

Somerset Water Management Partnership (SWMP) Meeting

Monday 5th September 2011
2 – 4.15pm
Langport

Minutes of meeting

Attendees:

Anthony Gibson – SWMP Chair
DCllr Anne Fraser - Sedgemoor District
Council
DCllr Patrick Palmer - South Somerset
District Council (SSDC)
DCllr Bruce Nottrodt - TDBC
John Herrington – TDBC
Simon Foyle – Environment Agency
Phil Brewin – Somerset Drainage
Boards Consortium (SDBC)
Steve Dury – SCC, SWMP Co-ordinator
David Graham – Catchment Rep

Andrew Warde – Catchment Rep
Chris Edwards – SCC
Richard Bradford – RSPB
Alan Lovell – Wessex Regional Flood
Defence Committee
Jeremy Taylor – EA
Mervyn Winslade – SWADA
Rebecca Seaman - SCC
Phil Perkins – Sedgemoor District
Council
Helen Jones – FWAG

No questions from members of the public

Apologies / Declarations of Interest

Apologies received from:

Cllr Ann Bown, SCC; Steve Webster, SCC; Ruth Barden, Wessex Water; Paul Cottington, NFU; David Leach, Somerset Wildlife Trust; Roger Meecham, SSDC; Nigel Hester, National Trust; Louise Webb, CSF, EA

AG stated that he was also Chairman of the Bridgwater Challenge and Ann Fraser also involved in the Bridgwater Challenge.

Minutes of last meeting

These were signed off, with no changes, by AG.

(1) SCC Flood & Water Management Strategic Plan / Strategic Flood Management Partnership – Latest updates at this meeting

Steve Webster, SCC's Flood Risk Manager (from 1 Aug 2011) was unable to attend, but submitted a briefing note 'Flood and Water Management Update' that was circulated at the meeting. Copy also attached.

Preliminary Flood Risk Assessment submitted to EA in June following approval by Scrutiny group. The PFRA identifies areas at significant risk of local flooding i.e. surface water, groundwater and ordinary watercourses.

Development of the Local Flood Risk Management Strategy will be commencing shortly and be ready for public consultation next spring.

Action: SD to invite Steve Webster to next SWMP meeting to give presentation on PFRA.

(2) Flood Risk Modelling, Somerset Ken Moss, EA

Ken gave a presentation on the flood modelling work the EA have commissioned, as part of the WAVE project.

AL – concerned we may be looking too far ahead. More immediate concerns about lack of funding government putting into drainage maintenance, rivers and coastal flood defence. Particularly for rural areas. As a result the Somerset landscape could alter quite rapidly.

AG – What can we do? We need to know what's needed, what will it cost, and where the money might come from.

AL – need to stir up a bit of a hornets nest, so people know what the alternatives are, so that the wider community can have a debate

RB – it is difficult for organisations to know the extent of the problem. Information on alternatives and costs needed.

AL – we are still at the early stages of knowing where money will come from and how it will be spent

AF – there is a degree of nimbyism, that will remain until something awful happens.

Bridgwater is building 14,000 new homes, people also continuing to add extensions to their homes. How can we raise awareness? Some people are not interested. The actions of the insurance companies likely to focus people's minds, following their review of provision of flood insurance in 2013.

AG – important to defend and manage not just main rivers but smaller watercourses responsibility of Drainage Board. There is a real threat to agricultural economy, environment and to communities in Somerset.

SF – In EA's Bridgwater office we are looking at funding allocations. Positioning ourselves as best we can to attract revenue and capital funding into the area. But we are constrained by Defra / government policy.

Action: All: Need to stir up a hornets nest re importance of maintenance of flood defence in time of funding constraints

(3) Upper Tone Catchment Pilot

Jeremy Taylor, EA

From now until December 2012, EA testing new approaches to meeting Water Framework Directive objectives in ten catchments, one of which is Upper Tone Pilot, with a view to rolling-out effective elements to other catchments from 2013. EA moving away from 'leading' – pilot catchments will involve greater engagement and 'listening'. For Upper Tone 3 step process thus far:

First internally deciding what we thought issues were, and drawing up stakeholder list. Second holding Workshop to 'capture' knowledge about issues – e.g. what has worked well / not worked well? Third focussing on key themes – trees/woodland and water storage/flooding are 2 main themes arising.

