

Somerset Water Management Partnership (SWMP) Meeting

Thursday 19th January 2012
2 – 4.15pm
Langport

Minutes of meeting

Attendees:

Anthony Gibson – SWMP Chair
DCllr Anne Fraser - Sedgemoor District Council
DCllr Bruce Nottrodt - TDBC
John Herrington – TDBC
Ruth Barden (RBd), Wessex Water
Simon Foyle – Environment Agency
Nick Stevens – Somerset Drainage Boards Consortium (SDBC)
Steve Dury – SCC, SWMP Co-ordinator
Richard Bradford (RBr) – RSPB
Steve Webster, SCC

David Leach, Somerset Wildlife Trust
Roger Meecham, SSDC
Nigel Hester, National Trust
Phil Perkins – Sedgemoor District Council
Simon Lipscombe – Wessex Water
Richard Brunning (RBg) – SCC
Roy Hayes – NE (CSF)
David Graham – Catchment Rep
Robert Deane – Land Use Consultants

Apologies / Declarations of Interest

Apologies received from:

DCllr Patrick Palmer - South Somerset District Council (SSDC); Mervyn Winslade – SWADA; Jeremy Taylor – EA; Andy Hicklin – EA; Alan Lovell – Wessex Regional Flood Defence Committee; Paul Cottingham, NFU; Josselin Rouillard - Centre of Expertise for Waters; Andrew Warde – Catchment Rep

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 provided an update. See attached presentation.

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. Report approved and uploaded to the Agency and Somerset's websites. See <http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/research/planning/135540.aspx>

Although the PFRA report does not give much useful info at the local scale, the information gathered will be used to inform the Local Flood Risk Management Strategy.

The requirements for the local strategy under FWMA are limited and include surface water, groundwater and ordinary watercourses only - does not include main river/tidal, potential impacts of climate change and possibly coastal erosion – although SCC do not have any coastal erosion duties or powers.

ACTION – following discussion there was unanimous agreement that the strategy ought to cover all forms of flooding, and that the Chair conveys this message at the next meeting of the Strategic Flood Partnership Meeting. Also considered essential that the strategy looks at multiple benefits (including beyond FRM) if we are going to attract funding to carry out schemes

Consultation on Sustainable Drainage: Schedule 3 of the FWMA is likely to commence in October 2012, establishing SCC as the SuDS Approving Body. Draft National Standards for SuDS are out for consultation until 13 March. The relevant documents can be found at: <http://www.defra.gov.uk/consult/2011/12/20/sustainable-drainage-systems-1112/>

Transfer of Land Drainage Act s23 and s25 powers: Sections of the FWMA that amend s23 and s25 of the Land Drainage Act will come into force on 6th April. This will transfer consenting and enforcement on ordinary watercourses from the EA to LLFAs and powers to require works for maintaining flow of watercourse from the district councils to the LLFAs. Under the FWMA a risk management authority may arrange for a flood risk management function to be exercised on its behalf by another risk management authority. Therefore if the district councils wish, the s25 powers could be delegated back to them.

(2) Water White Paper. Ruth Barden, Wessex Water

Ruth gave a summary and circulated a handout.

AG – does white paper tie in with ecosystem services approach, as will be described in Robert Deane's presentation?

RBd – it is more related to water supply, making sure it is sustainable, and taking into account environmental impacts of abstractions. Natural Environment White Paper more emphasis on ecosystem services.

AF – is there a danger of consultation overload?

RBd – one of consultees is Consumer Council for Water which represents wider consumer interests

AG – danger is, if you don't consult, someone won't like something, and it could be overturned

NS – problem is a lot of people in Defra appear to be inexperienced, hence rely heavily on consultation to formulate policies. The competition outlined in White Paper makes life difficult for Emergency Services – they don't always know who the supplier is to contact

RBd – the competition being proposed is more about service provision to customers e.g. billing services, not the sale of the wholesale product, i.e. the clean water we supply or the sewerage we treat.

(3) Update on Levels & Moors Taskforce. Anthony Gibson, Chair L&M Taskforce

Anthony, Levels Taskforce chairman, explained that it was set up using model of similar Taskforce on Exmoor, to address situation on Levels after end of ESA. As at present no natural successor scheme to ESA. Farmers have option of 'dumbing down' to ELS, which requires less management and pays less money, or if they have SSSI land, can take up HLS option.

