

Alison Bloom-Cooper,
Head of Planning/Chief Planning
Officer
Somerset Council
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Date: 7 March 2024
Ref: Somerset Levels and Moors Local Nutrient
Mitigation Fund
Officer: Michael Garrity
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✉ planningpolicy@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk

Dear Alison,

Somerset Levels and Moors interim delivery strategy

This letter has been prepared after considering an 'interim delivery strategy' for the Somerset Levels and Moors habitat site prepared by officers at Somerset Council for a meeting of the Somerset Council Strategic Planning Committee (scheduled for the 21 March 2024).

In common with other freshwater habitat sites elsewhere in the south, and south west, of England the Somerset Levels and Moors habitat site has been assessed as being in an unfavourable condition because phosphorous pollution. The catchment of the River Parrett is hydrologically connected with the Somerset Levels and Moors and overlaps the administrative boundary of both council's areas. As a consequence nutrient pollution from development in Dorset Council area may have an adverse effect on the Somerset Levels and Moors habitat site.

Somerset Council act as the lead authority for responding to the nutrient pollution issue effecting the Somerset Levels and Moors, but both councils have worked closely and effectively since Natural England notified of the sites unfavourable condition in August 2020.

Officers welcome, and support, the work of Somerset Council to date in responding to this issue which includes:

- developing a catchment specific calculator which reflects local circumstances
- providing detailed advice and guidance to applicants and officers
- delivering council funded mitigation projects
- supporting third parties in developing and delivering mitigation projects

Both councils made bids for Local Nutrient Mitigation (LNMF) government grant in May 2023 (Dorset Council's bid related to Poole Harbour catchment where it acts as the lead authority). Officers welcomed the announcement by government in December 2023 that Somerset Council had been awarded £9.6 million to deliver a phosphorous mitigation delivery strategy which in turn would unblock housing delivery across the whole of the habitat site's catchment.

Officers at council support the 'interim delivery strategy' prepared by Somerset Council which includes a package of short-, medium-, and long-term mitigation measures. Officers note that measures include both 'grey water' solutions to reduce concentrations of phosphorous in wastewater alongside 'nature based' solutions which are likely to confer secondary public benefits (potentially including public access, net gains in biodiversity and natural flood risk management).

We recognise that the interim strategy will need to be reviewed and updated as projects are developed, and as part of this process we would encourage Somerset Council to ensure that the strategy supports delivery of mitigation, and new homes, across the whole catchment area. We are confident that the positive working relationship that has been established with officers at Somerset Council will allow engagement around these issues.

We look forward to continuing with the positive and effective working relationship with colleagues at Somerset Council around investment of the LNMF grant, and in collaborating more generally in responding to the challenges and issues raised in the local response to nutrient pollution of habitat sites.

Yours sincerely,

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the signature of Michael Garrity.

Michael Garrity
Head of Planning