

Somerset Rivers Authority Board Paper

Title: Dredging Commitment

RECOMMENDATION

The SRA Board is asked to:

- Note the sensitivities that exists between the relative priorities and programmes of the Sowy Enhancement Scheme and further pioneer dredging on the River Parrett
- Commit to “Dredge the River Parrett between Oath and Burrowbridge as soon as a legally compliant and affordable scheme can be found”.

Purpose of the item:

To advise the SRA Board of the sensitivities that exist regarding the relative priorities and timings of the following SRA promoted projects

- Enhance the capacity of the Sowy scheme
- Further Pioneer Dredging on the River Parrett.

Also to recommend that the SRA Board adopt an approach to future pioneer dredging on the River Parrett that will show a commitment to deliver this work as soon as a legally compliant and affordable case can be made.

In doing so it is expected that SRA Board representatives will have sufficient confidence in the delivery of both schemes to support them both.

Background and context

The promotion of the Sowy Enhancement Scheme is viewed as a positive step towards reducing flood risk in the upstream River Parrett catchment. However there remain concerns that a consequence of implementing this scheme will be to change the patterns of flooding and seasonal water levels to the detriment of land owners within Allermoor and Kings Sedgemoor areas in particular.

The original Sowy Scheme, otherwise known as the Parrett Flood Relief Scheme was intended to divert water from the River Parrett, at times when its capacity would otherwise become uncontrollably exceeded, and carry it in an enlarged channel (Sowy

and KSD) through Allermoor and Kings Sedgemoor to discharge back into the River Parrett at Dunball. In this way the aim of reducing flood risk upstream was achieved and the impact in Kings Sedgemoor and Allermoor was managed.

The Parrett IDB, representing their rate payers across the catchment support the concept of the enhanced Sowy Scheme as it would further reduce flood risk in the upstream Parrett Catchment whilst having a neutral effect in the receiving areas of Kings Sedgemoor and Allermoor.

However as the details of the scheme have developed it has become clear that this neutral effect is not achievable, with peak water levels under extreme conditions predicted to increase by approximately 300mm and freeboard to land levels reducing more often.

Recognising the value of the Sowy Enhancement Scheme to the wider River Parrett catchment the IDB have strongly promoted further pioneer dredging of the River Parrett between Burrowbridge and Oath Lock to reduce the detrimental impact of the Enhanced Sowy scheme on land owners in Allermoor and Kings Sedgemoor and to enable them to support the Enhanced Sowy Scheme.

There is strong evidence that in this reach of the River Parrett the channel has reduced in size to the extent that the existing Sowy Scheme now operates prematurely. Hydraulic modelling commissioned by the IDB has shown that restoring the River Parrett to a larger cross section would allow it to carry more flood water and would delay the operation of the Sowy Scheme thereby providing reduced flood risk.

The IDB consider that the combination of the Enhanced Sowy Scheme and further pioneer dredging will provide an outcome that reduces flood risk in the Parrett Catchment and reduces detriment to land owners in Kings Sedgemoor and Allermoor to the greatest extent possible. They continue to promote this solution.

It is acknowledged that both schemes must be shown to be legally compliant in terms of impact on land owners and the environment.

Latest status

An Extra Ordinary Management Group meeting was held on 19th May 2017 to work through these issues, at which it was agreed the Management Group would recommend to the SRA Board to make the following commitment.

“The SRA commits to dredge the River Parrett between Oath and Burrowbridge as soon as a legally compliant and affordable scheme can be found”

This would give the greatest possible confidence that both schemes will be implemented.

Recommendation:

- Note the sensitivities that exists between the relative priorities and programmes of the Sowy Enhancement Scheme and further pioneer dredging on the River Parrett
- Commit to “***Dredge the River Parrett between Oath and Burrowbridge as soon as a legally compliant and affordable scheme can be found***”.

Date: 26/6/17

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