

The Somerset Levels and Moors Flood Action Plan

Report on Progress

Report on progress delivering the actions of the Somerset 20 Year Flood Action Plan

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Joint Scrutiny Panel
8 July 2022

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Purpose of the Item

To update the SRA Joint Scrutiny Panel on progress towards delivery of the actions contained within the Somerset 20 Year Flood Action Plan (FAP) and inform the panel of plans to review and update the plan.

Background and Context

The FAP was written in 2014 during the flooding of the winter of 2013/14 and is now 8 years old. The Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA) was established as a result of the FAP and the SRA Board now oversees delivery of the Plan. The SRA is a partnership of the flood risk management authorities in Somerset and Natural England. The actions with the FAP are being delivered by the SRA partners and other organisations such as Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group South West.

Current Status

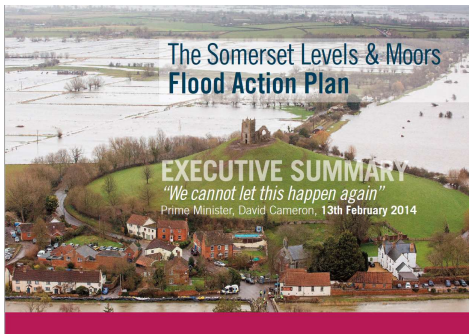
Many of the actions within the FAP have either been completed, are underway or are now established as part of the SRA's annual Enhanced Programme (EP). Some actions have been started but are stalled or are no longer being taken forward. The SRA Board has commissioned a review of the existing Flood Action Plan with a view to updating it to provide a strategy and plan that is fit for the future and which plans for addressing emerging flood risks.

Recommendation

The Joint Scrutiny Panel is asked to consider and comment on progress to date with delivery of the actions of the Somerset 20 Year Flood Action Plan.

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Somerset Flood Action Plan objectives:



- Reduce frequency, depth and duration of flooding
- Maintain access
- Increase resilience to flooding
- Make the most of special characteristics of Somerset
- Strategic transport connectivity
- Promote business confidence and growth

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The Somerset Flood Action Plan A 20 year plan for a sustainable future

Workstream Purpose & Progress to Date

| Key | |
|------------|--|
| Complete | Action completed |
| EP | Action now part of annual SRA funded Enhanced Programme |
| Underway | Action underway but is not yet completed |
| Incomplete | Action either started and stalled or deemed not required |


Workstream 1 – Dredging and River Management

- Effective management of the rivers, ditches, pumping stations and other structures is vital for all aspects of life on the Somerset Levels and Moors. It reduces the frequency, duration, depth and extent of flooding events.
- Dredging of the Rivers Parrett and Tone has been identified locally as a key element in addressing future flood risk, and especially reducing the duration of flooding but it will need regular long term maintenance to keep rivers flowing well.
- Enhancement of the Sowey-KSD to relieve pressure on the River Parrett is a key priority of this plan
- The development of a tidal barrier or sluice on the River Parrett below Bridgwater will be an important contribution to managing flood risk to Bridgwater, potentially reducing the amount of silt entering the Parrett and Tone from the Sea.

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| ID. | Workstream 1 Dredging and River Management - Actions | Status |
|-------|--|----------|
| W1.1 | Dredge 4km of the River Tone and 4km of the River Parrett | Complete |
| W1.2 | Additional maintenance of dredge profiles | EP |
| W1.3 | Maintain rivers and small watercourses for better conveyance | EP |
| W1.4 | Install permanent infrastructure to enable temp. pumping at Dunball, Northmoor and B&T Canal | Complete |
| W1.5 | Repair and reinstate river and flood banks and spillways | Complete |
| W1.6 | Implement small scale ring bank improvements e.g. Thorney | Complete |
| W1.7 | Expand existing river models to assess effectiveness of actions | Complete |
| W1.8 | Review impact of existing WLMPs on 13/14 event | Complete |
| W1.9 | Develop Flood Risk Management Strategy for Levels & Moors | Underway |
| W1.10 | Review effectiveness of and identify locations for further dredging | Complete |
| W1.11 | Enhance role of voluntary rhyesmen (riparian responsibilities officer) | EP |
| W1.12 | Sowy-KSD capacity improvements | Underway |
| W1.13 | Develop future governance and funding model for 'Somerset Rivers Board' | Complete |
| W1.14 | Taunton Strategic Flood Alleviation Improvements Scheme | Underway |

