

Committee members updated on flood barrier progress.

15 March 2023



Councillors have voted to accept additional grant funding from the Environment Agency to cover further costs in the construction of the West Kirby flood alleviation project.

Members of the Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee were told at their meeting on Tuesday 14th March that the extra flood defence funding will cover most of the additional costs for the construction of the flood wall and associated works along South Parade.

These costs were identified by the independent third-party project manager overseeing the works. They are related to unforeseen factors including global increases in the cost of construction materials, significant variations in ground conditions along the promenade, design changes and the temporary relocation of the RNLI lifeboat station.

These factors also contributed to delays in the schedule, which means the current prediction for overall completion of the scheme is now early June 2023.

However, it is forecast that by Easter, 50% of the area will be completely open - from Riversdale to Albert Road. Other sections of work on the promenade, flood wall and highway are also forecast to be completed in April. An official opening of the scheme by the Mayor of Wirral is planned for May.

Once fully completed, residents on South Parade and the surrounding areas will enjoy greater protection from potentially catastrophic flooding for many years to come due to the presence of the 1.2m high barrier.

Since December 2013, there have been more than 20 flood events at West Kirby with four considered significant. With sea levels rising, this risk is only going to increase and the scheme will protect 70 properties at risk of flooding now from extreme tidal events and give more than 500 properties improved protection over the next century.

As well as providing a barrier from flood waters, the design of the wall – resembling a wave with a continuous curve – also incorporates timber-slat seating, memorial or celebratory plaques (including replicas of those previously in place on the promenade), access points and crossing spaces.

The old baths site is currently being developed as part of the scheme and will become a new public open space for West Kirby, suitable for a range of events such as food festivals, markets, music and art performances.

Some other aspects that members of the public said they wanted to see incorporated as part of the scheme are also in the process of being realised, including improved public realm with features such as gateways highlighted with icons linking to the local environment, a clearly marked cycle lane provided within the one-way highway arrangement and a circular trail around the promenade and lake, with distance markers counting up and down every 100m.

Throughout the project, the council and its partners have strived to keep residents, local businesses and visitors informed about the progress of the scheme and at every stage efforts have been made to minimise and disruption and negative impact of the necessary works.

Several direct letter drops have been made to residents on and around South Parade to inform them about key stages of the works, how they might be affected and how any potential issues they might face could be addressed.

Contractor VolkerStevin has operated a drop-in engagement point from the side of its compound on Salisbury Avenue for people to stop off and ask any questions they might have had about the scheme or raise any concerns.

Regular communications have gone out to stakeholders and to residents and businesses through the media to inform and update people about the progress of the works, including reminders that West Kirby has remained open for business throughout.

These communications have reminded people about the reduction in the numbers of car parking spaces available during the course of the scheme and instead have promoted car parking at West Kirby Concourse as an alternative – and free parking at West Kirby Marine Lake in the run-up to Christmas and into January to try to encourage visitor numbers. Public transport options for people from outside the area to get to West Kirby have also been regularly highlighted.

Engagement with local businesses to address some of the concerns they have had throughout the project has also taken place and business support through the Wirral Chamber of Commerce has been offered. The council and the RNLI are also continuing to work together positively.