

4. Consultation

4.1. Full River Sowy and King's Sedgemoor Drain Enhancements Scheme

4.1.1. Options appraisal

Public consultation was undertaken in December 2014 and January 2015 regarding the strategic level combination of capacity and operational enhancements for the full River Sowy and King's Sedgemoor Drain Enhancements Scheme as discussed in Chapter 2. A public consultation event was held in Othery village hall on 10th December 2014 and an online survey made available between 10th December 2014 and 9th January 2015.

Public opinion on which options should be taken forward was fairly evenly distributed, with no options particularly being favoured. There was a slight preference for the following options.

- Option A – enhanced operation. This option will involve increased opening of the Monk's Leaze Clyce (sluice) to divert more water from the Parrett into the Sowy and KSD during high flows.
- Option B – enhanced capacity: KSD simple improvements at Dunball. This option will involve resolving the constriction at the A38 Bridge.
- Option C – enhanced capacity: channel widening. This will involve the Sowy/KSD being widened by up to 30%, which will increase the water carrying capacity in the channel by up to 75%.

The options appraisal report and public consultation feedback report produced in support of this consultation is available on the .gov website⁴. A summary of the key issues raised during the options appraisal consultation process is provided in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 Key issues raised during options appraisal consultation process

| Key issue | Response |
|---|--|
| Concern that engineering-only solutions will encourage further intensification of land use within the floodplain, and hence there was support for proposals that don't rely on hard engineering solutions, and offer greater potential for delivering sustainable flood risk management | This was taken into account during selection of the preferred option for the full River Sowy and King's Sedgemoor Drain Enhancements Scheme as described in this report. |
| Detailed assessments will need to be undertaken to determine the effects on | In advance of the Proposed Scheme a strategic level Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) which considers the |

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/river-sowy-kings-sedgemoor-drain-enhancement-options-2016>

| Key issue | Response |
|---|---|
| the Somerset Levels and Moors SPA, Ramsar, SSSI and protected species. | potential impacts associated with the full River Sowy and King's Sedgemoor Drain Enhancements Scheme will be undertaken, in addition to a project level HRA which focuses primarily on the construction related effects of the Proposed Scheme (Phase 1). Draft strategic and project level HRA Stage 1 and Stage 2 assessments are provided in Appendices C and D. |
| Consideration also needs to be given on how to enhance farm business resilience within the high-risk areas of the flood plain, in line with the "Somerset Levels and Moors Vision". | This action is separate from the delivery of the enhanced capacity scheme. |

4.1.2. Preliminary Environmental Information Report (PEIR) for the full River Sowy and King's Sedgemoor Drain Enhancements Scheme in 2016

Stakeholders were consulted on the PEIR prepared for the full River Sowy and King's Sedgemoor Drain Enhancements Scheme in 2016. A summary of their responses, along with considerations within the ongoing EIA process, are provided in Appendix M.

4.2. Proposed Scheme

4.2.1. PEIR for the Proposed Scheme (2019)

Stakeholders consulted on the PEIR prepared for the Proposed Scheme include the following:

- Natural England (NE)
- Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)
- Historic England (HE)
- South West Heritage Trust (SWHT)
- Somerset Wildlife Trust (SWT)
- Sedgemoor District Council (SDCC)
- Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA)
- Somerset Drainage Boards Consortium (SDBC)

Table 4.2 summarises key comments received from consultees.

Table 4.2 Summary of key comments on PEIR (including responses and actions taken)

