



Medway Estuary and Swale Strategy

Appendix Q Lessons Learnt

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Mott MacDonald
Mott MacDonald House
8-10 Sydenham Road
Croydon CR0 2EE
United Kingdom

T +44 (0)20 8774 2000
F +44 (0)20 8681 5706
mottmac.com

Environment Agency
Guildbourne House
Worthing
UK

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1 Introduction

The Environment Agency has appointed Mott MacDonald (MM) to develop the Medway Estuary and Swale Coastal Flood and Erosion Strategy (hereafter known as MEASS), with the aim of providing a Flood and Coastal Risk Management (FCRM) Strategy for the Tidal Medway Estuary, the Swale Estuary, and the Isle of Sheppey. The aim of MEASS is to assess how to best manage the coastline to protect people, properties, designated habitats, and agricultural land from coastal flood and erosion risk. As with all flood and coastal risk management work, the wider impacts must be considered. This means that the best technical solutions for defences need to be found, while also considering the impacts and benefits for local communities, the environment, and the cost to the tax payer.

1.1 Strategy area

The Strategy area includes the Isle of Sheppey, the tidal extents of the Medway Estuary and the Swale estuary. The boundaries of the strategy area are:

- Allington Sluice as the upstream tidal limit of the Medway;
- the village of Stoke on the Hoo Peninsula; and
- the Sportsman Public House on Cleve Marshes near Faversham.

MEASS encompasses the large urban areas of the Medway Towns including Rochester, Strood, Chatham and Gillingham; major industrial and commercial areas along the estuaries; and large swathes of rural farmland and extensive salt marsh and mudflats. Many of the rural areas are highly designated and protected for their heritage, landscape, and environmental value.

1.2 Aims of the strategy

MEASS assesses and considers a variety of economic, environmental, and technical approaches to manage the coastal flood and erosion risk, in order to balance the wide range of features and interests within the area.

The vision statement of MEASS is to “*work with the community to plan how we will sustainably reduce flood risk to 17,226 homes at risk in the Medway Estuary, Swale and Sheppey over the next 100 years (under a 0.1%AEP event), whilst also protecting and enhancing the local environment.*”

1.3 Aims of this report

This report aims to capture some of the things that went well within the Strategy, and other things where there were lessons learnt to be captured.

2 What Went Well?

2.1 Consultation and Engagement

Use of the online consultation tool

The online consultation tool was used to publish the consultation material and facilitate feedback from public review. The tool enabled the team to split the consultation down into different pages on different parts of the strategy, and coordinate responses for specific areas. The website provides feedback in an excel spreadsheet that is easily downloadable and reduces time to process information. The online tool also provides an easy way to reach a larger number of public without the need to print copies and place them in different areas. This has been particularly good for the Strategy which covers 120km of coastline.

Early landowner engagement

Specific landowner engagement was undertaken from early on in the Strategy, and drop in events and communications for landowners were separated from more general public consultation. The engagement with the landowners provided really interesting insights into those who were fairly supportive of Managed Realignment type options (often those more interested in receiving compensation) versus those who already see the defences as being “theirs” and who are happy and enthusiastic to take on maintenance and management of them going forward.

These open, honest and early discussions have helped form a Strategy with a number of Managed Realignment sites and No Active Intervention Policies whilst reducing the landowner conflicts.

Use of a Stakeholder Engagement Group

A Stakeholder Engagement Group (SEG) was set up near the start of the Strategy process. The SEG met three times at key stages of the Strategy to review long list/ short list/ preferred options, to review the work being undertaken, and provide comment and help the direction of the work being undertaken by the Project Team. Furthermore, the SEG helped disseminate information about the Strategy, including putting up posters about the public drop-in events and the online consultation material.

A specific charter was set up at the start of the process which was disseminated across the SEG. This ensured everyone understood the focus of the engagement, the different roles within the team and the processes, and provided more transparency to what the project team was trying to achieve.

