

ITEM 7

Somerset Rivers Authority Board Paper

Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership funded projects

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

1. Note that 31 March 2021 is the original deadline for the completion of LEP Growth Deal Funded projects.
2. Note how the SRA has used its Growth Deal funding from the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership.
3. Note that it is forecast that by 31 March 2021 91% of the LEP Growth Deal allocation will be fully claimed and that agreement was secured from the LEP to carry over the final 9% for use in 2021-22.

Purpose of this item

To update the Board on what Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA) has achieved with Growth Deal funding from the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership, originally awarded for spending by 31 March 2021.

Background and context

The award of £13.049 million of Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) Growth Deal funding to the Somerset Levels & Moors Flood Action Plan was announced on a visit to Somerset on 3 June 2014 by Owen Paterson, who was then Secretary of State at the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra).

The move was welcomed by Cllr John Osman, then Leader of Somerset County Council and Chair of the Leaders Implementation Group spearheading work on the Flood Action Plan. "This is great news," said Cllr Osman. "Without the money we cannot make the Plan a reality and this considerable sum will allow many things to move forward."

With Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA) being launched on 31 January 2015, the Flood Action Plan was expanded across Somerset, and the SRA inherited the £13.049m Growth Deal funding. As the deadline for the spending of this funding was set at 31 March 2021, now is a good time to note how many things have successfully moved forward.

Current status

Dredging: The Flood Action Plan said that "dredging of the Rivers Parrett and Tone has been identified locally as a key element in reducing future flood risk". After the Environment Agency dredged 5 miles (8km) of the Parrett and Tone in 2014, the SRA

used Growth Deal funding to help pay for more pioneer dredging. In 2016, 0.47 miles (750m) of the Parrett downstream of Northmoor Pumping Station was dredged; in 2019, 1.4 miles (2.2km) of the Parrett between Stathe and Burrowbridge; in 2021, 1.4 miles (2.2km) of the Parrett between Northmoor to M5.

LEP Growth Deal funding also paid for an important study from consultants HR Wallingford into *Future Dredging Opportunities in Somerset*. It was this report that prompted the SRA to invest LEP money into trials of water injection dredging techniques in 2016. This was the first time these methods were used on a UK tidal river in conjunction with a sophisticated silt-monitoring programme. The trials' success led to water injection dredging becoming the SRA's preferred choice for the crucial job of maintenance dredging. It is quicker, cheaper, has less environmental impact and is less disruptive for local people than traditional methods of excavation.

Dredging works have been delivered for the SRA by the Parrett Internal Drainage Board (IDB), working closely with the Environment Agency and Natural England. They have helped to protect homes, businesses, land, roads, and infrastructure across a large part of the Somerset Levels and Moors that were badly affected in winter 2013-14 and summer 2012.

River Sowy - King's Sedgemoor Drain (KSD):

The Flood Action Plan proposed to improve the entire River Sowy-King's Sedgemoor Drain (KSD) system, while balancing a range of interests. The main aim was to increase the amount of water that could be evacuated through the Sowy-KSD, so as to relieve pressures on the River Parrett and the River Tone, and enable upstream and downstream pumping stations to be operated earlier. This would confer operational flexibility in times of flood and benefit places such as Langport, Muchelney, Thorney, Moorland and Fordgate.

Sowey-KSD works funded with LEP money have so far included:

- the creation of new river channels under the busy A372 at Beer Wall near Othery, along with tilting weirs, to help stop the road flooding as it did for weeks in 2014
- the installation of a new water level control gate near Chedzoy, to help better protect the Chedzoy and Andersea area
- de-silting bridges to increase channel capacity at Parchey and Dunball
- dozens of water level control structure improvements on the Westmoor and Moorlinch Raised Water Level Areas and a new culvert at Egypt's Clyse

All done for the SRA by the Environment Agency, working especially closely with the Parrett IDB and Natural England.

Bridgwater Tidal Barrier

One of the biggest targets of Somerset's 20 Year Flood Action Plan was to 'accelerate the construction of a Barrier or Sluice at Bridgwater, with the objective of achieving delivery by 2024'. The date previously identified in the Parrett Estuary Flood Risk Management Strategy was between 2030 and 2050, ideally 2046.

The Barrier project is led by the Environment Agency and Sedgemoor District Council. Giving them £2million of LEP Growth Deal money as a contribution towards project costs helped speed up progress to the submission in December 2019 of the Transport and Works Act Order (TWAO) that is required to build the Barrier.

Few other places in the UK are as vulnerable to tidal surges as Bridgwater, and climate change is predicted to increase the dangers. The town needs extra flood protection. Bridgwater Tidal Barrier will reduce flood risks to at least 11,300 homes and 1,500 businesses.

