

ITEM 11b

Somerset Rivers Authority Board Paper to note

Quarterly Project Update: Bridgwater Tidal Barrier

Purpose of the item

To update the Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA) Board on progress in obtaining the legal powers to enable the construction of the Bridgwater Tidal Barrier and associated works which is the Transport and Works Act Order (TWAO).

Background and context

The Environment Agency and Sedgemoor District Council are working in partnership to deliver a tidal barrier and improvements to downstream defences to better protect Bridgwater and downstream communities. The scheme will deliver significant flood defence improvements and an increased standard of protection from tidal flooding for thousands of houses and businesses. 11,300 homes (built pre-2012) and more than 1,500 businesses will benefit from long-term reduced tidal flood risk provided by the scheme.

Transport and Works Act Order (TWAO) Application

The TWAO application was submitted to the Secretary of State at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) on 19 December 2019. Following the consultation period, the time period to secure the withdrawal of objections and resolution of issues raised in representations was extended until 31 July 2020, mainly to allow for the extra difficulty in engagement with stakeholders during Covid-19 lockdown.

The decision on whether the TWAO should be determined by Public Inquiry or through formal Written Representations rests with the Defra Secretary of State. A Public Inquiry must be held if statutory objectors e.g. landowners, utilities, wish to be heard.

Effective engagement resulted in all statutory objections either being withdrawn or statutory objectors advising the Secretary of State that they were content for outstanding issues to be resolved through the process of Written Representations. On 31 July 2021 the Secretary of State confirmed his decision that the TWAO will be determined through the process of written representations such that a Public Inquiry was not required.

The formal written representation process started on 1 August 2020 and there followed a number of representation exchanges through Defra with some objectors. **On 8 January 2021 Defra confirmed that the TWAO application for consent to construct the scheme has now been passed to the Defra Secretary of State for a decision.**

There is no timetable or time limit for the determination process, and it may be impacted by wider political considerations.

Detailed design and business case

The Environment Agency continues to work with framework suppliers to scope and start the detailed design. The Outline Business Case has been submitted for funding assurance. This process to assure the overall quality of the project will involve Environment Agency specialists, Defra and HM Treasury. Construction is planned to start 2022-23.

Funding

The project will be funded 80% by central government and 20% by local partnership funding. Sedgemoor District Council and the Environment Agency continue to investigate and secure all funding opportunities including from Local Levy, Bridgwater Town Investment Fund, Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership and Somerset Rivers Authority.

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