| Key issue | Consultee | Response |
|---|-----------|--|
| ES should consider presence of additional Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS) present within the local area | SDBC | Chapter 7 considers additional information provided by the SDBC on the distribution of INNS on the Somerset levels and moors within the baseline and assessment. |
| Fish passage along the Sowy/KSD system may not be as restricted as indicated in the PEIR | SDBC | Chapter 7 considers risks associated with fish passage as identified from conversations with the IDB ecologist. |
| Water vole likely to be present within the study area | SDBC | Water vole surveys carried out in 2019 showed water vole to be abundant throughout much of the scheme corridor (see Appendix F). Chapter 7 considers impacts on water vole arising from the Proposed Scheme and identifies appropriate mitigation. |
| Consideration of climate impacts associated with peat excavation, as well as potential impacts on peatland habitats from reduced flood duration and extents should be explored | SDBC | The PEIR identified that a maximum of 20,000 m ³ of peat will be excavated and reused on site, however following further design development this has been reduced by approximately a third. A package of mitigation measures to avoid adverse effects on habitats from the full King's Sedgemoor Drain Enhanced Capacity in combination with the Oath to Burrowbridge dredging scheme undertaken by IDB has been identified and agreed with NE and RSPB (see Chapter 7 and Appendices D and E for further information). |
| <p>Concern regarding;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consideration of archaeological potential of area between Othery and High Ham, and of evidence for relic landscape remains in the floodplain between Sowy and the Poldens • Potential impacts of tree planting near any remains excavated during works and impact of | SWHT | Additional areas of risk and pathways of impact identified by SWHT are considered within the heritage assessment in this report (see Chapter 8). As agreed, the PEIR and ES reflect up to date Historic Environment Record (HER) and Portable Antiquity Scheme (PAS) data and therefore an update to the 2016 DBA prepared by Wessex Archaeology was not considered necessary. Mitigation requirements based on more current design information are detailed in section 8.6 of this report and in the EAP for the Proposed Scheme (see |

| Key issue | Consultee | Response |
|--|-----------|--|
| <p>aquatic plant rhizomes on archaeological remains required</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consideration of peat shrinkage and consequent vulnerability of wooden remains to tracking required • Comment regarding requirement to update archaeological desk-based assessment (DBA) and on timing and wording of mitigation requirements in the draft EAP that accompanied the PEIR | | <p>Appendix K). We have begun developing a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) upon which SWHT and Historic England will be consulted.</p> |
| <p>Concern regarding potential impact of the scheme on designated sites including the Somerset Levels and Moors SPA, on Greylake RSPB reserve and on areas downstream of the KSD at Parchey Bridge (see Appendix J for further detail)</p> | RSPB | <p>We provided a letter to the RSPB responding to each of their concerns (see Appendix M for further detail), which were discussed further during a subsequent telephone conference meeting. Potential impacts on nature conservation sites are assessed within Chapter 7 in this ES, and mitigation identified for all potential adverse impacts.</p> |
| <p>Concern regarding:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Construction impacts on breeding waders, other bird species and protected species in general, particularly if programme delays arise due to COVID-19 • Maintenance requirements for WFD enhancement features and for raised flood embankments • Queries regarding impacts on agricultural land, agri-environment schemes and potential for intensification of agricultural practices | NE | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential impacts on birds are considered within Chapter 7, with mitigation identified where required. The earthworks phase of the Proposed Scheme will be undertaken during September and October 2020, with landscape planting carried out in the first week of November (pending agreement with NE) • Further detail regarding the proposed maintenance of landscape elements of the Proposed Scheme is provide in Appendix N. No maintenance of WFD enhancement features will take place following the initial two year aftercare period for aquatic planting and five year aftercare period for tree planning. |

| Key issue | Consultee | Response |
|--|-----------|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Queries regarding content, timing and landowner consents required for measures included within the MAP prepared by the EA, NE and IDB. | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potential impacts on agricultural land, including agri-environment schemes, are considered within Chapter 10. Whilst the full River Sowy and King's Sedgemoor Drain Enhancements Scheme will reduce the frequency, extents and duration of flood events on the levels in conjunction with other measures identified under the 20-year Flood Action Plan¹, flooding will still occur on a regular basis. A MAP (see Appendix J) has been developed by the EA in conjunction with NE and the IDB which provides information on the timings of identified actions and consents required. |

4.2.2. Public information events

After meetings with local land owners, a series of public information events were conducted in February 2020 over three consecutive evenings. The events took place in village halls at Westonzoyland, Othery and Aller.

