

## 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.

#### 1 Purpose of the item:

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. This paper provides an overview of project progress and notes any significant progress, changes or risks that have occurred since the previous Scrutiny Panel meeting on 31 January 2020.

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.

#### 2 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 works focussed on a 2.2km stretch of river between Beazley's Spillway at Stathe and the confluence with the River Tone at Burrowbridge. The work is being delivered by the Parrett Internal Drainage Board.

The original estimate was that the works would take 12 weeks (September through November) to complete and up to 22,000m<sup>3</sup> of material would be removed from within the river channel and deposited at the rear of the bank. In total 21,363m<sup>3</sup> of material was removed in 11 weeks.

Due to poor weather conditions contractors could not complete all tasks as originally planned before having to leave the site due to deteriorating ground conditions. Remaining tasks included completion of bank levelling, topsoiling and reseeded to the banks. During the winter months the Environment Agency and the Parrett IDB worked closely to monitor site conditions and take remedial actions where required.

The contractor returned to site on 26 May 2020 to raise bank levels across a five-meter width of crest at identified low spots and to replace gates and fence lines removed during the works. Ground conditions were very dry at the time of the works and, as it was

considered unviable to irrigate the bank throughout the summer - re-seeding of the bank is being deferred until later in the year.

A further small contract will be let to restore a ditch on Southlake Moor as mitigation for watercourses filled with dredged material during construction of the extended flood bank. This work is expected to take place in September

This project is now largely complete.

Work continues to monitor the effects of the dredge to determine whether any further environmental mitigations are required.

Further information can be found at page 14 of the draft Annual Report.

### 3 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.

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 8 week representation period ended on 13 February 2020. The decision on whether the TWAO should be determined by public inquiry or written representations rests with the Secretary of State

A request was made to the Secretary of State for an extension of the time within which to resolve objections. The Secretary of State agreed that request and has extended the time within which to resolve objections until 31 July 2020.

The project team continue to engage with parties that submitted TWAO objections and representations to Defra with the objective of addressing their concerns. An estimate of the current project timeline is set out below. The decision on the TWAO is ultimately taken by the Secretary of State following consideration of any representations made.

Assumed date for TWAO decision	Late 2020 (Excludes Covid-19 impact)
Complete Tender and FBC approval	Late 2021
Main contracts	2022-2025
Barrier should be operational	Late 2024

Further information is available on page 22 of the annual report.

## 4 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 SRA Board agreed in June 2018 that works to enhance the Sowy/KSD should continue with a phased approach. Phase 1 includes detailed design and planning for further Dunball 'smoothing', desilting at Parchey and Dunball bridges (completed November 2018), widening of the lower Sowy using a 'cut and fill' approach and work to structures (e.g. outfalls) to allay concern of localised increased water levels on adjacent land. The package also includes extensive work to mitigate any impacts affecting the protected environmental habitat areas (Special Protection Areas).

In September 2019 the Board gave their approval to proceeding with commissioning the delivery of the environmental mitigation package and the channel works. Phase 1 of the main channel improvements must be completed by March 2021 to meet Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) funding deadlines. The environmental window for carrying out works is approximately August through November.

The project team have been pressing on with project development work. There have been some impacts as a result of COVID-19 restrictions affecting resource availability causing some delay.

Whilst work has been progressing for starting physical works there has also been significant activity preparing the necessary Environmental Statement (ES) and associated documentation for formal consultation. Consultation is to take place during August/September. Land Drainage Consent must also be secured through the Parrett Internal Drainage Board. Physical works cannot start until necessary compliance paperwork is in place.

The correct environmental mitigation for impacts of the work are essential to support scheme delivery in the highly designated Levels and Moors. A Raised Water Level Areas (RWLA) refurbishment package has been designed to ensure mitigation for the planned works in the foreseeable future (approximately 5 years). This approach is proposed to enable flexibility as it allows for a long-term, more sustainable solution to be developed which aligns with any future agri-environment schemes and environmental priorities. For the proposed mitigation approach to be accepted as compliant as part of the Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) it is essential to provide reassurance that a solution for beyond the 5-year time horizon also comes forward.

The Environment Agency and Parrett Internal Drainage Board are working together to develop proposals that can be supported by farmers, land managers, the local community and environmental organisations. .

The project is working to a very tight timeline. Delivering projects in and around the highly designated environmental sites of the Somerset Levels and Moors is extremely challenging. The project team and SRA partners are working hard to ensure the project is delivered.

Further information is available on page 16 of the draft Annual Report.

## 5 Taunton Strategic Flood Alleviations Improvements Scheme (TSFAIS)

To protect existing property in Taunton and to allow the town to develop safely a holistic and strategic solution is required. Somerset West and Taunton (SWT) 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.

Previous studies, including Phase 1 of the TSFAIS, pointed towards the need for a combination of (i) improved flood defence walls in the town and (ii) an area for storing flood water upstream, to provide capacity for the long term (100 years). The capital cost and ongoing maintenance of this was estimated to be upwards of £50mill. All parties accepted that the total sum required was unlikely to be found in the short term. A revised Project Delivery Plan focussing on smaller local interventions as an interim solution was therefore agreed.

Somerset West and Taunton Council and the Environment Agency have continued to work in partnership, part-funded by the SRA. This year's focus was on 11 smaller options for improvements identified during Phase 2 of TSFAIS studies. The aim is to give Taunton a useful short and medium term increase in its capacity to manage flooding, pending the longer-term delivery of the two main TSFAIS options.

At the end of January 2020, the SRA Board confirmed its ongoing support for TSFAIS and its wider objectives, subject to the condition that any interventions made as part of the Scheme must have no significant impact downstream of Taunton.

In February 2020, a Full Council meeting of Somerset West and Taunton agreed to prioritise three initial local interventions. These are:

1. Optimising flood water storage at Longrun Meadow through building 1500 metres of raised embankments up to 1.8 metres high. This will benefit 687 properties.
2. Raising low spots in the River Tone's flood defences from Frieze Hill to Town Bridge. This will benefit 508 homes, businesses and facilities such as the police station and council offices, BT exchange and French Weir surgery, plus the A3027 and A3088.

3. Raising Firepool Lock gates to prevent River Tone floodwater entering the Bridgwater and Taunton Canal at Firepool, which reduces the risks of overtopping into Maiden's Brook and then Allen's Brook in Bathpool, and also raising 750metres of River Tone defences between Firepool Lock and the A358 Obridge Viaduct. This will benefit 219 properties.

Somerset West and Taunton Council will use £6million previously put aside for building projects 1and 2. Further funding for project 3, and other TSFAIS elements, is being sought.

In March 2020, as part of the SRA's budget and Enhanced Programme of works for 2020-21, the SRA Board agreed to put £300,000 towards the detailed design and delivery of the three interventions listed above.

Further information is available on page 16 of the draft Annual Report.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

The SRA Joint Scrutiny Panel is asked to:

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

**Date: 09 July 2020**

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