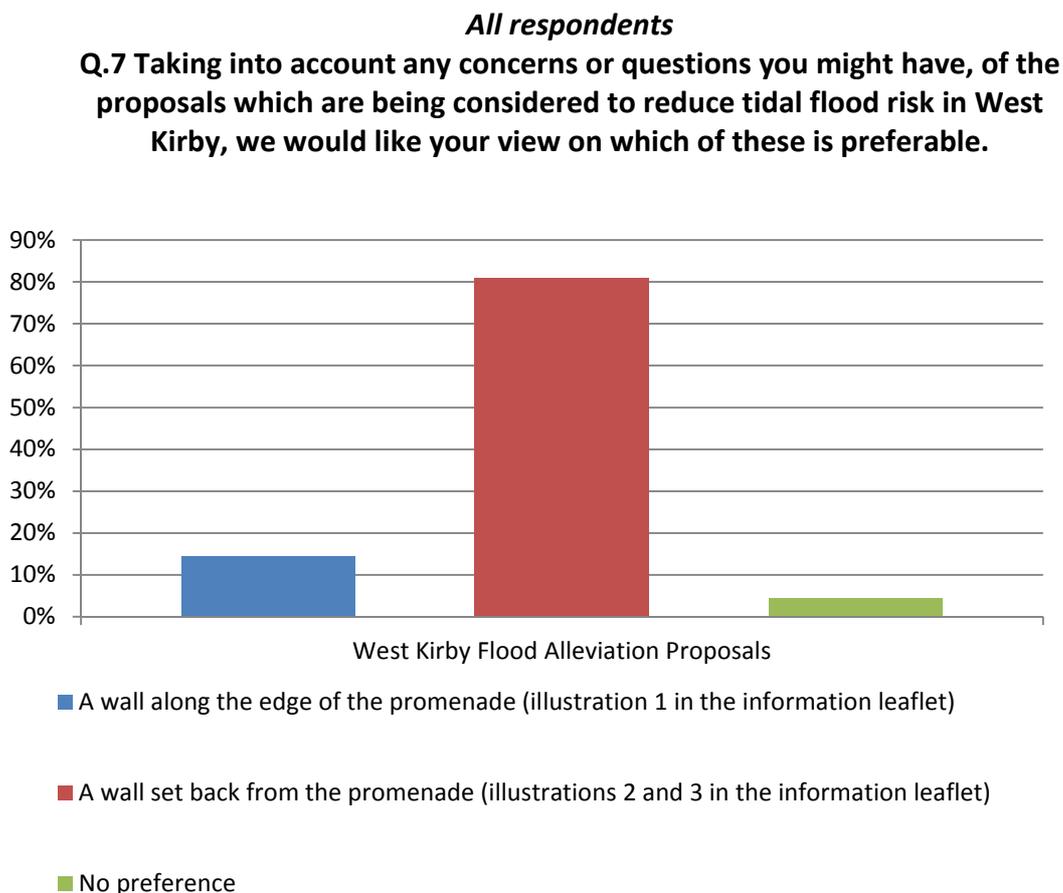
Table 2: Support for the Council’s proposals



The information leaflet contained illustrations showing what a permanent structure would look like either in place of the railings along the front edge of the promenade or towards the rear edge of the promenade, incorporating access points at regular intervals and landscaping.

On the basis of these illustrations, the preference of those who completed the feedback form is a structure set back from the promenade. Over 80% of the respondents who answered this question (85% of the overall number of respondents) prefer this option, equating to 286 of the 400 people who took the time to complete the feedback form. 70% of those who identified themselves as potentially being directly affected by the flood risk prefer this option. The feedback highlights as well that many people, whilst in broad favour of a structure set back from the promenade, have questions and concerns about the potential impact of the scheme.

Table 3: Preferred Proposal



Your Concerns

There are concerns that not enough information was provided about why a permanent flood defence structure is the preferred option as opposed to a temporary defence or other solutions. In addition, some respondents commented that they were concerned that Q.7 on the feedback form did not allow them to state that they did not wish to support any form of defence wall, or that their preference is a temporary defence.

Based on the detailed work that has been undertaken so far, the best option for West Kirby is building a permanent wall along the promenade because it is considered that this will provide the best value for money in terms of the public investment required to alleviate the flood risk. The option for a full demountable defence is not considered to present the best value for money. However, as some respondents have suggested, the flood wall could be a combination of solid wall and temporary ('demountable') defences and the balance between the permanent structure and demountable defences at access points will be a key factor in developing the scheme.

