



Mountmellick

FLOOD RELIEF SCHEME

Consultation Summary Report

Final

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OPW

Oifig na
nOibreacha Poiblí
Office of Public Works



JBA Project Manager

Elizabeth Russell
24 Grove Island
Corbally
LIMERICK
Co Limerick
IRELAND
V94 312N

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P02 / 10/5/2020	Final Report	Laois County Council

Contract

This report describes work commissioned by Office of Public Works (OPW), on behalf of Laois County Council (LCC). Elizabeth Russell of JBA Consulting carried out this work.

Prepared by Elizabeth Russell
Project Manager

Purpose

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1 Background to the study

1.1 Importance of communication

1.2 Importance of communication

Through the project risk register, communication with key stakeholders has been identified as a potential threat to the project success. Specific risks identified include: a lack of engagement with residents meaning they reject the scheme, or elements of the scheme; lack of engagement, or late engagement with statutory stakeholders (such as NPWS) may delay delivery, or necessitate reworking of elements of the scheme; lack of understanding of the statutory process and programme may result in poor engagement with local stakeholders.

To overcome some of these risks, a comprehensive communications and engagement plan has been developed and adopted by the project team.

Some of the key elements of this plan include establishment of a project website and Facebook page. Another key activity is engagement through public workshops. The first project engagement day was held on Wednesday 13 November, and is the focus of this summary report

1.3 Event Details

Aims	The purpose of the Opening PED was to raise awareness of the project, seek initial views from the public and other interested parties in relation to the key issues that the study should address, the options to manage the flood risk in the area, including the Scheme proposed in the FRMP, to highlight points of local importance that might constrain the design and/or viability of any potential flood alleviation measures, collate information on any flood events that have occurred since the CFRAM Study was undertaken with particular reference to the flood event of the 22nd November 2017, and to find out about other flooding incidents.
Venue	Mountmellick Development Association, (057) 862 4525 Irishtown, Mountmellick, Co. Laois
Date and Time	Wednesday 13 November 1pm - Set up by project team 2-3pm – Invited elected members – presentation and discussion 3-8pm – Public drop-in 8pm - Close
Target Audience	Any and all interested parties, including political stakeholders.
Event Format	Opening presentation to invited elected members was planned, but there were no elected members present at this stage of the event. Registration (host role) and one-to-one or small group discussions

Drop-in format, which included a presentation shortly after opening and once a reasonable number of attendees were present, including elected representative.

Information stand / posters set-up

Maps and post-it notes to allow visitors to add annotated notes on their experiences

2 Promoting the Event

2.1 Overview

Promotion of any event is key to its success on the day. A variety of means of promoting / advertising the workshop were used to increase awareness of the day and aim to maximise attendance.

There was little engagement with the CFRAM public consultation events, but they pre-dated the 2017 event. It was anticipated that this event would be well supported by elected members and local residents and businesses.

2.2 Means of Promotion

Direct contact	Direct contact and word of mouth was useful as the community, and housing estates, are relatively small. This helped spread the message between people who had seen leaflets / posters and those who had not.
Project Websites	Information in relation to the PED was uploaded to the study website along with appropriate supporting materials. After the event, all posters and a copy of the questionnaire was also uploaded.
Local Authority mechanisms	LCC promoted the event through: upload of information to LCC website; announcements on facebook; Inclusion of information in relevant and timely circulars/newsletter/leaflets etc
Poster campaign	Posters will be displayed in cafes, churches, schools, supermarkets, post offices, garda stations, community centres, libraries etc. The poster campaign particularly focused on areas that flooded in November 2017, or properties likely to be impacted by the scheme (visual impact).
Mail drop	It was not initially proposed to undertake a mail drop at this stage of the project, but this was reconsidered and approximately 150 leaflets were distributed to residential properties, particularly in the Manor Road and Irishtown area.
Media campaign	A press release was issued to the local media in advance of the event, reporting on the contract signing and advertising the PED. This was published in the Laois Today and Leinster Express. Follow up articles were also published.
Social Media	Social media sites, such as Facebook Groups, provided opportunities to promote messages and information about the Study. Several local groups were contacted to promote the event.

Attendees reported hearing about the event from a range of sources, including newspapers, facebook, posters through town, leaflets through the door, parish newsletter and word of mouth.

3 On the day

3.1 Project team representation

The number of attendees likely to drop into the event was a big area of uncertainty, as was the focus of the questions that may be asked. Two members of the JBA project team (Project Manager and lead modeller) were present all day. Paul O'Loughlin and Sandra Southern from the LCC project team were also in attendance, supported by members of the OPW project team.

3.2 Supporting material

In addition to a sign-in sheet, the following materials were available on the day:

- Copy of the newsletter and questionnaire - handed to each attendee on arrival
- Key constraints map, including the CFRAM 0.1% flood outline and indicative scheme alignment.
- Series of posters which covered the following topics:
 - Introduction to the project, including background, programme, statutory stages and opportunities for further involvement
 - Background to the ecological, archaeological and heritage challenges specific to the scheme
 - Examples of similar works (such as flood walls and embankments)
- Copies of the posters were subsequently uploaded to the website.
- Pull up banners presenting various general topics, including different flood management options

3.3 Attendance

Attendance was good, with 90 people signing the attendance register through the day.

