Draft (V6) MEAS Contributions – Advice Note

Planning Policy, Swale Borough Council, July 2026

Background and introduction

The Medway Estuary and Swale (MEAS) Flood and Coastal Risk Management Strategy is the Environment Agency's (EA) plan to sustainably manage the coastline and tidal defences in the Medway Estuary and Swale area. It aims to protect people, properties, infrastructure, designated habitat and agricultural land over the next 100 years. It was approved by DEFRA in 2019, following extensive consultation.

The MEAS strategy area includes land within Swale Borough Council, Medway Council and Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council.

The emerging Swale Borough Local Plan (policy C7) is seeking to include a policy to help implement the MEAS strategy, including through payments to a fund to contribute to flood defence works as they come forward. It is anticipated that the funds would be gathered through Planning Obligations/S106 Agreements.

The intention would be that contributions from relevant developments within Swale will be spent on coastal risk management works within the administrative boundary of Swale – particularly until all councils within the strategy area adopt an equivalent approach. The impacts of Local Government Reorganisation will need to be considered when more is known of what that might look like for Swale Borough Council.

Background and Evidence

The evidence to support this approach includes that set out in the following documents:

- Shoreline Management Plans (SMP) identify the most sustainable approach for managing the risk from coastal flooding and erosion over the short (0 to 20 years) medium (20 to 50 years) and long (50 to 100 years) term. The SMPs relevant to Swale are SMP9 River Medway and Swale Estuary and SMP10 Isle of Grain to South Foreland.
- The Medway Estuary and Swale Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Strategy (MEAS Strategy) - the EA's plan to manage the coastline and tidal defences in the Medway estuary and around the Swale.
- Environment Agency – National Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Strategy for England – seeks to guide operational activities and decision making for those involved in flood and coastal erosion risk management.

Costs and funding

In 2016/17 the first ten years of MEAS works were estimated to cost £28 million. Since then, costs have increased exponentially.

The Government's updated Flood Defence Grant in Aid (FDGiA) policy means that prioritised projects valued at £3 million or less are eligible for 100% upfront funding. Projects exceeding £3 million receive the first £3 million, plus 90% of the costs thereafter. As a result,10% contributions will be required for schemes costing over £3 million. This could come from local councils, the County Council (eg Highways Authority), the Regional Flood and Coastal Committee, infrastructure providers (eg Network Rail, Southern Water, UK Power Networks), private companies/developers and, if adopted, the MEAS contribution policy in the emerging Swale Local Plan.

Without this 10% contribution these flood defence works, which are critical to protecting existing and future communities, may not come forward, or could be delayed.

It should be noted that the Environment Agency's Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Strategy sets out a long-term objective for Risk Management Authorities (RMAs) to work with infrastructure providers to ensure all infrastructure investment is resilient to future flooding and coastal change.

Contribution area

The Swale Borough Council Regulation 18 Local Plan, January 2026 (preamble to policy C7) sets out that contributions would be sought as follows:

- MEAS Contribution Zone 1: all new development within the area covered by the Environment Agency Flood Map for Planning Flood Zones plus Climate Change dataset (accessed April 2026) with the fluvial only flood risk removed. Note that the Flood Map for Planning Flood Zones plus Climate Change dataset shows how the combined extent of Flood Zones 2 and 3 could increase with climate change over the next century, ignoring the benefits of any existing flood defences. The dataset uses the 'Upper End' allowance for risk of flooding from the sea, accounting for cumulative sea level rise to 2125[i]; **and/or**,
- MEAS Contribution Zone 2 (Isle of Sheppey): all new development on the Isle of Sheppey. This is due to the Isle of Sheppey's dependence on the road and rail infrastructure onto the island which is at tidal flood risk and is due to be protected through the MEAS schemes (eg, the A249).

It is noted that the contribution areas may also be areas with stretched viability. As such contributions towards the MEAS will need to be reasonable and viable.

The following rates have been included in the Local Plan's Whole Plan Viability Assessment (Local Plan Review Evidence - Viability):

Contribution Zone 1 rate:

- £500/dwelling

- £20/sq m for all other buildings up to a cap of £10,000 at which point it reduces to £4/sq m for every further square meter

and/or

Contribution Zone 2 (Isle of Sheppey) rate:

- £100/dwelling
- £4/sqm for all other buildings up to a cap of £2,000 at which point it reduces to £2/sq m for every further square meter

Please note that development on the Isle of Sheppey, within Contribution Zone 1, will be required to pay both rates.

To note

- Contributions are not a payment 'to be protected' – but rather a contribution to a wider strategy that considers the strategy area as a whole.
- The EA's MEAS programme will be prioritised based on asset condition and risk to properties - not on quantity of proposed development.
- Contributions to MEAS will be used across the borough, rather than (necessarily) at the contributing development's location, as determined by EA priorities.
- Contributions to MEAS do not negate the need for landowners to continue to maintain their own defences.
- Contributions to MEAS cannot be used to justify inappropriate development, and sites will still need to satisfy paragraph 170 of the NPPF and demonstrate they are safe for the lifetime of the development without increasing flood risk elsewhere.
- Contributions to MEAS do not confer a requirement on the EA to carry out works.
- Achieving 10% external contributions doesn't necessarily mean schemes will get FDGiA (although greater contributions are likely to increase the priority).
- Contribution rates will increase in line with inflation. The figures set out above are for May 2026.

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[i] The Defra Data Services Platform provides further information on both the **Flood Map for Planning - Flood Zones plus Climate Change** dataset and the **Flood Map for Planning - Flood Zones dataset**.