

Paper for SRA Board meeting 21st October 2015

Subject: Ring Bank Community Feedback – Moorland, Fordgate and Chadmead

The Somerset Rivers Authority Board (SRA) is asked to:

1. **Note the summary of results of the public consultation of residents and landowners at Moorland, Chadmead and Fordgate on the principle of ring banks at these communities as outlined in this paper.**
2. **Consider the recommendations of the SRA Management Group**
 - **That no further investigation is carried out on the Fordgate ring bank at this time and a summary of both the consultation responses and this decision should be sent to the residents and landowners by the EA on behalf of the SRA.**
 - **That a two stage approach is adopted for Chadmead and Moorland**
 - **Stage 1 - The SRA to commission further work with the communities with a view to developing a greater degree of consensus. This would involve addressing as many of the concerns and issues as possible, prior to investment in appraisal and design. It would require some community officer and technical support. The SRA Board to agree who would be best placed to lead this work.**
 - **Stage 2 - Depending on the outcome of this work and the scale of the issues and concerns that remain, the SRA would then consider whether to invest in further appraisal and design work (circa £200k).**

1.0 Background

At the end of 2014, on behalf of the SRA, the Environment Agency (EA) carried out an initial assessment of locations where it might be possible to build ring banks to provide extra flood protection to residential properties. 12 potential locations were identified by those with local knowledge and experience (the IDB, EA operations staff and members of the local community). This initial assessment suggested that Chadmead, Fordgate and Moorland were the most viable locations. Following this, an initial site walkover was carried out with community representatives in March 2015.

To establish the level of community support for these three locations, the EA, on behalf of the SRA, carried out a consultation exercise over the summer. Letters, along with indicative maps of potential alignments were sent to landowners and home owners in the three villages. These documents are appended to this summary report. Consultees were asked whether they were supportive or not supportive of a ring bank in principle and were given the opportunity to identify questions, concerns or issues. A drop-in session was also held in Moorland Village Hall in July to support this exercise and to gauge local opinion.

All consultees have been sent a copy of the results of the consultation exercise as well as a copy of this paper.

2.0 Summary of consultation responses

A summary of the responses received is shown in the table below.

	Total Responses	Supportive	Not Supportive	Undecided
Fordgate	32/39 (82%)	9 (28%)	20 (63%)	3 (9%)
Chadmead	9/13 (69%)	6 (66.7%)	3 (33.3%)	0
Moorland	63/116 (54%)	45 (71%)	18 (29%)	0

The highest response rate was obtained from Fordgate residents (82%) and more than half of those responding did not support the principle of a ring bank (63%) with many strongly opposed to it. Only 28% were supportive, with the rest undecided (9%).

The response rates for Chadmead and Moorland were lower (69% and 54% respectively) but the majority of those responding were in favour of a ring bank (Moorland 71% and Chadmead 66.7%). However, there were also responses from both communities strongly opposing the idea.

In addition, many detailed comments and queries were received on subjects such as the detailed construction / design of the banks, increases in flood risk outside of the banks, ground water issues, future maintenance issues, and effects on property values and access.

A number of respondents felt that the money would be better spent on dredging, the Bridgwater Barrier, pumping at Elson's Clyce, maintenance of the recent 8km dredge, maintenance of rivers, banks, rhynes and ditches, and reviewing the management and maintenance of Park Brook.

Several respondents also commented that they had considered the completed 8km dredge and improved pumping procedures to have sufficiently reduced their flood risk, but expressed concern that the suggestion of ring banks could now imply that this was not the case.

3.0 Further Considerations

3.1 There have also been a number of concerns during and subsequent to the consultation from people living in the area, but who would not be protected by any of the potential ring banks. Their concern is that their flood risk would be made worse by such constructions.

3.2 The SRA Management Group have reviewed the results of the consultation and subsequent feedback and concluded the following

- Given the high response rate and low support for a ring bank at Fordgate, it was felt that there was no justification for developing a proposal for a ring bank there at this time.

- With regard to both Moorland and Chadmead, the picture was less clear. Although a majority was in favour in both communities, it was not overwhelming in either location and people there have a considerable number of queries and concerns. As a result it was felt that there would be merit in carrying out some further work with the communities, possibly with the assistance of community representatives from Thorney or Muchelney, where there are ring banks in place. The aim of this work would be to share experiences and address the queries and concerns raised, with a view to developing a greater degree of consensus. To do so would also require further investigation work in these two locations. Chadmead in particular has merit given the limited number of properties.

4.0 Recommendations

The SRA Management Group therefore recommends the following next steps

4.1 Fordgate

That no further investigation is carried out on the Fordgate ring bank at this time.

4.2 Chadmead and Moorland

A two stage approach is adopted for both locations.

Stage 1 - The SRA to commission further work with the communities with a view to developing a greater degree of consensus. This would involve addressing as many of the concerns and issues as possible, prior to investment in appraisal and design. It would require some community officer and technical support. Given the community anxieties and uncertainties in response to the consultation in July, it is felt that the EA should provide some technical support to this piece of work, but should not lead it. As a result the SRA Board is asked to decide who should provide this leadership.

Stage 2 - Depending on the outcome of this work and the scale of the issues and concerns that remain, the SRA would then consider whether to invest in further appraisal and design work (circa £200k).

5.0 Next steps

SRA Board to consider the recommendations of the SRA Management Group in this paper (Sections 4.1. and 4.2)

SRA Management Group to identify a lead delivery partner for this next phase of work (two stages identified in Section 4.2).