The events were advertised via a poster which was sent out to:

- A variety of local newspapers and publications, including a popular newspaper within the area (The Leveller), which were identified by the Environment Agency and the Somerset Rivers Authority as being local to the areas in which stakeholders will live.
- All local Parish Councils, 10 days prior to the first event. Parish Councils were asked to share the poster with their constituents and place a copy outside their local halls where this was feasible. Parish Councils that received the poster included: Aller, Ashcott, Bridgwater Without, Burrowbridge, Chedzoy, Curry Rivel, Greinton, High Ham, Huish Episcopi, Kingsbury Episcopi, Langport Town Council, Long Load, Muchelney, Middlezoy, Moorlinch, North Petherton, Othery, Stawell and Stoke St Gregory.

The events were also publicised via social media with the SRA sharing the poster on their website and LinkedIn page.

132 people attended the three events with individual attendance as follows:

- 52 attendees on Monday 17 February at Westonzoyland (15:30-19:00)
- 37 attendees on Tuesday 18 February at Othery (15:30 -19:00)
- 43 attendees on Wednesday 19 February at Aller (14:00 - 18:30)

Attendees were asked to sign in on a sheet upon arrival to the halls, they were also offered refreshments.

At each event 'stalls' were set up around the hall with information on the scheme. Staff were available to discuss or answer questions on the scheme. At each event the following information was made available:

- A presentation slideshow highlighting key points of the scheme
- A video showing drone footage slowly progressing along the channel between the downstream and upstream extents of the scheme. A second interactive video was also used showing drone footage slowly progressing along the channel with changes in the direction of the camera angle
- A draft of the Preliminary Environmental Impact Report (PEIR) dated February 2020
- Several other scheme plans and figures such as the Indicative Landscape Plans (ILPs) which accompanied the PEIR

Key issues raised of relevance to the EIA for the Proposed Scheme are set out in Table 4.3 below.

Table 4.3 Key issues raised through public information events

| Key issue | Response |
|--|--|
| <p>Concern regarding potential impacts on a listed building as a result of proposed haulage route through Chedzoy. Better understanding required regarding the method of works and the impacts to the Chedzoy and Westonzoyland communities, roads and infrastructure.</p> | <p>Following further design development, it is no longer necessary to transport material through the villages of Chedzoy and Westonzoyland, although construction plant may need to use these routes in order to access the site occasionally. A Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP) for the Proposed Scheme will be prepared by the contractor in consultation with the relevant authorities. See Chapter 10 for further information regarding impacts on local communities.</p> |
| <p>Local footpaths are being flooded more often and to higher levels</p> | <p>The Proposed Scheme will not increase the frequency or duration at which local footpaths are flooded. See Chapter 10 for further detail regarding impacts on the Proposed Scheme on Public Rights of Way (PRoW).</p> |
| <p>A change in water level management procedures will be required if more water is diverted from the Parrett to the Sowy/KSD system</p> | <p>The KSD, Sowy and rhyne system offers the capability to effectively manage water levels in the channel and the surrounding fields. The management system will be modified in the future when the full River Sowy and KSD Enhancements Scheme has been implemented to maximise the flood and land use benefits, including potential changes to penning levels and sluice opening procedures/conditions. However, no change in management procedures will take place following implementation of the Proposed Scheme (Phase 1).</p> |
| <p>Impact of the Proposed Scheme on the rhyne system – concern that raising the existing informal flood embankments will impede outflow of the rhyne</p> | <p>Rhynes discharge to the Sowy/KSD system via a sluice or outfall, and these are currently locked when water levels within the Sowy and KSD are high. The duration of locking may be longer following implementation of the full River Sowy and King’s Sedgemoor Drain Enhancements Scheme when additional water is diverted through the system, however, bank raising will also reduce the overspill of water from the system onto surrounding areas. See Chapter 10 for</p> |

| Key issue | Response |
|---|---|
| | further information regarding impacts on local communities and businesses. |
| Impact on raising existing informal flood embankments on drainage for adjoining land owner fields | See Chapter 10 for further information regarding impacts on local communities and businesses. |

4.2.3. Other topic specific consultation activities

Further consultation undertaken throughout the EIA process is summarised in Table 4.4 below. Technical consultation with consultees, including our own internal specialist teams, has been used to agree the general approach to the environmental assessments presented within this report including the scope of further ecological and archaeological surveys and methodologies, and to obtain advice on sources of existing relevant surveys and other baseline information.

