

## Somerset Rivers Authority Board Paper

**Title:** Sowy KSD Enhancement Scheme Progress Report

### RECOMMENDATION

The SRA Board is asked to:

1. Note that further progress has been made towards delivery of a comprehensive scheme that partners can support.
2. Note prioritisation of pinch points at the Dunball end of the system for delivery in 2018.
3. Note that the scope of works will need to be reviewed due to the increased estimate for the comprehensive scheme, and endorse the focus on targeted channel improvements.

### Purpose of the item

To update the Board on the progress made against items identified at the October Board meeting and confirm the current status of the Sowy KSD project.

### Background and context

At its October meeting a number of actions were agreed between partners to support progress of the scheme. Further, the Board acknowledged the complexity of the proposed comprehensive scheme to increase capacity of the Sowy-Kings Sedgemoor Drain corridor. Any enhancement could have impacts on landowners, environmental management, water level management and operational procedures. In considering this complexity, the project team has sought contractor advice on the practicalities of construction in this environment. Preliminary cost advice from the contractor suggests the existing scope of works may not represent good value for money, and the possibility of a reduced scope should be considered.

### Scheme Progress

1. **Landowner impacts:** IDB has expressed support for the scheme in its letter of 17 November. This includes acceptance of the information included in the 'Farmland impact assessment report' produced by CH2M, which identifies land directly affected by the scheme. IDB can use this to identify individual landowners. Landowners currently perceive the risk of impact from the scheme

to be low, because of progress with the dredge. However, there is still a risk that landowners could request financial compensation for perceived impacts. With the improved support from the IDB, and landowners stressing they only want to meet again when we have new information (as agreed at the NFU meeting) there is no immediate need for further landowner meetings.

2. **Operational guidance:** Operational guidance for the Sowy will need to be developed in conjunction with IDB progressing the dredge scheme. IDB will be carrying out the in-combination effects assessment to support the Habitats Regulations Assessment. EA will support the IDB in preparing the in-combination operational guidance. This will be moved forward through the SRA Technical Group.
3. **Environmental mitigation structures on non-main river:** The number and location of required structures has been defined and agreed with NE officers, and concept designs produced. The associated cost for this work has been included within the budget estimate above. This doesn't completely remove the risk of legal challenge under Habitats Regulations.
4. **Monitoring plan:** EA has developed a cost effective recommendation for a monitoring strategy based on satellite imagery. Meetings have been held with NE to discuss the proposal, but they still have a number of reservations. The proposal will be formalised and circulated by the second week of January.
5. **Water Level Management Plan amendments:** EA is working with NE to agree target penned water levels, based on a depth below field level, from which the required pen levels can be extrapolated and plans amended.
6. **Peat:** Based on early contractor advice, EA likely to recommend to the SRA that the disposal of excess peat from site is temporarily stockpiled at a number of previously used locations. Subsequent sustainable use for this material will then be considered as a separate SRA project. This will help reduce costs and potential programme delays.

## Current status

We are currently working on priority actions to address pinch points, particularly at the downstream end of the system, including desilting bridges and implementing channel improvements on the KSD. These works will be carried out within the timeframe of the LEP funding and within allocation and will commence in 2018.

Following endorsement from the Board, we sought cost advice on the channel works via an early supplier engagement exercise. Advice from the contractor suggests a budget price for the detailed design, planning and construction work of £12M-£15M,

with an anticipated contract programme of a minimum of 3 years from 2019. This is based on the complexity and high level of risk associated with the works, including the degree of difficulty working in the soft peaty environment, the complexity of obtaining consents for the works, the restricted construction window arising from environmental constraints, and the risk in managing the excavated material that can't all be distributed nearby.

Based on this estimate, the existing scope of work for the main channel works may not represent good value for money, and the possibility of a reduced scope will be investigated. We will further engage with the contractor to determine which elements of the work provide the greatest benefit. This will allow us to develop a more targeted scheme that provides improvements to channel capacity and flow.

### **Recommendation**

SRA Board is asked to:

1. Note that further progress has been made towards delivery of a comprehensive scheme that partners can support.
2. Note prioritisation on pinch points at the Dunball end of the system for delivery in 2018.
3. Note that the scope of works will need to be reviewed due to the increased estimate for the comprehensive scheme, and endorse the focus on targeted channel improvements.

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