

Somerset Rivers Authority Board Paper

Sowy/King's Sedgemoor Drain (KSD) Enhancement Scheme progress report

Purpose of the item

To update the Board on the progress of the Sowy/King's Sedgemoor Drain (KSD) Enhancement Scheme.

Background and context

The Board agreed in June 2018 that works to enhance the Sowy/KSD should continue with an incremental approach. As previously reported to the Board, Phase 1 includes further Dunball smoothing, desilting at Parchey and Dunball bridges (completed November 2018), widening of the lower Sowy using a 'cut and fill' approach and work to structures to allay concern of localised increased water levels on adjacent land. The package also includes work to mitigate any detrimental impacts affecting the protected environmental habitat areas (Special Protection Areas).

In September 2019 the Board gave their approval to proceeding with commissioning the delivery of the environmental mitigation package and the channel works. The Board also approved the removal of the Dunball smoothing construction works from Phase 1 of this project but approved the use of existing Sowy/KSD local partner funds to continue to develop the detailed design for the Dunball smoothing works to enable delivery of the final scheme when funding is available.

Phase 1 of the main channel improvements must be completed by April 2021 to meet Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) funding deadlines.

Latest status

Sowy/KSD works

Project development for Phase 1 of the channel enhancement scheme has been ongoing. Phase 1 includes development of flood risk and environmental mitigation packages and design of channel bank restoration improvements on the Sowy/KSD.

Thirty-five landowners anticipated to be directly impacted by the works were identified and contacted via a letter and invited to have a meeting with the project team to learn more about the scheme. A series of meetings were held over five days with landowners. Feedback was largely in support of the proposed works and the resultant benefits of the scheme. Any concerns held were largely due to our proposed construction timings, extent of the works and stocking plans for their fields. All landowners were informed of the Public Information Events planned for February 2020.

Public Information Events were held in Westonzoyland, Othery and Aller on 17-19 February. A member of the project team has also been attending Parish Council meetings alongside members of the SRA team to explain the proposals and answer any questions raised. An aerial drone company was procured to get aerial video footage of the scheme's footprint. A 360' video was used in the Public Information Events to provide visual support and inform discussions with landowners, as well as to serve as a pre-condition survey.

Design and Environmental assessment work for the 'in-channel' flood bank restoration work package continues, with the design and construction methodology being further refined with the aid of the designers and contractor.

Vegetation clearance is planned to commence along the left bank of the KSD and Sowry River in February / March as enabling works to assist displacing water voles from the areas identified for ecological improvements within channel i.e. back waters as part of the later construction works. In order to prevent the water voles from re-inhabiting the areas from which they have been displaced, frequent maintenance cuts of these areas will be required up until the commencement of construction.

Operation of Monks Leaze Clyce – Winter 19/20

Monks Leaze Clyce was operated beyond its normal operational capacity to avoid potential damage to banks through over-topping at the Oath to Burrowbridge dredge site. This allowed a greater volume of water to be removed from the River Parrett, thus, reducing the risk of damage to banks. This operation was successful and will continue to be delivered throughout this winter until bank strengthening works can be undertaken at the dredge site.

Environmental Mitigation

Detailed Scopes and Contract packages continue to be developed and tendered for environmental mitigation works packages. The first refurbishment/repair works package for Moorlinch Raised Water Level Area (RWLA) will be awarded imminently to allow detailed designs and preparation to be completed before works start in May 2020. Vegetation clearance is due to start in March 2020 at the Special Protection Area Mitigation sites (Moorlinch RWLA, Westmoor RWLA and Egypt's Clyce) to mitigate risks of delay arising from water vole, wintering and nesting birds becoming established in the works area.

Channel Smoothing at Dunball

The project team continue to appraise and refine the shortlisted design options for the Dunball Smoothing package. The project team is exploring solutions to overcome the complex problems associated with a difficult construction site. The aim is to find a preferred option that is deliverable and affordable.

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