

Somerset Rivers Authority Board Paper

Somerset Rivers Authority 2021-22 Enhanced Programme

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

- Review and comment on the proposed 2021-22 Enhanced Programme.
- Approve the proposed 2021-22 Enhanced Programme proposal.
- Recognise the importance of securing the full amount of local match funding to guarantee delivery of the Bridgwater Tidal Barrier and confirm that the SRA Board supports the principle of providing further contributions in future years.

Purpose of the item

To consider and approve the proposed Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA) 2021-22 Enhanced Programme.

2020-21 Enhanced Programme – background and context

2021-22 will be the seventh year that the SRA funds an 'Enhanced Programme' of projects to provide an extra level of flood protection and resilience for Somerset residents. SRA funding is currently collected via a 'shadow precept' of 1.25% on council tax. This alternative notional amount is a power granted by government explicitly for the purpose of funding the SRA. It is separate to other council tax funds and does not impact on the funds available to each council for core business.

The shadow precept is raised by Somerset County Council and the four district councils: Mendip, Sedgemoor, Somerset West and Taunton and South Somerset. The Parrett and Axe Brue Internal Drainage Boards (IDBs) also contribute £10,000 each per annum. The final amount of the shadow precept was confirmed at council budget setting meetings during February 2021. It will total £2,941,586. Item 8 on this agenda - 'Quarter 3 2021-22 SRA Finance Report' – further stated that £1.367m of contingency funds could be available this coming year for use on other projects.

The combination of the shadow precept and contingency funds provides up to **£4.289m** for delivery of the 2021-22 Enhanced Programme, SRA staff and overheads costs, and an allowance for contingency.

2020-21 Enhanced Programme – latest status

In previous years the SRA has undertaken one call for proposals each year. This call for proposals is during the month of August. Proposals are then assessed by officers with a draft programme presented to the SRA Board for provisional approval at its December Board meeting. Fewer proposals were received during the 2020 August call than in previous years, in part, as a result of the impact of Covid-19 disrupting SRA partner

organisations. At its December 2020 Board meeting the SRA Board approved a call for a second tranche of proposals.

An initial 10 proposals with a total value of £1.88m was submitted by SRA Delivery Partners in August 2020. All of these Tranche 1 proposals were scored against criteria reflecting the aims and objectives of Somerset’s 20 Year Flood Action Plan (FAP). They were then reviewed by SRA Technical Group members at a meeting on November 13, and by SRA Management Group on 20 November. SRA Board members provisionally approved funding of these 10 proposals at their meeting on 11 December 2020. After this meeting, one proposal that was provisionally approved has been withdrawn. The Environment Agency reported that the Dunball Sluice Refurbishment project would not be in a position to spend SRA funds during 2021-22, so recommended withdrawing the project so that the funds could be allocated to a project that would proceed during the 2021-22 financial year.

A further 19 proposals, totalling £3.424m, were received in response to the call for a second tranche of proposals. These Tranche 2 proposals were reviewed and scored by the SRA team in consultation with Technical Group officers on 5 February and then reviewed by SRA Management Group on 11 February.

As reported in agenda ITEM 9, during February 2021, the River Sowy – King’s Sedgemoor Drain Enhancements Scheme project team identified that additional funding is required to ensure delivery of Phase 1 of this project during 2021-22. This request for funding has been factored into 2021-22 Enhanced Programme preparations.

Tranche 1 and Tranche 2 have now been fully assessed and a final proposal for the 2021-22 Enhanced Programme is set out below. Of the 29 proposals originally submitted and assessed, 20 – plus the request for additional funding for the River-Sowey-KSD scheme – are proposed for inclusion in the 2021-22 Enhanced Programme.

2021-22 Enhanced Programme

SRA projects are categorised into 5 workstreams, as per Somerset’s 20 Year Flood Action Plan. In total there are 21 proposals for inclusion in the 2021-22 Enhanced Programme. Table A summarises how proposals and SRA funding are spread across the workstreams.