Being able to target the specific key stakeholders throughout the project enabled development of a Strategy which had buy-in from landowners, environmental groups, infrastructure organisations and local and parish councils. It was also beneficial to engage the different groups through workshop sessions together as it helped different stakeholders understand the complexities and conflicts between different interests.

Use of external consultant to facilitate stakeholder workshops

The Environment Agency employed an engagement specialist to help plan and facilitate the three SEG workshops. Having a slightly external and impartial party to facilitate the workshops helped gain trust and openness from the stakeholders.

2.2 Environmental

Natural England formed part of the Project Team

The Environment Agency set up an agreement with Natural England, which meant that rather than just trying to engage early through the Strategy, Natural England formed a part of the Project Team and attended the monthly progress meetings. There have been a large number of difficult decisions to make in the Strategy regarding environmental assessments, by having Natural England as part of the project team they have been able to review draft technical notes to discuss different ideas for the method, as well as have input into the wider discussions including stakeholder consultation and modelling, rather than just the Strategic Environmental Assessment and Habitats Regulation Assessment. Getting the Letter of Support for the Strategy during the final reporting stages was easy and quick to do as all the comments and issues had been addressed throughout the work rather than at the end. The Project Team believe without this level of involvement throughout, a programme delay would have been experienced following the consultation on the Strategic Environmental Assessment and Habitats Regulation Assessment.

2.3 Technical

Implementation Plan – development of a focussed and active document for how the Strategy will be delivered

The Implementation Plan which has been developed for MEASS is innovative in its approach and different to past implementation plans. The MEASS Implementation Plan provides much more detail and consideration compared to a lot of Strategies previously been produced. It has been produced to be less of a “report” and more of an action plan. It is concise and gives instructions for those taking forward MEASS schemes; it provides the information we need in the five business case model, linking to the appendices to give more information and to facilitate writing Strategic Outline Cases (SOCs). Importantly, for all sections of the Strategy, it highlights risks and opportunities to ensure work done in the Strategy feeds easily into schemes and that wider opportunities can be met.

Implementation Plan development – undertaking a workshop with KSL Area Team

The Implementation Plan has been designed and structured to be a useful information base rather than a report and it was important to design and develop it with different members of the KSL Area Team as they are going to be the dominant users of the plan. A two day workshop was undertaken in the KSL Area Team office to go through and come up with ideas. Following this several reviews were also undertaken.

The ideas that came out of this workshop and the direction of the Implementation Plan would have been different if it had just been the Project Team working on it and it would not have provided as focussed and clear information as it required.

Development of Appraisal Summary Tables in excel spreadsheets

Due to the large quantity of data available and processed as part of MEASS, it was important to find a way of clearly displaying the data so that it could be accessed and viewed in a clear and efficient manner. The appraisal summary tables were developed in excel spreadsheets so that different columns being assessed were in line with each other and could allow easy comparison of different options. Due to the number of different areas in MEASS, not all the data could be displayed within the different Technical Appendices and therefore it is very useful having all the detailed data and assessments within one Technical Appendix.

Proportioning costs of MR sites across HTL sites

Following the initial economic assessment, there were no preferred options which came out with Managed Realignment sites. However, as part of the Strategy requirements to provide compensatory saltmarsh habitat, a number of Managed Realignment sites are required across the MEASS area. The justification for these sites are based on the requirements to compensate for saltmarsh coastal squeeze in SPA and Ramsar habitat which is caused by the Hold the Line sections. Therefore the justification for the Manged Realignment sites is based on the Hold the Line sections. To provide a robust business case, costs for the Managed Realignment sites have been proportioned across the Hold the Line sites. Rather than splitting geographically, which would be difficult due to the estuary geography, the costs were split proportionally against the Outcome Measure 1s.

The Economic Report presented in Technical Appendix G provides more detailed information around the methods and results of this exercise.

Early review of documents

Early draft reviews of the documents, even when not all sections of the reports could be completed, enabled the Project Team to undertake the early reporting alongside the consultation phase and reduce the programme associated with the final reporting stage, creating overall efficiency savings.

