

Somerset Rivers Authority Board Paper

Title: Strategic Solution Approach to mitigation to enable delivery of Flood Action Plan works

RECOMMENDATION

The SRA Board is asked to:

1. Recognise the benefits of a strategic solution approach to mitigation and approve the development of a strategic approach to mitigation for the Flood Action Plan.
2. Note the relationship between this work and the work in W1 to develop a long term flood risk management strategy for Somerset.
3. Request that £50,000 funding is allocated to the development of this work. Project to be led by Natural England, to be completed within this financial year 2017/18.

Purpose of the item:

To seek approval from the SRA to develop a Strategic Solutions approach to mitigation.

There is a positive solution that enables delivery of schemes to reduce the number of floods that adversely affect property, people and infrastructure, makes appropriate use of the flood plain to convey and temporarily store flood water, and maintains the special characteristics of the Levels and Moors. A strategic mitigation scheme will give greater certainty and clarity to FAP developers/deliverers, reduce costs and time spent, and provides a positive solution that works for flood risk, people and nature.

Background and context

- The Flood Action Plan and SRA works programme have not been subject to a Strategic Environmental Assessment to ascertain its cumulative impact of the environment.
- Under the Habitats Regulations process FRM projects in Somerset are currently being assessed - and affects mitigated - individually, which in some cases has been time consuming and added to wider uncertainty about cumulative effects across the Levels SSSI, Special Protection Area and Ramsar sites.
- Individual projects would still require individual Hab Regs to be completed, however the process would be more straightforward.
- Projects that will benefit from a strategic approach include: Sowy/KSD flood relief channel, River Parrett pioneer and maintenance dredging, River Brue pioneer dredging, Bridgwater Barrier and improvement to pumping stations.

What are strategic solutions?

Strategic solutions are usually driven by challenges and opportunities arising from planning issues such as particularly complex, problematic or long running cases. They generally apply more broadly than at a single designated site and also often include aims such as cutting down unnecessary consultations, providing strategic scale mitigation or developing a generic approach to evidence collection and use. Significant time and effort can be spent on individual complex cases, and in many cases working out separate or repeat solutions. Strategic approaches, once in place, can save time in the longer term. Natural England have been involved over 40 different strategic solution packages across the country.

Benefits of a Strategic Approach

- Streamlining processes and reducing cost and risk to customers for regulatory requirements (Habitat Regulations, SSSI consents). Identifying up front mitigation options on the floodplains and elsewhere in the catchments to reduce uncertainty.
- To enable delivery of flood risk management schemes in Somerset.
- Develop generic processes for complicated and complex issues
- Increase resilience in the landscape, with wider benefits (soils, water quality, habitats, species, carbon storage, climate change, flood management).
- Supporting the 6 key objectives of the Flood Action Plan, developing a strategic approach to mitigation that enables a reduction in the number of floods that adversely affect property, people and infrastructure whilst making the most of the special characteristics of Somerset (with internationally important biodiversity, environment and cultural heritage)
- Provide information to support the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)

Key Stages

- Collating existing evidence – document review, baseline data, identifying gaps and issues
- Identifying the residual flood management risks and opportunities in Somerset
- Providing clear advice for legal compliance
- Identify and recommend options for upfront strategic mitigation and highlighting opportunities for wider benefits
- Implementing strategic mitigation plan (additional funding streams will need to be identified), plan could include securing the function and integrity of key

floodplains and resilient wetland habitat creation providing benefit for wildlife, flood management, water quality, recreation.

- Identifying responsibilities and mechanisms to secure delivery and ongoing monitoring of the performance of the adopted Strategic Mitigation Plan
- Ongoing engagement and partnership approach required throughout the process.

Next Steps

- Funding Request for £50,000 to develop mitigation solution plan. Funding would not cover implementing actions identified.
- Project to be led by Natural England, establishing a working group to deliver the project
- Project to start once funding has been agreed
- Estimated project completion 31st March 2018

South Humber Gateway – Case Study example

The South Humber Gateway (SHG) consists of 4 square miles of port and associated industrial development land. It is one of the most important strategic development locations in the UK. It is a premier employment site and a key focus of the local economic regeneration plan. The SHG is also incredibly important for waterbirds, protected by the adjacent Humber Estuary Special Protection Area, amongst its other European and international designations.

There were many possibilities of conflict and delay as proposed developments came forward over time. However, with imagination, collaboration and hard work, we found a solution was found that benefitted both the natural environment and economic development.

Over 8 years we've worked with the local planning authorities and partners such as the Local Nature Partnership and the RSPB to develop a shared solution for the strategic development of the SHG. We have helped to unlock £2 billion of ongoing and planned investment, alongside 15,000 planned jobs. This new development will be located alongside 275ha of new wet grassland habitat, created and managed for birds.

Recommendation:

The SRA Board is asked to:

1. Recognise the benefits of a strategic solution approach to mitigation and approve the development of a strategic approach to mitigation for the Flood Action Plan.
2. Note the relationship between this work and the work in W1 to develop a long term flood risk management strategy for Somerset.
3. Request that £50,000 funding is allocated to the development of this work. Project to be led by Natural England, to be completed within this financial year 2017/18.

Date: 4th July 2017

Author: Donna Gowler (Natural England)