

Somerset West and Taunton Council

Corporate Scrutiny Committee – 5th October 2022

Strategic Flood Alleviation Schemes and Overview of Somerset Rivers Authority and Flood and Coastal Protection Board

This matter is the responsibility of Executive Councillor Dixie Darch

Report Author: Jonathan Stevens, Assistant Director Climate Change Regulatory Services and Asset Management

1 Executive Summary / Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To update Members on the progress of strategic flood alleviation schemes and projects, as per the request of Corporate Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 6th July 2022.
- 1.2 To provide Members with an overview of the Somerset Rivers Authority and Flood and Coastal Protection Board, and the Council's strategic involvement in both, as per the request of Corporate Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 6th July 2022.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 That Members note the report.

3 Risk Assessment

- 3.1 There are no associated risks with this report.

4 Background and Full details of the Report

- 4.1 At the July meeting of Corporate Scrutiny Committee, Members requested a report be brought forward to provide an update on the progress of non-coastal strategic flood alleviation schemes and projects. The report was asked to focus specifically on work within the Taunton Deane area of the district.
- 4.2 It was also requested that the report covered strategic links between the Council, Flood and Coastal Protection Board and the Somerset Rivers Authority.
- 4.3 **Taunton Strategic Flood Alleviation Improvements**

The existing flood defences within Taunton, built during the late 1960s/early 1970s and modified in the early 1990s are now deteriorating. They will not provide longer term flood protection to the Town, especially when considering climate change predictions for increased rainfall and flood flows.

- 4.4 Currently, there are approximately 1031 properties (residential, commercial and infrastructure buildings) at risk from river flooding in Taunton from the 1% Annual Exceedance Probability (AEP) flood. The 1% AEP flood has a 1 in 100 chance of occurring once in any one year, taking into account the standard of protection offered by the existing flood defences.
- 4.5 The issue has been exacerbated by climate change, and by 2118, the number of properties at risk of flooding is projected to rise to 2,548.
- 4.6 To protect existing property in Taunton and to allow the town to develop safely, Somerset West and Taunton Council and the Environment Agency began working together in 2014 to produce a long-term strategic solution to reducing flood risk to Taunton and, where possible, the wider catchment.
- 4.7 The partnership was called the Taunton Strategic Flood Alleviation Improvements (TSFAI), and since its inception has been successful in securing funding from the Regional Flood and Coastal Committee: Wessex Levy (£298k), Heart of the South West Local Economic Partnership (£65k), the Somerset Rivers Authority (£665k), Garden Town Communities Local Infrastructure Funding (£300k) and the New Homes Bonus (c. £650k).
- 4.8 The TSFAI partnership's programme of work included three phases:

Phase	Outcomes
One	<p>A flood risk study, identifying:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) areas for improved flood defence walls in Taunton (ii) an area for storing flood water upstream, to provide capacity for the long term (100 years). <p>This study was completed in 2014. The identified solutions required major engineering work to provide the desired level of protection. The capital cost and ongoing maintenance of this was estimated to be upwards of £50million.</p>
Two	<p>A Project Delivery Plan (PDP) with phased 'short term' local intervention solutions that increase flood capacity, pending the longer-term delivery of the larger flood risk reductions identified in Phase One. The local interventions identified were a combination of flood defences and storage.</p>
Three	<p>The delivery of three of the short term (0-10 years) projects identified by SWT and the EA during Phase Two.</p>

- 4.9 On 26 February 2020, SWT Full Council endorsed the strategic and long-term approach set out in the Phase Two work, as well as a commitment to continued partnership working with the Environment Agency to deliver the TSFAI short term measures. £6 million from a Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and dedicated project management capacity was made available by SWT to support three of the identified

short-term measures.

- 4.10 The three identified short-term measures are collectively known as Taunton Strategic Flood Alleviation Improvement Schemes (TSFAIS), and are as follows:

Scheme	Overview
<p>TTC5 River Tone Left Bank Flood Defences</p>	<p>A combination of repair, replacement or new flood defences between Frieze Hill and Town Bridge to provide reduced flood risk to key transport routes including the A3027 bridge street, A3027 Staplegrove road and the A3087 station road, and the North Town and Firepool areas of Taunton.</p> <p>This scheme is a partnership between the Environment Agency and SWT.</p>
<p>TTC10 Firepool Lockgate and associated bund between the River Tone and Bridgwater to Taunton Canal</p>	<p>Raising levels of the lockgates and the area around them in conjunction with creating an earthen bund defence between the canal and the river from Firepool to Obridge. This scheme aims to prevent flows entering the canal and reduces flood risk for Priorswood and Crown Industrial Estates and Bathpool.</p> <p>The scheme is led by SWT with Environment Agency support.</p>
<p>LRM Longrun Meadow flood attenuation improvements</p>	<p>Optimisation of the existing flood storage area at Longrun Meadow through new embankments, inlet and outlet to remove excess water from the river and control when the water is put back into the river.</p> <p>The scheme aims to reduce flood risk in Taunton town centre and further downstream including areas of North Town, Firepool, Priorswood and Crown Industrial Estates, Bathpool and benefitting tributary flows reducing flood risk in Tangier area.</p> <p>Led by SWT with Environment Agency support.</p>