A number of conservation and farming organisations are very concerned that a lot of the good things that have been achieved on the Levels & Moors over the last 26 years could be lost.

One option recently considered was a 'Nature Improvement Area' bid. Not the same scale of assistance as ESA; would have brought in approx £200K per year for 3 years. However bid was unsuccessful. Over 70 bids for 12 NIA's. Asked whether we know why not successful?

RBr – not much feedback from NE. Informed was generally a good bid, but not very prescriptive about how much change being proposed. Strange because we got it down to last 10ha. Unfortunately, a lot of Agencies attention will now be focused on the 12 successful areas.

AG – the door is not quite closed. Reform of CAP will have major implications for architecture of our agri-environment schemes. Difficult to say what will emerge from that. Possible will be a rather more tiered approach, which could be more suitable for Somerset Levels. But for now we are on our own.

Whatever activity there is on the Somerset Levels to reward farmers for producing public goods / services will have to be in context of some sort of partnership, involving a third party broker, between the farmers producing the 'services' and the people who are benefiting.

We had a very interesting presentation on a project in W Devon / E Cornwall run by W Country Rivers Trust called 'Upstream Thinking'. Funded by SW Water. Seems to us this is an approach that might have something to benefit Levels – although more difficult to put together here. But we ought to be exploring the possibilities. Which is why we've got Robert Deane here to talk about this approach.

We've invited the Minister to come down and see the situation here, will continue to pursue this approach. Not much response yet from local MPs. We need to keep Levels on political agenda so politicians do realise there is a risk that we could lose all the good work that's been done.

We also need to do whatever we can ourselves to reward farmers for farming in a way that delivers wider public goods.

NH – recent meeting of Exmoor National Park discussing same topic. SW Water looking for different way of recompensing farmers

SD – SW Water have made Business Case for investing in upstream catchment management, particular water quality issues assoc with Exmoor management. OFWAT watching with interest and likely to recommend further involvement of water companies in funding catchment management in next Price Review.

(4) Announcement of new Defra-funded project: Ecosystem Interactions on Somerset Levels & Moors. Robert Deane, Land Use Consultants

See attached handout, prepared for the meeting. First opportunity for Robert to publicise the successful funding bid. Still awaiting signature of contract, but given go-ahead by Defra to make public. 18 month project.

DG – the traffic light colours on the map – is this the potential of service provision, or a measure of how it is currently being provided?

RD - potential service provision. Idea is to weigh up and compare different layers. One land use may trump others. Interactions therefore useful. Need to speak to people to get idea of priorities and importance.

Clearly interest from NE – want solutions. Defra also want policy triggers. So will use maps to question if current policy helping to deliver the opportunities that are there.

RBg – how do you take into account that something you see as an opportunity might be disastrous for something else not on your list of ‘services’?

RD – had to limit to 6 layers. Experience shows 8 layers is too many. Will try to take into account any major consequences however.

AG – what will be the outcome – what will it look like?

RD – a map. Dartmoor went through long process of producing a v simple map of what they wanted to see happen. Hope that one of outcomes will be a better consensus about what happens where, what is allowed to happen where, and what means we have of encouraging that.

DG –why not include housing development?

RD – if there are growth areas, we can put them in

AG – what determines land-use is a mixture of market and regulation. At the moment there isn't a market for many of these ‘services’. Or if there is, for flood storage, the customer isn't prepared to pay for it because they have always had it provided ‘for free’. But presumably your end-product would enable us, having collectively identified that there is this valuable output, to go to whoever is receiving the benefit of the output and say ‘come on, pay up’.

RD – It is all about developing a process of negotiation. There isn't one answer. Will be rash to say we will produce definitive map of land-use change. But hopefully will further the thinking about agreeing our priorities

AG – a very valuable tool for doing this

AF – when will project be confirmed?

RD – we've been told bid is successful and that we can publicise at this meeting, so should start soon

AG – how will you engage local people?