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Workstream 2 – Land Management

- Every farm and every stream has a part to play in water and flood management in Somerset. Farming lies at the heart of Somerset's rural economy, employing 10,000 residents and worth in the region of £200m per annum.
- Effective land management through the entire catchment can make a real difference to flood risk in local areas and have a significant effect on sediment at the catchment level. Securing benefits in the upper catchment is particularly important.
- To maximise the potential for land management to contribute to the overall enhancement of the catchments, by reducing flood risk and soil erosion, improving water quality and environmental management, there is need for an expansion of the existing farm advice and support package to assist and encourage land managers with making the necessary changes.

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| ID. | Workstream 2 – Land Management - Actions | Status |
|-------|---|----------|
| W2.1 | Somerset partners to pilot a new approach to Catchment Sensitive Farming that covers flood risk management | Complete |
| W2.2 | Support adoption of more flood resilient farming systems and adaptation | Complete |
| W2.3 | A locally administered capital grant fund | EP |
| W2.4 | Explore the potential of delivery through locally defined Nature Improvement Areas, ecosystem services and off-setting approaches | Underway |
| W2.5 | Slow the flow in watercourses | EP |
| W2.6 | Review current High Level Stewardship schemes at their 5 year break clauses and agree adaptations | Underway |
| W2.7 | Ensure that next agri-environment scheme (NELMS) takes into account benefits from natural flood management. | Complete |
| W2.8 | Put in place simplified approvals process to allow land managers to carry out work | Complete |
| W2.9 | Pilot a locally operated Payment for Ecosystem Services scheme | Complete |
| W2.10 | Defra will consider how best to secure flood risk benefits in CAP review | Complete |
| W2.11 | Examine innovative mechanisms such as developing a Community Land Management Trust to support a Land Swap/ Transfer/Purchase Scheme . | Complete |

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Workstream 3 – Urban Water Management

- Rainfall in developed areas often falls on hard impervious surfaces such as roads, roofs and pavements so it runs off fast and cannot infiltrate into the ground. This can increase the risk of flooding, particularly locally.
- there is an opportunity across the county for individual businesses and home owners to improve drainage locally and decrease run off where it does cause a problem, by putting in place things such as permeable paving, green roofs etc.
- The plan includes an action about retrofit schemes where run off is identified to be an issue, and an action about working with local partners to provide and promote advice to individuals or businesses who wish to implement schemes .

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| ID. | Workstream 3 – Urban Water Management - Actions | Status |
|------|---|------------|
| W3.1 | Provide an easy to use online source of expert guidance on the design and delivery of sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) for planners and developers | Complete |
| W3.2 | Encourage developers to go beyond the minimum requirements to reduce runoff by creating a “Watermark” scheme | Underway |
| W3.3 | Review to what extent we can use the planning system to create planning requirements eg require rainwater harvesting on all new development | Incomplete |
| W3.4 | Review the effectiveness of existing SuDS schemes and attenuation ponds | Complete |
| W3.5 | Mapping of existing SUDS and flood alleviation schemes across the county | Incomplete |
| W3.6 | Undertake an awareness raising campaign of steps individuals can take to reduce runoff and explore potential options in terms of incentives for doing so. | Underway |
| W3.7 | Authorities will work with organisations that occupy large areas to encourage them to use permeable materials and install SUDS when replacing or maintain hard surfaces . | Incomplete |
| W3.8 | Carry out inspections of new unadopted SuDS to ensure they are constructed and maintained in accordance with approved plans. | EP |
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Workstream 4 – Resilient Infrastructure

- The flooding of the Somerset Levels and Moors in 2012 and 2014 has seen major disruption to transport. Some communities have been cut off for weeks at a time. There has been major disruption to the road network with several A roads blocked, causing disruption and delay to peoples’ travel and consequent costs to business; initial estimates of impacts are in the region of £100m. The strategic road and rail routes into the South West peninsula have been cut.
- Other important infrastructure was affected, with 57 BT telecommunications boxes under water and waste water treatment not possible for some isolated communities
- Effective infrastructure and transport links are vital both for individual communities and for economic prosperity and growth and the delivery of Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects. We aim to ensure:

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| ID. | Workstream 4 – Resilient Infrastructure - Actions | Status |
|------|---|----------|
| W4.1 | Deep clean of system, including review and survey of gullies and culverts | EP |
| W4.2 | Pre-placed flood gates and signage (for diversionary routes) for roads that are at risk of flooding | Complete |
| W4.3 | Repair and resurface damaged roads (44km), using materials and road marking more resilient to flooding, allowing faster recovery in the future. | Complete |
| W4.4 | Implement minor flood alleviation management schemes e.g. to reduce road flooding of the strategic network | EP |
| W4.5 | Assess risk and as necessary implement flood alleviation measures at National Grid's Bridgwater electricity substation and Western Power's substations | Complete |
| W4.6 | Assess risk and as necessary implement flood alleviation measures to ensure that mains water supply is unaffected by, or can be maintained in, a flooding event | Complete |
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Workstream 5 – Building Local Resilience

- Resilient communities are the cornerstones for protecting local lives and livelihoods. Somerset has a long tradition of self help, and we need to build on that, sharing experience of what works and work together to innovate and ensure excellence across the county.
- This is about helping people help themselves and each other to reduce vulnerability to future flooding events.
- The first stage is to support people to re-establish their day to day lives, business connections, farming practices and community way of life, which have been so affected by the prolonged floods in 2014.
- The second stage is to work with households, businesses and landowners to prepare and adapt for possible future flooding.

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| ID. | Workstream 5 – Building Local Resilience - Actions | Status |
|------|--|------------|
| W5.1 | During Recovery Deliver a dedicated programme of targeted support to help individuals, farms, businesses and neighbourhoods to recover, including help to access resources and advice from existing and future Govt. and local agency programmes including the Somerset Community Foundation. Citizens Advise Bureau, and partners to Somerset Emergency Voluntary Agencies Group (SEVAG). | Complete |
| W5.2 | Somerset Resilience Website – CRISP to continue their work to improve existing website presence to provide a comprehensive and easy to access information source for resilience, linked to flood risk information | Complete |
| W5.3 | Build household, farm, business and neighbourhood level flood resilience – support locally led action to plan, design and implement solutions to increase resilience, Limited progress with these groups. | EP |
| W5.4 | Formalise the role of the Community Resilience in Somerset Partnership (CRISP) and provide sustainable funding and governance arrangements. | Complete |
| W5.5 | Ensure households, farm, business and neighbourhoods can obtain affordable and comprehensive insurance | Complete |
| W5.6 | Help ensure Somerset is seen as good place to do business as well as ensure tourism businesses become more resilient to flooding | Incomplete |
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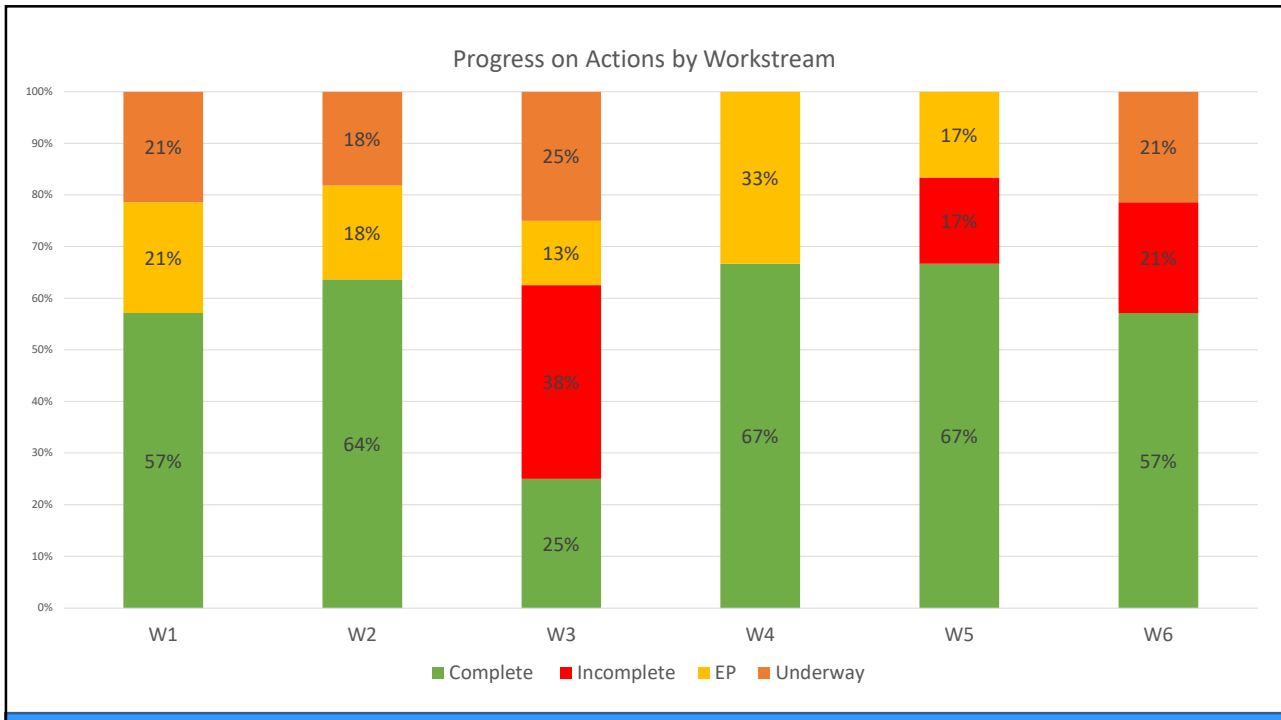
Workstream 6 – Complex Interrelated and Unfunded