- 4.11 Construction of the TTC5 scheme remains on track for 23/24 commencement. In Feb 2022 a Collaborative Agreement between SWT and the Environment Agency was signed and Binnies UL Ltd were appointed via an EA framework as contractors for the detailed design, consents, and permissions work. Ecological surveys, land and visual impact assessment and topographical surveys have been completed, with a planning application due to be submitted during Q2 of this financial year. Approval will enable construction to commence to the original timetable of 23/24.
- 4.12 The full project cost estimates are circa £850k for detailed design, consents and permissions, and circa £1.54 million on construction.

Funding is made up of contributions from the following:

- Wessex Levy
- SRA
- Garden Town Communities Infrastructure
- Flood Defence Grant-in-Aid
- Department of Education
- CIL

4.13 TTC10 is led and project managed by SWT, with support from the EA and J Price Consulting Ltd. The contract for detailed design, consents and permissions was let to WSP Engineering Ltd in August 2021. WSP completed preliminary studies (ecology, heritage, landscape, etc.) during spring 2022 to support the scheme, and outline design work started in April 2022. All project milestones have been met to date and granting of planning permission is timetabled for Q3 of 2022. This would see commencement of construction in 2023, in line with the initial schedule.

4.14 SWT undertook a public consultation on TTC10 between 11/7/22 and 7/8/22. Officers are now reviewing all responses.

4.15 The full project costs are circa £580k for detailed design, consents and permissions work and circa £1.5 million for construction.

Funding is made up of contributions from the following:

- SRA
- Garden Town Communities Infrastructure
- CIL

4.16 Both TTC5 and TTC10 have faced significant obstacles due to the Covid 19 pandemic, unstable market forces and difficulty in resourcing contractors to undertake the works, but these have been successfully managed within the project by the EA and SWT teams and the projects remain on target for completion within original timescales.

4.17 LRM is led by SWT, with support from the EA. This project has been awaiting project manager capacity to be released, and a PM from the Climate Change and External Operations directorate was assigned in September. The PM will progress the project to detailed design, consents and permissions work, and this will provide up-to-date construction costings and timescales.

It is anticipated that LRM would qualify for Flood Defence Grant-in-Aid monies and, like the other two short-term measures, SWT will be looking for other partnership funding.

4.18 **The Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA)**

The SRA's creation was proposed in the Somerset Levels and Moors Flood Action Plan. The plan was in response to the floods of 2013/14 and recommended the introduction of a 'Somerset rivers board', working with partners and stakeholders to develop a future governance and funding model to protect Somerset from floods. The Somerset Rivers Authority was established in January 2015.

In December 2015, the Department for Communities & Local Government gave Somerset County Council and local district councils the power to raise a shadow precept of up to 1.25% to fund the SRA. This figure has remained since, and the budget for the SRA for 2021/22 was £3.440,000.

Somerset's councils vote on whether they should continue to support shadow precepting on an annual basis.

- 4.19 Partners in the SRA are Mendip District Council, Sedgemoor District Council, South Somerset District Council, Somerset County Council, Somerset West and Taunton Council, the Parrett and the Axe Brue Internal Drainage Boards, the Environment Agency, Natural England and Wessex Regional Flood & Coastal Committee. Representatives of all these bodies sit on the SRA Board, as agreed in the SRA's Local Memorandum of Understanding and Constitution. A copy of this document is included as an appendix to this report.
- 4.20 The SRA oversees the Flood Action Plan, and funds works within Somerset that meet Flood Action Plan objectives. The objectives are as follows:
- Reduce the frequency, depth and duration of flooding.
 - Maintain access for communities and business.
 - Increase resilience to flooding for families, agriculture, businesses, communities, and wildlife.
 - Make the most of the special characteristics of Somerset (with internationally important biodiversity, environment and cultural heritage).
 - Ensure strategic road and rail connectivity, both within Somerset and through the county to the South West peninsula.
 - Promote business confidence and growth.
- 4.21 Via the budget raised by the shadow precept, the SRA provides additional maintenance and improvements to rivers and their catchments above and beyond statutory obligations, as well as structures such as culverts and drains. Works range from major engineering schemes, such as repairing flood relief channels, to small scale works such as emptying a roadside gully.
- 4.22 Projects are put forward for consideration annually by partners, and those approved are delivered as part of an 'Enhanced Programme of Works'. The programme is approved by the SRA Board at a final budget-setting meeting held every March. Actions can also be added during the year.
- 4.23 Areas of the Somerset West and Taunton district that have benefitted from SRA funded or part funded works (aside from TSFAIS) since 2020 include:
- Vegetation clearance and de-silting to West Somerset streams that lie in Rapid Response Catchments.
 - A flood alleviation study at the Blackbird Bends near Wellington.
 - Removal of silt at the outfall pipe, and de-silting streams in Sampford Brett and Woolston Moor.
 - Highways SuDS trials in two areas of Taunton.
 - Installation of a new high-capacity drainage system in Kingston St Mary.