Jeremy invited anyone not already participating who wishes to get in touch.

AG – the partnership would welcome the opportunity to have some sort of input, and to be kept informed about this. We may also want to support one of the proposed non-EA led pilots?

SD – Deadline for submission of Expression of Interest for non-EA led pilots is 30 Sept. FWAG are considering submitting an EoI, possibly for Upper Parrett. Liasing with Ben Thorne on this.

Action: All: to support Upper Tone catchment pilot in any way

Action: SD / HJ to express SWMP support to Ben Thorne, FWAG, for submission of catchment pilot expression of interest for (Upper) Parrett

(4) Somerset Levels & Moors – proposed Nature Improvement Area (NIA). Richard Bradford, RSPB.

Referred to challenges ahead for Somerset Levels & Moors, where for 60% area ESA agreements ending in next year or two. HLS confined to SSSI's, and ELS very low level of protection and funding. 2 ongoing initiatives that might help:

- 1) NFU-led Taskforce convened to develop scheme tailor-made to Levels & Moors that might secure funding to plug the gap.
- 2) SL&M NIA. The Government's recent Natural Environment White Paper announced £7.5m funding to create the first 12 NIAs "transforming rural and urban areas and providing bigger, connected sites for wildlife to live in and adapt to climate change".

Stage One NIA Application deadline 30 Sept. Taskforce will critique NIA.

DG – have you consulted with wider audience on NIA bid?

AF – who is the wider audience? Farmers? Parishes?

RB – not possible in timescale. If bid successful, there needs to be that engagement.

AG – to put into context, ESA brings in £3M per year. HLS bringing in more but on smaller area. The £600K over 3 years from NIA, if successful, not going to solve the SL&M problems but should give gateway into Ministry.

MW – agreed ELS not v useful

AG – important that farmers know we're trying to work on successor, so don't rush into anything precipitative and cause wholesale damaging change, in what may only be a gap between funding schemes. Agricultural intensification will have major impacts. NIA will not be the answer to all problems, but can be seen as a necessary precursor to seeking the solution we need.

PP - what is the area included?

AG – 27,500ha in ESA

RB – Tricky. Needs to be between 50,000 – 100,000 ha. IDB area, approx 55,000 ha.

NIA will focus on key areas where we will target effort, largely IDB area.

PP – edges of area are vulnerable

AG – edge of SSSI's most vulnerable eg Shapwick, W Sedgemoor. MAFF drew up plan here for arable farming.

PP – we're partly arable farm; no incentive to convert back to more 'nature-friendly' farming

DG – why was impact of ESA end not anticipated sooner?

BN – ESA's were brought in to replace earlier wildlife and management agreements – are these still active?

PB – these were 25 year agreements that have been phased out. There may be WFD money available? We can predict negative effects of end of ESA.

CE – there might be appetite to do something based on combination of HLS/ELS?

RB – First key thing is to come up with locally-led scheme. Let the local areas come up with the solution, rather than NE / EA etc. Need to be true to what the area needs.

AL – Not large sums of money for 12 NIA's, but if don't play the game won't benefit from it.

RB – successful bid may attract further funding

AG – have advanced since the days farmers and conservationists were at each others throats. Now a close community of interest and work well together. All have a common objective – to continue the good work the ESA has done for the area - which can only be good for the area.

Action: All: support Levels & Moors Taskforce in submitting bid for NIA, and developing tailor-made scheme for Levels & Moors to replace ESA.

(5) Coastal Change Pathfinder Project update

Rebecca Seaman, SCC

Rebecca highlighted the numerous activities that have taken place. Copy of presentation attached

AG concluded by saying it was a useful meeting, with 6 actions arising.

Dates of next meeting:

Scheduled to take place 1 week prior to Strategic Flood Management Partnership meetings.

Next SFMP meeting to be arranged, will inform SWMP when date finalised.

Everyone happy with Langport as venue for SWMP meetings.