

Somerset Rivers Authority Joint Scrutiny Panel Paper

Title: Brue catchment update

RECOMMENDATION

The SRA Joint Scrutiny Panel is asked to consider and comment on the latest position with projects in the Brue catchment. In particular the Panel is asked to consider the fact that a different approach will be required to deliver projects in the Brue.

Purpose of the item

This paper is a progress update on SRA funded proposals for work on the River Brue and in the Brue catchment. The paper summarises the latest position and some of the challenges experienced in moving the project forward.

Background and context

In financial year 2015/16 using funding provided by the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership (HotSWLEP) the SRA Board agreed to allocate £500,000 towards capital works that would optimise the capacity of the River Brue. The proposed works included updating the hydraulic model of the Brue, tree removal works, river bank improvements and desilting between Westhay and North Drain Pumping Station. HotSWLEP have a central government mandated deadline for of March 2021 for use of their funds.

An SRA Board Paper was submitted in December 2017 to bring attention to the difficulties experienced delivering SRA work in the Brue catchment. The difficulties were as a result of the need to work within strict environmental and regulatory constraints combined with a lack of consensus on the flood risk benefit of the proposals.

Some work on updating and enhancing the Brue hydraulic model has been completed but further development will be required. To date the only physical works it has been possible to undertake is a proportion of the tree works which were completed in February 2018.

In an effort to overcome these challenges the SRA Board requested that a 'Brue Plan' workshop should be held in early 2018 to investigate the potential for a more holistic catchment wide approach to managing flooding in the Brue catchment. The aim would be to ensure flooding issues are addressed and projects with multiple benefits are promoted.

The meeting was held on Wednesday 14 March. The meeting considered the flooding issues facing the Brue catchment to identify opportunities, constraints and knowledge

gaps. It was clear from the meeting that there is strong support for the development of a holistic Brue Plan that provides a framework for future SRA projects in the catchment but still a lack of consensus on the need for dredging.

Latest Status

The Brue projects have been led by the Axe Brue Internal Drainage Board (IDB) on behalf of the SRA. The IDB intended to carry out works under a public sector cooperation agreement as the River Brue is a 'main river' and as such the Environment Agency must permit any works that are proposed. The funding was originally secured from the Heart of the South West LEP it was assumed that the main focus of works would be on dredging in the Brue. The IDB agreed to lead the project as dredging sits comfortably within their organisation's area of expertise. For the reasons set out above it became clear that a broader package of works would be required which needs the expertise of a range of delivery partners.

In December 2018 the IDB took the decision to step back from leading the project as it was felt that it was unlikely that a scheme to dredge the Brue between Westhay and North Drain Pumping Station would be able to secure the necessary approvals in time to meet the funding deadline of March 2021. Other activities that had been identified such as potential projects in the upper catchment are beyond the IDB boundary and different to the types of work the IDB would usually commission or deliver.

Next steps

The SRA Senior Manager will work with SRA partners and stakeholders to seek a consensus on the best options for making use of the capital funds currently allocated towards the Brue catchment.

The SRA Board will be updated at the March Board Meeting on a proposed way forward.

Risk

Should it not be possible to identify a capital scheme, or schemes, which can be delivered in the time available it may be necessary to ask the SRA Board to reallocate the funding to another suitable project.

Recommendation

The SRA Joint Scrutiny Panel is asked to consider and comment on the latest position with projects in the Brue catchment. In particular the Panel is asked to consider the fact that at a different approach will be required to deliver projects in the Brue.

Date: January 18th 2019

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