Questionnaire returns were comparably low, with only 30 being received either on the day, or by post after the event.

3.4 Venue suitability

The venue was amply sized in terms of floor space, and had glass walls that could be used to display posters. The neighbouring offices were used for breakout space during the busiest parts of the day. The MDA provided a high level of support, including kitchen facilities for the project team and directions for attendees arriving.

4 Feedback received

4.1 Questionnaire analysis

There were 26 questionnaires returned on the day and another 4 posted back to JBA Consulting offices, although every attendee was given a questionnaire and they were also made available on the project website following the event.

The responses to the various questions are summarised below. It should be noted that in some cases more than one answer to a question was provided so percentages rather than real numbers have been used.

1. Which area of Mountmellick do you have a particular interest in?

Of the 30 questionnaires received, 9 were most interested in locations outside of Mountmellick town, including Derrycloney, The Rock, Clonterry and Cloncannon.

The Manor Road / Court area was of most interest to five respondents. Five respondents stated Irishtown was of most interest, and another five said Main Street / O'Moore Street. One questionnaire stated Brockview, to the east of the town, and two said Emmett Street, to the north of the towncentre. Three were interested in the whole town.

2. How do you think the issue of flooding in Mountmellick can be resolved?

There were a range of proposals to managing flooding in Mountmellick, but nearly all respondents included river maintenance and removal of silt and vegetation and clearing bridge blockages in their answers. Other thoughts included:

- Actions in the upstream catchment, such as reservoirs, replanting trees and diversion channels
- Land zoning and consideration of development in the future
- Embankments (only raised by two people)
- Flood forecasting and warning
- Improvements in drainage.

A separate submission was also received from the Mountmellick Angling & Conservation Association. This gave a number of suggestions for flood management:

- 1 River cleaning at bridges and arches
- 2 Control of water coming down the mountain
- 3 Jackson valley to be dammed to create reservoir
- 4 Stepping of river banks as oppose to scraping river banks, to create walkways and give flood relief and do away with poor maintenance practice
- 5 Rock armouring
- 6 Barkmills weir to be annually desilted
- 7 Annual maintenance to be done with parties being involved and having an input.

3. Is there anything you would like us to take into account when we design the scheme?

Answers included:

- Storm drains
- Public involvement
- Flood warning
- Impacts on wider area, both up and downstream
- Erosion of topsoil upstream of Mountmellick

- Ecology
- Cost and speed
- Aesthetics and landscaping
- Looped walk – Convent Br to Derrycloney Br

4. In your opinion, how important are the following in the development of a Flood Relief Scheme:

4 In your opinion, how important are the following in the development of a Flood Relief Scheme:	Very Important	Important	Moderately Important	Of Little Importance	Unimportant	No answer
Human health and quality of life of residents	26	1	0	0	0	3
Effective drainage system	23	4	0	0	0	3
Community infrastructure (church, community centre, crèche etc.)	8	10	7	1	0	4
Plants and animals (land based)	5	7	12	1	1	4
Local fisheries and angling	2	9	8	6	1	4
Habitats and the Special Area of Conservation	2	7	16	2	0	3
Water quality	17	7	1	1	0	4
Architectural and cultural heritage	5	13	5	3	0	4
Visual amenity and views of the river	3	10	10	2	2	3
Being prepared for the impacts of climate change giving higher river levels	19	5	2	0	0	4
Tourism	3	12	6	3	2	4
Recreation (walking, sports etc.)	5	9	9	3	0	4
Local economy and employment	18	5	3	0	0	4
Erosion of the river bank	11	10	4	1	0	4

5. Attendants' relationship to Mountmellick

Of those attending, 15 were flooded residents, 10 were non-flooded residents and there was one flooded business.

Four people reported having flooded in 1990. 12 flooded in 2017 and two reported flooding in 1968/69 (it was common during the event for people to talk about the two dates, presumably meaning the same flood). There were also two attendees living outside Mountmellick who reported annual flooding; it is not clear if this is of property or land.

5 Summary of PED

5.1 Practical arrangements

The event was widely advertised, and attendance was good.

The advertising methods seem to have been appropriate, and the leaflet drop reached most members of the community, including a couple of individuals who had not attended the workshop but rang the office for more information.

5.2 Input to the scheme development

The feedback provided on the day, and in following conversations, will be extremely useful in developing the flood relief scheme. There was a lot of genuine interest in the works, and particularly in the timeline for construction. However, the feeling from most attendees was that a solution was needed, and there were concerns about what would happen until the scheme was finished. Calls for river maintenance were widely heard. There was also a lot of discussion of flooding from the combined system, with a number of attendees reporting this is the mechanism that caused flooding, rather than the river directly.

There was also a good representation from residents outside Mountmellick, many of whom nearly flooded in 2017 and are concerned about the impact of a scheme on future flooding.

It was interesting to note that the forestry practices in the Slieve Blooms were widely discussed and seen to have exacerbated runoff over recent years.

Offices at

Dublin
Limerick

Registered Office
24 Grove Island
Corbally
Limerick
Ireland

+353(0)61 345463
info@jbaconsulting.ie
www.jbaconsulting.ie
Follow us:  

JBA Consulting Engineers and
Scientists Limited

Registration number 444752

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