Table 4.4 Stakeholder engagement undertaken between 2016 and 2020

| Date | Name and organisation | Approach (email, letter, telephone, meeting, etc.) | Consultation issues/ comments |
|--------------------|--|---|--|
| 10th December 2018 | Meeting with Historic England (Helen Woodhouse) to discuss approach to archaeology from revised scheme. | Meeting at HE offices in Bristol. | Agreement on approach to archaeological works. |
| 5th March 2019 | Meeting with IDB on site to discuss water control structures. | Meeting on site. | Reviewing structures previously identified as being required for HRA Mitigation. |
| 4th April 2019 | Meeting with Richard Brunning, County archaeologist to discuss the key archaeological features and risks and scope of archaeological work. | Meeting on site at the scheduled monument just south of Parchey Bridge. | Agreement on approach to take and scope of works. |
| 15th August 2019 | Meeting with IDB to discuss HRA mitigations. | Meeting at IDB offices. | |
| 6th September 2019 | Meeting with SRA, IDBs and NE to discuss and approve approach to revised scheme and HRA mitigation measures. | Meeting at IDB offices. | Agreed approach to HRA mitigation. |
| 28th November 2019 | Meeting with NE to talk through approach to strategic and project level HRAs. | Meeting at EA offices. | Updates on changes to the scheme and the implementation of mitigation measures. |

| Date | Name and organisation | Approach (email, letter, telephone, meeting, etc.) | Consultation issues/ comments |
|-------------------------------|--|---|--|
| | <p>Attendees:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • John Rowlands (EA) • Gary Cutts (EA) • Will Maclennan (EA) • Steve Parker (NE) • Donna Gowler (NE) | | |
| 13 th January 2020 | Correspondence with Sedgemoor District Council (Stephanie Parsons). | Email to discuss projects within the wider area which may need to be considered in terms of cumulative impacts in the ES for the Proposed Scheme. | Sedgemoor District Council provided a list of projects for our consideration. |
| 3 rd February 2020 | Correspondence with Natural England (Donna Gowler). | Email. | Confirmation that an appropriate assessment under regulation 63 of the Habitats Regulations is required, following receipt of the strategic and project level screening assessments. |
| 9 th January 2020 | John Rowlands meeting with RSPB. RSPB were given a presentation of the scheme and its benefits with further discussions around flooding and scheme boundaries. | Meeting in person. | Agreement to attend the public drop-ins. |

| Date | Name and organisation | Approach (email, letter, telephone, meeting, etc.) | Consultation issues/ comments |
|-----------------------------|--|--|---|
| 31 st March 2020 | EA and Jacobs meeting with Historic England (Helen Woodhouse and Hayley McPartland) and SWHT (Richard Brunning) | Teleconference call. | General discussion regarding evolving scheme design and programme, impacts on buried archaeology, and potential mitigation requirements. Requirement for SMC discussed. |
| 1 st June 2020 | RSPB (Helen Booker and Damon Bridge) | Letter to RSPB from the EA, sent via email | Addressing concerns raised by RSPB regarding alternatives, Mitigation and impacts on the lower part of the system (see Appendix M) |
| 16 th June 2020 | Attendees: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helen Booker (RSPB) • Damon Bridge (RSPB) • Donna Gowler (NE) • Stephen Parker (NE) • Will Maclennan (EA) • Graham Quarrier (EA) | Teleconference call | A productive discussion addressing all of the concerns and outlining the approach to mitigation. |