

ITEM 7d

Somerset Rivers Authority Board Paper

Title: Somerset Rivers Authority Strategic Approach to Mitigation

RECOMMENDATION

The SRA Board is asked to note that:

1. The principles of Strategic Mitigation have been agreed by the working group as set out in annex 1.
2. A list of potential sites/areas where mitigation could be delivered has been produced.
3. This will require investments in both physical infrastructure and legally binding changes to water level management protocols.
4. The quantum and location of mitigation required is proportionate to the scale and cumulative impact of current and future SRA flood alleviation projects.
5. Assessing cumulative impacts is complex.
6. Natural England, the Drainage Boards and Environment Agency are in the process of agreeing a shared understanding of the impacts of current schemes and priorities for strategic mitigation.
7. Delivery requires ongoing commitment from SRA partners to maintain the special characteristics of the Somerset Levels and Moors.

Purpose of the item:

To update the board regarding the development of a Strategic Approach to Mitigation.

Background and context

The board commissioned Natural England to coordinate the development and implementation of a strategic approach to mitigation for the environmental impact of SRA works. The aim of the strategic approach to mitigation is:

- To develop positive solutions enabling delivery of schemes to reduce flooding whilst making appropriate use of the flood plain to convey and temporarily store flood water, and maintaining the special characteristics of Somerset.
- To provide greater certainty and clarity to Flood Action Plan project developers/deliverers, reducing costs and time spent, and provide a positive solution that works for flood risk, people and nature.
- To ensure compliance with relevant legislation.

Timescale

The initial project timescale was aiming for completion by end March 2018. However, uncertainty over the scale and environmental impact of headline projects has delayed completion.

Modelling work to confirm the hydraulic changes associated with the proposed dredging and Sowy-KSD works is now being processed. Completion of this work will enable us to finalise mitigation requirements and find the most effective ways to deliver it.

The mitigation is likely to require changes to Water Level Management protocols and agreement from partners and landowners to deliver appropriate shallow splash conditions in the winter months.

Costs

The drainage board letter of 17 November referenced that costs associated with the mitigation work will be the subject of grant aid from the Somerset Rivers Authority. The board should note this important point, and the likely need to resource ongoing engagement with landowners to develop solutions.

Key Next Steps

A detailed report setting out environmental mitigation options and approximated costs is being developed with partners and will be presented at a future board meeting.

Date: 22 February, 2019

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Annex 1 - Agreed Principles of Strategic Mitigation

Stakeholders working group - A group of key partners and stakeholders (Natural England/Environment Agency, Somerset County Council, Sedgemoor District Council, Somerset Drainage Boards Consortium, National Farmers Union, Country Land and Business Association, Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group SW, RSPB and Somerset Wildlife Trust) has been established. The group recognised the SRA's aspiration to achieve better control of high-order rain events and welcomed the proactive approach to mitigating for risks of environmental damage associated with works.

The SRA endorsed that initial focus of the strategic mitigation should be (in parallel priority):

1. **Enabling Maintenance Dredging Programme** - Production of a 5 Year joint Natural England/Environment Agency advice/protocol and associated consent to enable ongoing maintenance of the recently dredged profile. This will mitigate for and minimise direct, in-channel, impacts of works, enabling maintenance works to progress in a timely and cost-effective manner. (Important: This will not cover mitigation for the direct, in-channel, impact of works associated with pioneer dredging projects.)

Timescale: COMPLETE

2. **Enabling measures that reduce flooding to be delivered whilst ensuring a resilient wetland at the heart of Somerset** – The SRA Board has endorsed the principal aspiration to achieve both better management of water in high-order rainfall events and better management of the natural environment, in particular the maintenance of water levels necessary to protect the wetland environment. It has been recognised that these two things must go hand in hand.