2.4 Project Management

Project Board milestones in the programme

Due to the complex interactions between different stages of the programme, and the number of different iterations which are needed for the optioneering, milestones associated with project board sign off of phases were introduced into the programme. These were critical to reducing iterations and creating freeze points which were important for clear consultation with stakeholders.

3 What Could Have Gone Better?

3.1 Consultation and Engagement

Over-reliance on social media

Whilst posters in key community areas and press releases were undertaken to advertise the public consultation, the Project Team tried to use social media to drive much of the advertisement. Given the demographics of the area, it was felt that although social media can be a really powerful tool, other forms of advertisement and communication needed to be used and focussed on (such as additional newspaper articles/advertisements).

Resourcing of facilitators for the Stakeholder Engagement Group meetings

Whilst the Stakeholder Engagement Groups were organised far in advance, and staff who were facilitation trained from the local EA offices were identified and confirmed to help with the facilitation, many of these staff had to drop out closer to the event due to other commitments. The national facilitation network needs at least 6 weeks' notice prior to the event and so by this time it was too late to get national involved. This left some of the workshops a little low on the number of facilitators. In the future it should be considered what the risk is around the area team's resourcing and workload and whether national should also be contacted so there is a mixture of resource.

Engaging landowners and key stakeholders

Some early consultations undertaken went very well (see Section 2.1) however would have been more successful if they could have reached a wider audience. It is a common theme on Strategy work that engaging people at this high level can be difficult. Individual letters were sent to landowners to try and reach as many people as possible, but attendance numbers to events versus number of people invited were still very low.

Language used in documents to consult with the public

The FCRM work generally contains a lot of very technical speak and acronyms. Although effort was made to define acronyms and limit their use, it was evident that stakeholders will generally flick to the section they are interested in and not read the document in the order it has been presented in. Feedback at stakeholder events and from the online consultation was that some parts were difficult to understand and had too many acronyms. Whilst the Environment Agency Communications team were very useful in reviewing documents for public consultation, providing training to Consultants regarding the Environment Agency's general style could help make the process more efficient.

3.2 Environmental

Being able to deliver wider outcomes, specifically habitat creation under Outcome Measure 4s through the Strategy

Although the Environment Agency's 25 year plan focusses on a commitment to creating different habitat, at Strategy stage it is very difficult to identify where this could be possible and find funding to facilitate this. When following the FCRM Appraisal Guidance, although OM4 payments can help justify additional spend, this has to be undertaken fundamentally as part of a flood protection scheme and linked to residential property protection (OM2s and OM3s).

Within MEASS, there are a number of areas with Priority Habitat such as freshwater grazing marsh, but limited residential properties. This makes it very difficult to justify continuing to maintain embankments and a number of these areas have become a No Active Intervention Policy. Increased overtopping over the next ten years in these areas are likely to cause adverse impacts to the habitat, and yet potential creation of habitat in the Strategy (outside of that being undertaken as part of the legal obligations under the HRA) is less than that which may potentially be lost.

Whilst the focus on protecting residential properties is largely accepted, this makes it very difficult for the Strategy to achieve the broader objectives of the Environment Agency and DEFRA.

Too focussed on designated heritage assets

Through conversations with the Kent County Council Heritage Department and Historic England, it was advised that there had been a heavy focus on designated heritage assets and that non-designated assets, as well as historic landscapes, are also important considerations. However, it can be difficult to get the more detailed information at Strategy stage as the level of detail a Strategy goes into is often not sufficient for Stakeholders. In MEASS, the project team found it difficult to engage key heritage stakeholders at the early stages during long list and short list of options. Higher level discussions between organisations may be required to discuss the usefulness of actually coordinating discussions at this early stage.

3.3 Technical

Reliance on Aims database

Initially the modelling was undertaken using information taken from the Aims database. However, part way through the project the Area Team identified a number of inaccuracies within the Aims database and updates needed to be undertaken. This caused a programme delay and required re-runs of the model. The Area Team should be asked to review the data being used at the start as their knowledge of the area is better than what is contained within the Aims database.