- Funding towards a natural flood management solution for Doniford catchment farms.
- Funding towards a 25-year flood action plan for Minehead.
- Funding towards flooding improvements to the A358 near Combe Florey.

A full list of SRA funded or part-funded works are listed in Appendix 2 of this report.

4.24 Planned schemes for 2022/23 within Somerset West and Taunton are as follows:

- Funding to reduce the risks of flash flooding to homes, roads and Wessex Water infrastructure in the Wellsprings area of north Taunton.
- A new flood warning system for Lane End in Ham and Lipe Lane in Ruishton.

4.25 Several general activities in the SRA's Enhanced Programme of works for 2022-23 will also benefit Somerset West and Taunton, such as the contribution to the Trees for Action Fund, SuDS inspections and extra programmes of highways maintenance.

The SRA also funds an annual enhanced countywide programme of gully emptying, drain jetting, silt trap emptying and trash screen clearing.

4.26 The SRA does not adopt any of its partners' existing statutory responsibilities or accountabilities. It is designed to provide an extra level of flood protection and resilience, above and beyond the usual activities of other Flood Risk Management Authorities, such as councils, Internal Drainage Boards and the Environment Agency. The SRA is not involved in emergency responses, nor it is involved in coastal flood risk activities, but it does raise additional funding for flood alleviation projects.

4.27 SWT play an active role in the SRA Board and are currently represented on the board by Cllr Dixie Darch, Portfolio Holder for Climate Change, and Jonathan Stevens, Assistant Director Climate Change, Regulatory Services and Asset Management. The Board meets monthly.

The board is also supported by two officer working groups: SRA Technical Group and SRA Management Group.

4.28 **SWT Flood and Coastal Protection Board**

SWT hold their own Flood and Coastal Protection Board (F&CPB). The board was also created following the floods of 2013/14. Its formation was requested by Members, as there was a view that flooding issues in West Somerset differed to those in other areas of Somerset.

4.29 The Board aims to provide a link between local people with knowledge and experience of how their communities flood, with the organisations responsible for flood risk management.

4.30 The F&CPB includes representatives from SWT, Somerset County Council, Exmoor National Park Authority, the Environment Agency, Wessex Water, the local Internal Drainage Board, the SRA and West Somerset Flood Group. It is chaired by Cllr Dixie

Darch, Portfolio Holder for Climate Change.

- 4.31 The group's role is one of advocacy, drawing interested parties together for discussion and to seek solutions to flooding issues across the area. The group has no funding, and reports back to SWT via the Chair.

5 Links to Corporate Strategy

- 5.1 The Council's work on flood management and partnership working with other organisations, as detailed in this report, supports the following corporate objectives:
- Shape and protect our built and natural environment, supported by a refreshed Local Plan and develop our heritage, cultural and leisure offer including a clear vision and delivery plan for the Taunton Garden Town.
 - Seek additional funding for new strategic infrastructure and regeneration projects from developers, investors, Government and other funders, which support or enable existing or new communities within our district.

6 Finance / Resource Implications

- 6.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

Unitary Council Financial Implications and S24 Direction Implications

- 6.2 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

7 Legal Implications

- 7.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

8 Climate, Ecology and Sustainability Implications

- 8.1 There are no climate or ecological implications arising from this report.

9 Safeguarding and/or Community Safety Implications

- 9.1 There are no safeguarding or community safety implications arising from this report.

10 Equality and Diversity Implications

- 10.1 There are no equality and diversity implications arising from this report.

11 Social Value Implications

- 11.1 There are no social value implications arising from this report.

12 Partnership Implications

- 12.1 There are no partnership implications arising from this report.

13 Health and Wellbeing Implications

13.1 There are no health and wellbeing implications arising from this report.

14 Asset Management Implications

14.1 There are no asset management implications arising from this report.

15 Data Protection Implications

15.1 There are no data protection implications arising from this report.

16 Consultation Implications

16.1 There are no consultation implications arising from this report.

Democratic Path:

- **Corporate Scrutiny – 5/10/22**

Reporting Frequency: Once only

List of Appendices (background papers to the report) (delete if not applicable)

Appendix A	Somerset Rivers Authority Local Memorandum of Understanding and Constitution
Appendix B	A full list of SRA funded or part-funded activities that have specifically benefitted the Somerset West and Taunton district since 2020.

Contact Officers

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