- Determining the long term sustainable future for the Somerset Levels and Moors (SLM) will require careful assessment of the options and evidence and difficult decisions around investments and how the community can adapt.
- There is a complex interaction between different major capital investment opportunities which would be funded from a range of different central and local government groups as well as the private sector and other funders.
- Currently it is not known if flood risk to rail and road routes is more cost effectively delivered by raising transport routes or managing the river system differently. These options need to be considered together to provide good evidence on the most effective and best value approaches.
- The possibilities and options for adapting to changing pressures, including changing land use and buying out properties must also be considered as part of the overall assessment.

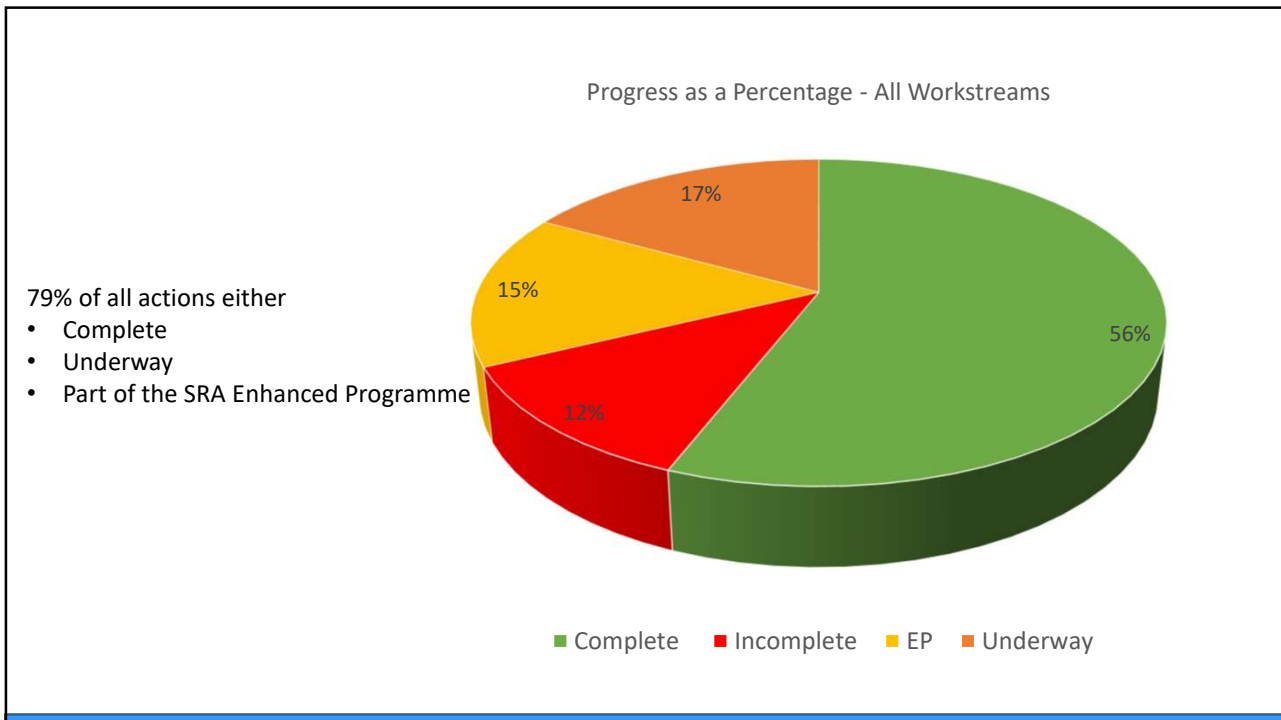
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| ID. | Workstream 6 – Complex Interrelated and Unfunded - Actions | Status |
|-------|---|------------|
| W6.1 | Raise level of the A361 (East Lyng to Burrowbridge) | Incomplete |
| W6.2 | Raise level of the A372 – Othery to Aller (7 bends) to allow larger culvert for Sowy channel (to be taken with River Sowy improvements below) | Complete |
| W6.3 | Design and implement road raising schemes to ensure access for Muchelney and other communities | Complete |
| W6.4 | Feasibility and assessment studies to identify key priorities for road schemes to ensure local access and delivery of schemes | Complete |
| W6.5 | Improve pumping capacity and operation, including upgrading Northmoor pumping station as appropriate. | Complete |
| W6.6 | Further local protection e.g. ring banks, around communities | Complete |
| W6.7 | Additional dredging, identified as effective of key locations across the catchment, and implement as appropriate | Complete |
| W6.7 | Improve the condition and raise floodbanks and spillways | Complete |
| W6.8 | Setting back defences to increase river channels and create floodplain within widened river channel | Incomplete |
| W6.9 | Spreading floodwater across the moors more evenly | Underway |
| W6.10 | Create temporary flood storage areas particularly in the mid catchments – 500 ha within 20 years | Underway |
| W6.11 | Production of an economic impact study of the 2014 event | Complete |