Table A

Workstream	No. of Proposals	% of proposals	Value £000s	% of value
W1 Dredging & River Management	4	19%	£1,445	42%
W2 Land Management	6	29%	£705	20%
W3 Urban Water Management	3	14%	£300	9%
W4 Resilient Infrastructure	7	33%	£865	25%

W5 Building Local Resilience	1	5%	£125	4%
Total	21		£3,440	

2021-22 Proposals

The proposed 2021-22 Enhanced Programme has a range of projects which combine to support delivery across all of the Somerset Flood Action Plan objectives. 33% of proposals will deliver countywide activities such as building local resilience to flooding, enhanced highway maintenance at flood susceptible sites and natural flood management and land management to slow the flow of water from the upper catchments. The list of proposals is set out below with full details provided in Appendix 2.

Reference	Workstream	Proposal Title
LP-GD2-a	W1	River Sowy-King's Sedgemoor Drain Enhancements Scheme
FWLM04	W2	River Aller Upper Catchment Floodplain Restoration
LP-SAM	W1	Somerset Levels Strategic Mitigation
FWMDCLM01-22	W2	Hills to Levels: Somerset Land Management and Natural Flood Management
MDCLLFA01	W3	River Sheppey Catchment Action Plans for Croscombe and Shepton Mallet
LLFA26	W3	Minehead 25-Year Action Plan
LASWT01	W1	Dulverton Weir and Leat Flood Alleviation Scheme (Phase 1)
EA17	W1	Bridgwater Tidal Barrier
FWLM06	W2	Somerset Beaver Strategy
FWLM05	W2	Somerset Natural Flood Management Mapping and Targeting
LAMDC07	W4	Beckington Drainage Improvements
LHA04-22	W4	Somerset Enhanced Maintenance: Drain Jetting
LHA03-22	W4	Somerset Enhanced Maintenance: Gully Emptying
LHA122-22	W4	Somerset Enhanced Maintenance: Silt-trap Emptying
LHA130	W4	Somerset West and Taunton Enhanced Maintenance: Trash Screen Clearing
LHA133	W4	A358 Combe Florey Drainage Improvements
WWT01	W2	Natural Flood Management for Doniford Catchment Farms
FWLM03-22	W2	Somerset Trees For Water Action Fund
LASWT01	W3	Burnham On Sea Water Management Investigation
LHA134	W4	Creech St Michael Culvert Upgrade
FAPW501-22	W5	Building Local Resilience across Somerset

A brief description of a selection of proposals from each workstream is provided below, full details are provided in Appendix 2.

Proposals under **Workstream 1** will see the SRA continue to support the delivery of the first phase of a major project to increase the capacity of key parts of the Sowy and King's Sedgemoor Drain through work in these rivers' channels and on their banks. Providing

more capacity in the Sowey-KSD system, so that it can be used more effectively, is a key aim of Somerset's 20 Year Flood Action Plan, which is overseen by the SRA. The first elements of the Somerset Levels Strategic Mitigation will be implemented to ensure that the special characteristics of Somerset are fully protected as projects to tackle the risk of flooding is addressed across internationally designated sites. The Bridgwater Tidal Barrier will receive a contribution towards the local match funding that is required to ensure delivery of this locally essential and nationally significant project. Most funding for this project will come from central government major project funding. However, a local contribution towards the project is essential to secure the national funding. In addition to the 2021-22 funding request, Sedgemoor District Council and the Environment Agency are seeking in principle support from the SRA Board for further contributions between 2022 and 2026 towards the match funding element of the project. An in principle commitment from the SRA Board will help to secure additional funding from other sources.

Workstream 2 contains six separate proposals, many of which put Somerset at the forefront of investigating and delivering flood risk reduction through the use of natural flood management (NFM) and changes to land management. The successful Hills to Levels project will continue to deliver the biggest range of natural flood management activities in the UK. Four nature-based schemes in sub-catchments in Mendip have already been identified for delivery due to two earlier Mendip-wide investigations funded by the SRA. Ongoing SRA investment is thus paying dividends as organisations have the opportunity to secure funding to investigate problems, develop solutions and deliver projects that they would not otherwise be able to tackle without SRA funding.

