

Petition for flood prevention scheme to be paused will be heard next month

A petition calling for a £50million flood scheme to be paused amid concerns over a lack of public input will be put before East Lothian councillors next month.

The Musselburgh Flood Protection Action Group won the right for their case to be heard after telling a meeting of the council's petitions committee they had gathered nearly 4,000 signatures supporting their call.

The group has raised concerns about the proposals for the town's project which need to be approved by the start of March if the local authority is to receive funding for it from the Scottish Government in the next cycle of grants.

And despite claims at the committee meeting that less than 1,000 of the people who signed the petition calling for the pause lived in the town itself, the committee agreed it had enough support to warrant a full hearing.

The Musselburgh Flood Protection Scheme (MFPS) has sparked controversy with residents with protesters raising concerns about what they describe as a 'hard-engineering' design plan rather than one with more nature-based solutions.

During a virtual meeting of the petitions committee today, Dr Jeff Wright, representing the action group, said there were

real concerns about the design of the scheme and lack of input from residents.

Concerns had been raised about the use of concrete walls as barriers as well as what he said was a lack of independent scrutiny of the project.

He said: "This is an important project for Musselburgh and East Lothian and there has to be a strong bond of trust and openness between residents and our elected representatives.

"Your agreement today to recognise the petition to pause and review the scheme would go along way to re-establishing that trust that is vital if it is to go ahead."

Dr Wright was also critical of what he described as a 'rush to get cycle one cash' by trying to approve the project in time to receive Scottish Government funding.

The committee had been told that if the project was not approved by March it would lose out on the 'cycle one' funding available for it and there was no indication when the money would be available again.

Dr Wright told the committee: "At a time of a cost of living crisis it is genuinely objectionable to hear this cycle one cash, which comes from taxpayers, being described as a lottery win for the town. Musselburgh deserves better than that."

The committee heard from council officers that the project had been subject to numerous public consultations and engagements with local residents over the years and a paper on the scheme is due to go before a special meeting of the council on January 23 for approval.

Members unanimously agreed to refer the petition to the meeting so members could make a decision on whether to progress or pause the scheme on all the evidence.

Committee chair Councillor Norman Hampshire said: "We agree

the petition should be considered alongside the proposed scheme at the full council meeting and we will then listen to the evidence and it will be up to all 22 elected councillors to decide how we take this forward.”

by Marie Sharp Local Democracy Reporter