| W6.12 | A303 improvements to increase resilience, following Highways Agency feasibility study | Underway |
| W6.13 | Network Rail to identify best value options for ensuring the resilience of 4.5 miles stretch of railway | Incomplete |

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Somerset Rivers Authority

Flood Action Plan Review

- The plan was written in response to a specific set of events - 2012, 2013-14 floods
- 59 actions identified in the plan
- 52 complete, underway or now part of the SRA Enhanced Programme
- 7 actions are 'incomplete'
- 220+ projects/ schemes / activities large and small taken forward so far
- Hundreds of places across Somerset have benefitted through the Flood Action Plan and the SRA partners
- It is time to review the plan and reflect on
 - what has been achieved
 - what has changed
 - what we want to achieve in the future
- The new plan will set the objectives of the Somerset Rivers Authority for the future

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Flood Action Plan Review

Several engagement sessions have already been undertaken with

- SRA Board
- 1-1s with key technical officers from SRA partners
- 1 Stakeholder workshop
- 1 workshop with SRA Technical Group

Some themes to consider are already emerging:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic vision • Climate change • Adaptation / resilience • Surface water flooding • Water quality / drought • Coastal risks • Net zero – carbon sequestration • Legislative change • Government reorganisation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transition period • Long term planning • Community engagement • Complexity - clarity • Leadership role – ‘one voice’ • Empower communities to act • Food security / energy security • Power of collective efforts • Pioneering / innovation |
|---|---|

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Flood Action Plan Review

Next Steps

- Stakeholder workshops x3 – July onwards
- SRA Board workshop – August
- Online consultation hub – Late September to November
- ‘Village Hall’ events x2 – Late September to November
- Online consultation events x2 – Late September to November
- Draft Plan to the Board December 2022
- Joint Scrutiny Panel Review – January 2023
- March 2023 for final approval
- SRA Team keen to attend groups and meetings to discuss the project
- Questions or comments contact sra@somerset.gov.uk / 01823 355111

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