

Somerset Rivers Authority Board Paper (for information)

Strategic Approach to Mitigation Key Project Update

Purpose of the item

This paper summarises the current status of the Strategic Approach to Mitigation project.

Background and context

The SRA 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 flood risk 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.

The SRA awarded Natural England funding in early 2021 for a two-year programme, to deliver four key projects. Draft timelines have been produced for all four projects, showing a monthly breakdown for delivery of actions for the first year (up until the end of March 2022).

Develop a robust and long-term monitoring programme.

Work has begun to design a monitoring protocol for the Somerset Levels and Moors Special Protection Area (SPA). Conversations have taken place between key Natural England staff and a draft briefing note has been written setting out the reasons why the monitoring protocol is needed, what it aims to achieve and thoughts on data sources. The next steps are to get input from Natural England monitoring specialists to help refine the early stage design principles and ideas. The briefing document will then be updated and used as a basis for discussions with key local delivery partners.

Review and update of all Water Level Management Plans (WLMP).

A few basic discussions have taken place between the Internal Drainage Boards and Natural England regarding this project, which have focused on working out the best way to move this complex and fundamental piece of work forward. More discussion is needed around where to focus efforts. Early ideas include: updating the WLMPs to reflect current operating procedures, commissioning a report into what WLMPs will

ITEM 13c SRA Board Paper to Note Strategic Approach to Mitigation

need to consider in terms of future conditions (water quality, carbon storage, peat restoration, climate change predictions and new agri-environment scheme opportunities).

Examine future alternatives to Raised Water Level Areas (RWLA)

Internal discussions have taken place between key Natural England staff. The next step is to have discussions with key local delivery partners to find out what their thoughts are on this topic. The results of a Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) study modelling alternative approaches to water management at a whole moor scale will also need to be obtained and analysed to see what that tells us.

Identification and mapping of areas outside of designated sites.

This project is also referred to as the Functionally Linked Land project. Two winters of data collection have been completed, using a bespoke habitat survey methodology. Wetland Bird Survey data has been obtained from the British Trust for Ornithology and analysed. The next steps are to produce maps from the habitat surveys and to try and overlay bird distribution onto these. A report will then be produced presenting the first results from this piece of research. This will be shared with partners for them to comment on and also for them to make use of. Further surveys may take place next winter (2021-22).

Date: 21 June 2021

Author: Simon Phelps, Natural England