RD – we will look to County Council and others for help. Already received help from Steve and Cabinet member. Also from NFU and NE. Not realistic to expect to have large community meetings in village halls. Important to involve people who feel they can speak on behalf of their interests.

AG – in this part of the world local people do like to be involved

RD – aim is to a) come up with tool that allows us to debate and b) get people together to make value judgments

BN – bearing in mind LA's have their draft Core Strategies, is that going to compromise any outputs you produce?

RD – no, we're not going to be recommending which areas get developed or not – that's too detailed. We will of course look at core strategies though.

(5) Announcement of £23K Defra funding for Brue / Parrett IDBs to help protect archaeological sites in Somerset. Nick Stevens, IDB

Part of £100K Defra fund to help farmers reduce the risk of flooding, maintain farmland and create new wildlife habitats. Funding announced 28 Dec – money to be spent this financial year.

Brue – water level monitoring equipment, to be able to answer questions about water levels in areas remote from main rivers

Parrett – bit of kit on flail that helps water voles, flow monitoring equipment, and trial of hydraulic limiting device on one of inlets to Moors.

AG – how far have you got with this in the Brue?

NS – tagging on to end of current commission with Hydrologic, 26 telemetry sites. Most associated with Favourable Condition projects.

RBr – do you anticipate this to be a one-off funding opportunity?

NS – an irregular funding stream, something else may emerge next year

(6) Catchment Sensitive Farming, Somerset - update. Roy Hayes, EA

(7) Catchment Pilot programme – overview. Andy Hicklin, EA (attached presentation given by Steve Dury on Andy's behalf)

(8) Upper Tone Catchment Pilot. Jeremy Taylor. Given by Steve Dury on Jeremy's behalf. Included summary of recent Upper Tone Pilot Steering Group meeting.

(9) Report on funding bid in development: 'Value of Working Wetlands'. Steve Dury, SCC.

Referred to earlier discussion on problems for Levels as result of ESA expiries. Funding bid in development that may help address some of issues being faced:

Interreg IVA (Channel) programme funding bid. The deadline for submission of the full application is June 2012, with applicants informed whether bids are successful in October. If successful project would run from Oct 2012-June 2015

Project partners involved in development of bid: Somerset County Council, Somerset Wildlife Trust, RSPB, FWAG, Devon Wildlife Trust, Parc Naturel Régional des Marais du Cotentin et du Bessin, Institution d'Aménagement de la Vilaine, Syndicat Mixte Baie de Somme - Grand Littoral Picard. Meeting of partners planned in Somerset 7th March. Estimated total budget: €2M (all partners). The Programme funds 50% of the total eligible project / partner budget, with the remaining 50% being made up of match-funding, which can include staff time.

Aims

Joint working and collaboration, and exchange of best practice to:

- Provide a sound monitoring and evaluation network which will allow the effects of landscape-scale interventions to be recorded, analysed and improved.
- Engage with landowners to develop economically sound businesses that best combine commercial practices with wetland farming.
- Help establish wetland conservation as a respected, cost-effective tool that can be used to provide society with a range of benefits such as cleaner water, better protection from the effects of drought and floods, carbon storage and food supply.
- Increase the local communities and visitors understanding of the benefits of wetland conservation.

Results

- Better understanding of how to deliver economically and environmentally sustainable farming businesses in the wetlands
- Increases in biodiversity, in tandem with increases in the rural affluence and economic sustainability of rural communities.
- Joint programme of events
- Creation of long term partnerships

A not too dissimilar existing Interreg Channel project exists across the border in Devon with Devon County Council as Lead Partner. The CORDIALE project (€3.6M budget) aims to encourage a general improvement of landscapes management, inspiring stakeholders and communities to engage with landscapes protection in the cross-border region. Lead partner: Devon County Council. Project partners: South West Protected Landscapes Forum (Dartmoor National Park); North Devon AONB; Tamar Valley AONB; Parc Naturel Régional des Marais du Cotentin et du Bessin; Parc Naturel Régional d'Armorique; Fédération départementale des CIVAM du Finistère (FDCIVAM); Chambre d'Agriculture du Finistère; University of Plymouth

AG – are you involving NFU?

SD – they are being kept informed, along with EA and NE.

Date of next meeting:

To be confirmed