

Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA) Board Paper to Note

Taunton Strategic Flood Alleviation Improvements Scheme (TSFAIS)

Background and context

To protect existing property in Taunton, and to allow the town to develop safely, a holistic and strategic solution to flooding is required. Somerset Council (SC) and the Environment Agency (EA) are working together to provide a long-term strategic solution to reducing flood risk to Taunton and where possible to the wider catchment.

The Somerset Rivers Authority has allocated £665,650 to the TSFAIS project. £100,000 remains to be claimed.

Latest Status

Since the last SRA Board update in September 2024 the following progress has been made and changes taken place:

Left Bank of the River Tone between Frieze Hill and Town Bridge - TTC5

Project: partnership between Somerset Council and the Environment Agency.

Revised outline designs were received on 13 December 2024 following engagement and consultation with external stakeholders (National Grid, Wessex Water, BT, Wales & West Utilities, Natural England, third-party landowners) and the public, and have been signed off by the project team.

During the last year we have seen some changes to development sites adjacent to the defences, with proposals for the redevelopment of the Poundstretcher site, following its demolition, progressing at pace. There have been new requirements in the planning process too, with the introduction of the mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG), to ensure natural habitats are left in a measurably better state than before development. In the light of these changes, Somerset Council and the Environment Agency have looked at the phasing of the different sections of TTC5.

The section near Weirfield Green and the Local Nature Reserve (Section 1) is being paused, to allow the council to prioritise the areas where the existing defences provide the lowest protection. These are the defences adjacent to Clarence Street and the BT Exchange (Section 3), where the proposed improvements will reduce the risk of flooding to both North Town and Firepool areas, and the former Poundstretcher site (Section 4), where improvements will reduce flood risk in areas to the north of the river in the centre of Taunton. By prioritising Section 4, the council is also seeking to provide best value and maximise efficiencies by working in conjunction with the developer's programme for the redevelopment of the former Poundstretcher site.

The existing defences in Section 1 continue to provide the required flood protection for a 1-in-100 year flood event to the areas around Weirfield, the Health Centre and French Weir Avenue. The defences will continue to be monitored annually by the Environment Agency. The council will continue to seek solutions to address the extremely challenging new planning requirements around BNG and bring Section 1 forward at a later date. All the surveys and assessments as well as outline designs to date for Section 1 are a comprehensive package of information that will inform and support the detailed design and construction.

Works in Sections 3 and 4 can progress under Permitted Development Rights (planning permission is not required), though licences such as a Flood Risk Activity Permit (FRAP) are still required. The detailed design has commenced for these sections which will provide construction drawings and associated packages. This work also includes:

- liaising with National Grid over service diversions
- liaising with BT on compound arrangements and construction timescales (Section 3)
- meetings with Acorn Homes to co-ordinate design information on site levels and access (Section 4)
- liaising with residential property owners for building conditions surveys
- undertaking tree route protection survey to try protect high-value trees during construction
- and onsite meetings with the main construction contractor and specialist sub-contractors to find construction methods which minimise impact on people and ecology, whilst seeking an appropriate balance of cost, quality and sustainability.

An exciting engagement session is planned with North Town Primary School. SRA Community Engagement Officers, Environment Agency and Somerset Council will be delivering a session on flooding and resilience in March 2025. The session will include three interactive 10-minute workshops, a presentation and quiz, an animation and flood board game. We are running two consecutive sessions with groups of the school children who have recently been studying climate change. This engagement has come about because the flood works will directly benefit the school and as such have secured funding for the construction phase from the Department of Education.

The overall programme has continued to see adjustments to its original timetable, these have been managed within the programme by the project team.

Raise Firepool Lock Gates and River Tone defences - TTC10 Project: led by Somerset Council with Environment Agency technical advice and support.

There has been no progression since the last SRA Board update. The Somerset Council restructuring proposals and programme have impacted on resourcing for the project.

Optimisation of Longrun Meadow Storage - LRM Project: led by Somerset Council with Environment Agency technical advice and support.

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