The Flood Action Plan set out the challenge to 'invest in flood management and infrastructure solutions having developed a better understanding of their effectiveness'. Under workstream 2 the SRA will continue to do this by supporting research to better understand the effect of what has been achieved with natural flood management over the last six years. The NFM Management Mapping and Targeting proposal will strengthen coordination between different organisations and individuals and provide evidence to better target future activities in key areas. A Somerset Beaver Strategy will assess the flood risk and environmental benefits of reintroducing beavers as well as consider potential negative impacts. The strategy will ensure Somerset has a robust evidence base which can be used by any person or organisation considering the reintroduction of beavers. This strategy will help to ensure that a coordinated and consistent approach is taken across the county to assessing the benefits and risks of beaver reintroduction.

Workstream 3 enables the coming together of all the relevant flood risk management authorities to produce a Minehead 25 Year Action Plan. Many properties and businesses are at risk of flooding in Minehead with climate change only going to increase that risk. SRA funding will supplement investment already planned by Somerset County Council and Wessex Water to go further than would otherwise be possible and undertake a truly integrated catchment approach to understanding what must be done to protect Minehead. The Action Plan will develop a costed programme of priority projects for Minehead.

Burnham on Sea Water Management Investigation will allow Sedgemoor District Council, working with SRA partners, to identify a solution to a complex flooding problem which is putting around 100 properties at risk of flooding but which no one organisation is in a position to address. River Sheppey Catchment Action Plans for Croscombe and Shepton Mallet will be a major detailed investigation. The investigation will be led by Mendip District Council. SRA funding will bring together eight organisations to identify solutions to the local flood risk challenges – in 2020, 19 properties were internally flooded and many roads were impassable, including the A371.

Workstream 4 will see four programmes of enhanced maintenance delivered by Somerset County Council's Highways Department with interventions happening across the whole county. The aim is to help keep roads open in locations susceptible to flooding, make them safer, preserve access for communities, and safeguard properties from flooding, all in line with the objectives of Somerset's 20 Year Flood Action Plan. These works benefit residents, businesses and visitors. Where possible, they are dovetailed with the Hills to Levels system of highway referrals to reduce run-off from land onto roads. A358 Combe Florey Drainage Improvements scheme will tackle flooding on the A358 which is one of only two main routes into and out of West Somerset. Somerset County Council will upgrade the drainage system and reprofile the highway whilst landowners will be encouraged to change their land management practices to reduce run-off from fields which is exacerbating the highway flooding.

Recognising the significant toll that the floods of 2013-14 took on local communities the Somerset Flood Action Plan committed to 'sustain and enhance business and community resilience'. **Workstream 5**, led by the Somerset Civil Contingencies Partnership, will deliver a variety of projects. SRA funding will secure the posts of the Community Engagement Officer and Community Engagement Support Officer for a further two years. These officers will focus on boosting resilience of small businesses; engage with schools in areas of flood risk; develop links with flood groups and encourage new groups to form. The officers will trial new ways of encouraging greater understanding of flood risks, the implications of climate change, and the responsibilities of property owners and land managers with the aim of increasing community resilience in at risk communities.

Summary

The total value of the SRA 2021-22 Enhanced Programme is £3.44m which can be funded from the 2021-22 Shadow Precept and available SRA contingency funds totalling £4.309m. Remaining funds will be allocated to the costs of SRA staff and overheads, and SRA contingency, as set out in Item 10b 2021-22 Budget.

The proposed programme has a good workstream and geographic balance. The programme will see significant investment in Workstream 1 Dredging & River Management ensuring delivery of Phase 1 of the River Sowey-KSD Enhancements Scheme and also providing an important contribution to the Bridgwater Tidal Barrier. SRA funding will help fulfil an important part of the SRA's function by facilitating greater partnership working and

production of integrated action plans for at risk areas such as Minehead, Shepton Mallet and Croscombe. The SRA's 2021-22 Enhanced Programme will make sure that Somerset continues to lead the way nationally in the volume and breadth of investment in natural flood management and improving land management to reduce the risks and impacts of flooding. Following a year of disruption caused by Covid-19, which limited the amount of community engagement that was possible, continued investment in Workstream 5 will make sure that communities and businesses at risk of flooding are supported to become more resilient to flooding and adapt to the impacts of climate change.

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Date: 25 February 2020

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Appendices:

Appendix 1: Confidential – 2020-21 Enhanced Programme List – with costs

Appendix 2: 2020-21 Enhanced Programme List – Public version – no costs