Taunton Strategic Flood Alleviation Improvements Scheme (TSFAIS)

Taunton Strategic Flood Alleviation Improvements Scheme (TSFAIS) is an important part of the Flood Action Plan. Since 2014 Somerset West and Taunton Council (previously Taunton Deane Borough Council) and the Environment Agency have been studying how to reduce flood risks from the River Tone and its complex network of tributaries.

In 2016-17 the SRA used Growth Deal funding from HotSWLEP to support the scheme's progress. In four other years, the SRA has made contributions from its Local Partners Funding.

Three initial local priorities are now being taken forward, with a long series of further interventions planned, because 1031 properties in Taunton are currently at risk of flooding and by 2118, because of climate change, that number is expected to rise to 2548. Somerset West and Taunton Council estimates that a single major flood could cost Taunton's economy up to £50million.

River Brue catchment

The SRA has used LEP Growth Deal money to part-fund two Brue catchment projects: the refurbishment of North Drain Pumping Station and the installation of a new surface water pumping station in Field Way, Highbridge. North Drain Pumping Station sits close to the confluence of North Drain and the River Brue about halfway between Westham and Burtle. It reduces the risks of flooding for a wide area and needs to operate effectively all-year round. In 2020, LEP funding helped the Environment Agency to make numerous structural improvements and introduce better ways of working. Also in 2020, a Growth Deal contribution to a scheme led by Wessex Water helped the company to complete a £1.8million scheme designed to protect homes in Highbridge

from horrible sewer flooding. Along with a new underground pumping station, new pipework was installed.

Land Management

The Flood Action Plan stated: “Every farm and every stream has a part to play in water and flood management in Somerset.”

It was originally envisaged that LEP funding would result in 40 schemes of Natural Flood Management (NFM). In reality, the money delivered 120 schemes, containing many more individual elements countywide, and many different kinds of NFM. Works were done at the following places, and some of them had several schemes. In Brompton Ralph, for example, one farmer was so pleased with the results that he persuaded his downhill neighbour to install some complementary measures:

- Aisholt Common, Aller
- Bishop’s Lydeard, Bower Hinton, Brompton Ralph, Bruton, Brymore Academy
- Charlton Mackrell, Chilcompton, Chipley, Clayhanger, Combe Sydenham, Compton Durville, Cossington, Croford, Crowcombe, Curry Mallet, Curry Rivel
- Dillington, Dommett, Donyatt
- East Combe, East Nynehead
- Fitzhead
- Goathurst
- Halse, Ham Hill Country Park, Hestercombe, Hinton St George, Hoccombe, Houndsmoor, Hurcott
- Langford Heathfield Nature Reserve, Launcherley, Lufton (edge of Yeovil)
- Marcombe Valley, Meare Green, Merriott, Montacute, Milverton
- Nether Stowey, Northway, Norton sub Hamdon, Nynehead
- Oake, Over Compton (edge of Yeovil)
- Pitminster
- Queen Camel
- Roadwater
- Sandford Orcas, Shepton Beauchamp, Staple Fitzpaine, Staplegrove, Stoke St Gregory, South Petherton
- Tinker’s Bubble, Tintinhull
- West Buckland, Wigborough, Wiveliscombe

The SRA’s Land Management workstream is led by the Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group SouthWest (FWAG SW). Hundreds more activities have followed this initial LEP-backed burst, through initiatives such as the EU-backed Triple C project and the online auctions pioneered by the SRA, FWAG SW, and the Environment Agency. LEP funding gave Natural Flood Management in Somerset great impetus.

Nowhere else in the UK now has such a range, number and sophistication of NFM schemes.

Next steps

Nearly all of the HotSWLEP Growth Deal funding of £13.049m awarded in 2014 for Somerset flooding projects has now been spent: 91%. Combining this with £25.7 million from other local and national sources means that Somerset has benefitted from a total investment since 2014 of £38.7 million into the works described in this paper.

The remaining 9% of LEP funding is scheduled to be spent in 2021 on Phase One of the River Sowy-King's Sedgemoor Drain Enhancements Scheme. Permission to carry this funding through into the 2021-22 financial year was granted by the LEP in October 2020 after a variation request was made.

The Environment Agency is therefore getting ready, on behalf of the SRA, to increase the capacity of key parts of the Sowy and KSD through work in these rivers' channels and on their banks. Important side-stream structures will also be upgraded. These activities form part of an ongoing programme to reduce flood risks across 150 square miles. People, homes, farms, businesses, land and infrastructure will all benefit from a greater level of protection.

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