

Axminster Town Council  
The Guildhall  
West Street  
Axminster  
Devon  
EX13 5NX

Our Ref: 36591  
Date: 18 October 2024

Via email:  
[enquiries@axminstertowncouncil.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@axminstertowncouncil.gov.uk)

Dear Council Members,

In previous correspondence to the Mayor of Axminster regarding Stoney Bridge, it was explained that the Environment Agency was waiting until further assessment of the River Axe at Stoney Bridge had been completed in order to decide whether desiltation at this location was beneficial in reducing flood risk to nearby properties. Initial results seemed to support desiltation and so we were intending to carry out a desiltation exercise this year, dependant on assent from Natural England. The River Axe has a status as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) as well as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). As an SSSI and SAC, the river is designated of international interest due to its geomorphological processes. This means that both the Environment Agency and landowners are restricted as to what they can do that will affect the river's natural processes. If we wish to carry out works, we must prove to Natural England that these natural processes will not be negatively affected. This can be difficult when removing river silt and gravels. For more information about the River Axe designations please visit [River Axe Special Area of Conservation - Evidence Pack - TIN193 \(naturalengland.org.uk\)](https://www.naturalengland.org.uk/conservation/river-axe).

Unfortunately, after initially gaining assent for the proposed works there was a late 'change in advice' from Natural England expressing their concerns about the likely impact upon the SSSI. Therefore, we needed to undertake a Stage 2 Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) of the proposed works, which would consider in greater detail the likely impacts of the proposed works and identify further mitigation. We could not complete this higher level of assessment and re-consult Natural England in time for the works to proceed in the June-September 2024 window.

We now plan to undertake the Stage 2 Habitat Regulations Assessment as well as further modelling of the river at Stoney Bridge in order to pursue permission for desiltation to be carried out next year, should the evidence continue to support this action.

Following the December flooding in 2023, we have been reappraising the potential options to manage flood risk to the community at Stoney Bridge, which considers recent flooding events as well as increased design and construction costs. The community at risk at Stoney Bridge is relatively small and as such attracts a smaller proportion of government funding. We have made a bid for additional funding based on the frequency of flooding in this location, and we are awaiting the result which will follow the government autumn budget announcement in late October. We are also investigating other possible funding sources.

To date, we have examined several options ranging from the large bypass scheme proposed in 2015/16 to individual Property Flood Resilience measures. All these options require

additional funding to allow them to go ahead. Having reviewed the cost of the 2015/16 scheme, it is very unlikely that this scheme or any other larger scale schemes to provide a defined standard of protection would be achievable under the current government funding guidance, even if additional funding is secured.

We are currently investigating other flood resilience options including improving the drainage of flood water that overtops the embankments into the wider underutilised areas of floodplain, alongside individual Property Flood Resilience measures. This approach may be possible but is subject to additional funding being secured. We will update you, Richard Foord MP and the local community when we know more following the autumn budget announcement. We have also written to Richard Foord MP and a local community contact to update them with the current position regarding desiltation and the review of options to manage flood risk at Stoney Bridge.

To improve flood resilience in the town, we are keen to work with the community to support them to develop their own Community Flood Plan, or Community Emergency Plan. Having a Community Emergency Plan helps the community consider what the risks are, and how and when they would respond before incidents like flooding occur. The emergency services also support the plans and often refer to them when an incident occurs. For more information please visit [Multiple Benefits of Community Flood Groups \(thefloodhub.co.uk\)](https://thefloodhub.co.uk)

The Environment Agency can support with this process by providing plan templates, sharing examples of other Community Emergency Plans, giving advice on the flood warning service for the area and information about predicted flooding. Funding is also available from the Devon Community Resilience Forum for initial meetings and necessary equipment once the plan is written. For more information please visit [Grant funding for community emergency resilience | Devon Communities Together](#)

We have already supported over one hundred communities that are at risk of flooding in Devon, alongside the Devon Community Resilience Forum. For more information please visit [Devon Community Resilience Forum | Devon Communities Together](#)

If you would like to discuss this further, please contact our Customers and Engagement Team, who will be happy to help you. You can contact the team via [DCISEnquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:DCISEnquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk).

Yours sincerely,



**Joanne Laeger**  
**Partnership and Strategic Overview Team Leader – Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly**

 [DCISEnquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:DCISEnquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk)  
 Environment Agency, Manley House, Kestrel Way, Exeter EX2 7LQ