A small number of respondents have queried why an option to build a flood defence on the residential side of the promenade has not been included (i.e. incorporating / replacing existing garden walls). In addition, some of the respondents who identify themselves as being potentially directly affected by the flood risk believe individual barriers for their properties would be a more cost effective solution. These options were considered as part of the initial work to identify the best way to mitigate the risk of flooding and, whilst either would potentially reduce the effect of flooding on individual properties along South Parade, these solutions would not protect the public realm (i.e. the promenade) which is used by many people recreationally and which is important both socially and economically to the area.

A small number of respondents have also queried why a larger breakwater around the perimeter of the Marine Lake has not been considered. Whilst it is correct that the outer wall of the lake reduces the risk at South Parade, the outer wall cannot be raised significantly as the lake water needs to be allowed to replenish regularly to avoid the formation of algal blooms which can have a negative impact.

Whatever defence is in place, there are concerns that this will retain flood water on the road side of the structure and not allow it to flow back into the Marine Lake (causing additional damage). Secondary flood walls are defences which are quite common features on coastal promenades around the country. At times it is possible that water will exceed or splash over the proposed structure but landscaping of the highway and provision of suitable drainage arrangements will allow this water to drain away as soon as water levels offshore permit, as is the case at many locations elsewhere.

As is shown elsewhere in this report, the option of a wall on the edge of the promenade (i.e. replacing the railings) is not generally supported. Concerns about this are generally related to the impact that this would have on the view and how this this would impact on the promenade as a visitor attraction and on the enjoyment of children and those with mobility issues.

It is also the case that the majority of concerns about the preferred option to have a wall at the rear of the promenade are about the impact on the view and this is the main issue expressed by those who identify themselves as being directly at risk from flooding. There are concerns about this obstructing the view from parked cars, especially given that many visitors to West Kirby have mobility issues.

Another concern apparent in the feedback is the need to maintain the character of the promenade – the Victorian ‘feel’ of this location is extremely important to many local people. Comments from respondents include: *“I think West Kirby should retain its unique seafront railings and shelters to preserve its character and heritage”* and *“any changes should be completed in a sympathetic manner to keep the beauty of the front at West Kirby”*.

People are also concerned about the potential impact on parking (for example, people getting out of their cars if a defence wall is in place) and loss of the shelters and benches which make the promenade such a valued place to visit. Some people are worried that that the wall would have the effect of ‘cutting off’ or separating the promenade from the town. Another issue raised is ensuring that the access points are closed if the flood risk was imminent and how / where flood water would be channelled.

As mentioned earlier in this report, the Council will continue to engage with local people about the need to address the flood risk and ensure that concerns about the proposals are addressed as fully as possible.

Your Suggestions

Many of those who completed the feedback form have provided suggestions as to how their concerns about the preferred scheme, i.e. a permanent defence wall at the rear of the promenade, might be addressed.

In respect of the preferred scheme, those who completed the feedback form had many suggestions about what might be incorporated and how the scheme might look:

- Consider creating some elevated parking as part of the scheme which allows for a view above the flood defence wall and/or consider how access points along the defence wall can be sited adjacent to disabled parking bays so that the view can continue to be appreciated by people who may have mobility issues;

- Consider whether defined and safe pedestrian / cycle paths could be looked at as part of the project (taking into account that some people have reservations about adult cycling);
- Consider whether there is scope for additional flood defence measures for Coronation Gardens (as well as maintaining the view from the ‘ovens’) and Victoria Gardens;
- Consider ‘echelon’ / diagonal parking as part of the scheme;
- Consider how bench seating can best be incorporated as part of the defence wall and how this might be done sustainably (i.e. resulting in an attractive, low maintenance feature);
- Consider whether the wall could be designed to allow for this to be heightened as the flood risk increases over time.

The illustration suggests that planters could be included in the scheme. The feedback highlights that the conditions for planting and growing may result in this being unsuccessful (e.g. plants being washed away during high tide) so the detail of this would need to be carefully considered. In developing the scheme, people do indicate support for some sort of landscaping to ‘soften’ the defence wall and further views will be sought on this as part of the development process.

What happens next?

The feedback gathered through the engagement exercise will be used alongside an Environmental Appraisal of the options which forms part of the overall Project Appraisal Report currently being produced by AECOM on behalf of Wirral Council. The feedback and the Environmental Appraisal will be “screened” by the Local Planning Authority to provide a Planning Screening Opinion. The Project Appraisal Report and Planning Screening Opinion will be submitted to the Environment Agency in order to secure the grant aid element of funding for the scheme. Work can then begin on the necessary approvals for the scheme, which will include the detailed design for the statutory planning application.

Residents and other stakeholders will have further opportunities to comment as part of the planning process (which will include detailed drawings and illustrations being made available) and the Council is also welcoming ongoing feedback from local people to help shape the proposed scheme.

To be added to the mailing list for updates on the development of the scheme and advance notice of further consultation please email helengallagher@wirral.gov.uk

The Council would also like to take this opportunity to thank local people for their valued feedback so far.