Achieving a balance between including enough risk and not restricting projects from going forward

At Strategy level, the amount of detail that is included within the optioneering process is fairly high level and therefore risk is often added and conservative assumptions undertaken. The problem with this is that it tends to provide high costs and reduce benefit cost ratios, in many cases so much that the project looks unjustifiable. If a project isn't set out at Strategy stage, then it will be difficult to later take it through, and whilst wanting to produce an affordable Strategy, it was important not to rule out projects if they could be taken forward. Sensitivity tests were undertaken to test different scenarios which enabled the Project Team to take the broader view.

Presenting details within the StAR document and Appendices

Although the Project Team was given positive feedback from LPRG in being able to succinctly provide a StAR document which was fairly brief for such a large area, following LPRG comments it was clear that there was slightly too much reliance on the details in different appendices, particularly relating to the outline of the economic process. The Project Team were advised by LPRG to provide a summary table that contained all the economic information within the StAR, despite this then needing to be a large table that takes up a lot of room. It is really important to be able to demonstrate clearly and transparently the economic process and decision making. Providing all the economic assessment results in one table within the main StAR document helps with the clarity, and the LPRG review and approval process.

Presenting the economic assessment and strategy preferred option selection assessment comprehensively and clearly

Due to the importance of habitat compensation in influencing the strategy preferred option, the economic assessment is only the first stage of determining the preferred option in MEASS. Initially, the StAR only presented the final preferred option, making a review and assessment of the economic process hard to separate by LPRG reviewers. Alternative preferred options can be made with the correct Local Choices or legal requirement backing, however presenting the two processes separately helps identify that the correct funding implications have been applied.

Following initial discussions with LPRG, the economic assessment chapter (within the Economic Assessment Report) was split into two chapters (the economic assessment and then the preferred option selection), and the summary economic table in the StAR document was split into two halves. These small changes made the transparency of the process for selecting the preferred option much easier to follow and audit.

3.4 Project Management

Outcome based scope for the Strategy

The contract with Mott MacDonald for the Strategy was let under Lot 3 of the Environment Agency WEM framework and was an outcome based scope. Whilst the outcome based scope approach has some advantages, in the case of MEASS there were too many specific expectations by different teams which were not outlined in the scope and should be clearly discussed at the project start up, with specific focus on agreeing a risk register and programme. This could then save costs related to different expectations from deliverables. Whilst producing a Strategy was a key aim, there were requirements specific to MEASS that were understood by the Environment Agency Project Team but not by the consultant. An initial risk day-workshop (followed on a quarterly basis throughout the Strategy) with the entire Environment Agency Project Team (including NEAS, local area team environmental officers, catchment coordinators, PSO team as well as ncpms) could help disseminate this information. Furthermore, responsibilities in terms of communication with stakeholders and liaison with different teams and stakeholders was unclear and could have been set out through the stakeholder engagement plan at the start of the project.

Two weeks review for environmental documents (and others) not long enough for the programme

Due to the number of different people and teams that work with NEAS to review environmental documents, and the size of the documents as well as the restricted resources NEAS had, two weeks was usually not long enough for Project Team review of environmental related documents.

This is also true later on in the programme for the Strategy reviews. Although two weeks is often a standard time used (and included within the WEM framework scopes), when the documents have a large number of appendices, and different people to coordinate across, this is an unrealistic timeframe.

Unrealistic timeframe and delayed damages as part of the contract which caused pressure on the programme

The Option C NEC PSC contract scope had a timeframe within it of getting LPRG recommendation for approval within 2 years. The contract also had delayed damages associated with it. This put pressure on the Consultant at bid stage to provide a very condensed and pressured programme. The Project Team agreed during the delivery of the project that the programme needed to be extended, and certain elements needed better focus on (for example

longer consultation periods). However, agreement and approval of the programme took a lot of time and effort and was only undertaken part way through the project. A more realistic timescale from the scope and tender stage would have provided more efficient start to the Project.

