

Somerset Rivers Authority Joint Scrutiny Panel

Key Project Updates

RECOMMENDATION

The SRA Joint Scrutiny Panel is asked to:

- Note and comment on the latest position with key SRA projects.

This paper updates the Panel on the latest progress with some SRA key projects. Key projects are projects regularly reported on to the SRA Board and which are usually of a larger scale and value.

Key projects are reported to the SRA Board by exception. Only when a decision is required, or a project has reached a significant milestone is an update tabled as an agenda item. This paper focuses on projects which have recently reached significant milestones or are due to progress towards a milestone.

Oath to Burrowbridge Dredging

The SRA Board allocated a proportion of its Heart of the SW Local Enterprise Partnership Funding (£1m) towards river dredging between Oath and Burrowbridge on the River Parrett. The work is being delivered by the Parrett Internal Drainage Board.

The original estimate was that the works would take 12 weeks to complete and up to 22,000m³ of material would be removed from within the river channel and deposited at the rear of the bank. In total 21,363m³ of material has been removed in 11 weeks.

Dredging activities started on the right bank on 16 September. The major works were completed on 29 November and the contractors vacated the site on the 4th December.

Persistent high river levels and wet ground conditions resulting from 155% of seasonal rainfall during September, 180% in October and 132% in November, made site conditions difficult towards the end of the work period. As a result the contractor has not yet completed all of the levelling, topsoiling and reseeding to the banks. The contractor will return in the spring, as soon as conditions are suitable, to complete that work and again at a later date, when a robust grass sward is re-established on the filled bank, to reinstate the temporary spillway.

Where necessary the contractor constructed a small temporary bank at low spots along the crest of the existing river bank before leaving site to reduce the likelihood of water overtopping. In addition, due to the high river levels experienced during the Christmas

period the Parrett IDB and EA officers placed sandbags at a small number of locations for the same purpose.

Officers from the Parrett Internal Drainage Board and the Environment Agency are working closely together to monitor conditions at the works site until such time as the remaining works can be completed.

Bridgwater Tidal Barrier

The SRA Board allocated a proportion of its Heart of the SW Local Enterprise Partnership Funding (£2m) towards accelerating progress with delivering a Bridgwater Tidal Barrier.

The Environment Agency (EA) and Sedgemoor District Council (SDC) are working in Partnership to deliver the Bridgwater Tidal Barrier Scheme by 2024, subject to funding and statutory approvals. The project will reduce tidal flood risk to 11,300 homes and 1,500 businesses. The present value of benefits is £1,331 million. The present value of capital and maintenance costs of the Barrier and downstream banks work is £100 million. The benefit cost ratio is 13.

The barrier will be located between Express Park and Chilton Trinity village. It will have two vertical lift gates. The scheme includes improvements to the existing downstream primary flood defences along the river Parrett together with new secondary defences in the flood plain.

On December 19, 2019 the Environment Agency announced the formal start of the legal process to gain the necessary permissions to deliver the project. Permission is being sought through a Transport and Works Act Order (TWAO).

- The TWAO is a “statutory instrument” which grants powers, amends by-laws and imposes conditions on the scheme promoter
- The TWAO effectively grants planning permission, permits changes to highways and footpaths, allows land acquisition, allows moving utilities

Ultimately ‘the Order’ must be approved by the Secretary of State (SoS). The process is being run by the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and representations must be submitted to the Department.

- It is a very structured process determined by the Act
- Statutory consultees and others have been advised, plus newspaper adverts placed
- Formal Representations can be letters of support or objections
- Formal Representations must be made to Defra not to the EA
- If necessary, the SoS may call a public inquiry

There is an 8 week period when representations can be made to Defra. The period ends on 13 February. The TWAO documentation and information on how to make representations can be accessed via Sedgemoor District Council's website - <https://www.sedgemoor.gov.uk/bridgwaterbarriertwao>

Sowy/King's Sedgemoor Drain (KSD) Enhancement Scheme

The River Sowy is used by the Environment Agency to take excess water away from the River Parrett near Aller. Water flows down via Beer Wall to King's Sedgemoor Drain (KSD) near Greylake, then re-joins the Parrett at Dunball. Providing more capacity in the Sowy-KSD system, so that it can be used more effectively, is a key aim of Somerset's 20 Year Flood Action Plan, which is overseen by Somerset Rivers Authority.

The Board agreed in June 2018 that works to enhance the Sowy/KSD should continue with an incremental approach. Phase 1 works include desilting at Parchey and Dunball bridges (completed November 2018), widening of the lower Sowy using a 'cut and fill' approach and work to structures to allay concern of localised increased water levels on adjacent land. The package also includes extensive work to mitigate any detrimental impacts affecting the protected environmental habitat areas (Special Protection Areas).

In September 2019 the Board gave the approval to proceed with commissioning the delivery of the environmental mitigation package and the channel works.

Project development for Phase 1 of the channel enhancement scheme has been ongoing. Archaeological surveys for Phase 1 were undertaken in November 2019, with no additional significant features of interest being discovered. The first drafts of the initial 'environmental scoping' reports having been discussed with Natural England officers.

The various surveys are integral to securing the necessary permissions to undertake the works. An Environmental Statement will be published for consultation outlining the various assessments undertaken and assessing the impacts of the project.

The design work for the 'in-channel' flood bank restoration works package is also progressing. The design consultants are refining the design principles and proposals for the flood banks and proposed channel ecological enhancements. Landowners directly affected by the scheme have been contacted and offered meetings to discuss the project.

Detailed packages are being developed and tendered for the environmental mitigation works. SRA partners have agreed to a two stage approach for mitigation. Phase 1 will be mitigation for the planned works for the foreseeable future (approximately 5 years). Phase 2 will identify the preferred longer-term approach to mitigation. The approach will be financially sustainable in the long term and one that accords with the direction of travel

being set out in the recently published Agriculture Bill where 'public funding will be provided for delivering public goods' e.g. funding for the storage of flood water on private land.

Phase 1 of the main channel improvements must be completed by April 2021 to meet the Heart of The South West Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) funding deadlines. The project team is focussed on meeting this timeframe.

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Date: 22 January 2020

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