

## **Frequently Asked Questions – Severn Valley Water Management Scheme**

### **Severn Valley Water Management Scheme**

#### **1. What is the Severn Valley Water Management scheme?**

The proposed Severn Valley Water Management Scheme is adopting a regenerative approach to catchment management in the Upper Severn. This means that interventions will seek to positively contribute to addressing the climate crisis and halting biodiversity decline, whilst also providing significant flood risk benefits. It will investigate interventions including natural flood risk management measures that slow the flow of water upstream such as tree planting or the creation of leaky dams; alternative farming and land management practices as well as engineered solutions such as the construction of flood storage areas and embankments.

Whilst still at a very early stage, the scheme has an aspiration to reduce flood risk to an estimated 3000 homes and over 1000 businesses along the River Severn. This initiative aims to mitigate and manage flood events up to and including those with a 1% chance of occurring in any given year (what is often called a 1 in 100-year return period flood event) and will include an allowance for the impact of further future climate change. Many of the flooding impacts seen throughout Shrewsbury during the floods in 2007, 2020, 2021, 2022 and 2023 would have been managed or had much less impact had a scheme like this been in place at the time. Whilst Shrewsbury and surrounding areas would immediately benefit from the proposed scheme, we expect some flood risk benefits down the River Severn to Worcester.

The proposed scheme will consider the wider river system and its catchment and look for opportunities to incorporate sustainable water resource management, deliver environmental improvements, promote health and well-being and minimise year on year the economic loss to the community caused by flooding.

#### **2. What could the Severn Valley Water Management scheme involve?**

Engineered solutions will inevitably play a part in solving the scale of flooding this catchment regularly experiences. However, our initial focus is on understanding the potential opportunities associated with the wider use of Natural Flood Management, tree planting, land use change and habitat restoration across the upper Severn catchment to mitigate the scale of hard engineering required.

We are at the very early stages of scheme development, where we are exploring the issues and solutions which will help us develop a range of options for managing flood risk.

The Severn Valley Water Management Scheme will be of interest to thousands of people. As a consequence, we are working on a programme of partner and community engagement, to ensure we capture local ideas and opportunities as early as possible and discuss them together as we shape and develop the scheme. We will engage with local communities and partners every step of the way.

Potential options as mentioned previously might include management of natural processes to slow down flood flows, natural flood management, creation of new habitats to improve the environmental and amenity value of areas and larger scale engineering works to ensure resilience in water management for the next 100 years.

As part of our responsibility to protect and enhance the environment, we will balance any potential negative impacts of a future scheme and seek opportunities to deliver more for the environment and people.

### **3. How are you working with partners and stakeholders in developing the scheme?**

To test concepts and ideas that will support the future roll-out of the Severn Valley Water Management Scheme the Demonstrator programme has been developed. The SVWMS demonstrator programme is a series of 8 projects focused on demonstrating the benefits of nature-based solutions, together with the sustainable use of land and resources.

Funded with £4.5M of Government Growth funding, the programme is working with landowners, the Wildlife Trusts, the Rivers Trusts, educational facilities, communities and other partners to understand how we can deliver a long-term sustainable approach to flood risk reduction while delivering wider social, environmental, and economic benefits. The learning from this programme, together with the relationships built, and the development of mechanisms for delivery will be used to develop the SVWMS.

### **4. What are the timescales for the Severn Valley Water Management scheme?**

We expect the development of a strategy for the Upper Severn catchment to be completed in 2026. The subsequent development of business cases and ultimate delivery of a programme of work will depend on a number of factors, which include the number, scale and type of intervention proposed together with the proposed funding

mechanisms. These are all currently being explored. This timescale reflects the fact that this is a catchment wide programme of water management programmes.

### **5. How is the scheme being funded?**

In response to the winter 2019/20 flooding, £10 million of funding was awarded to investigate a long-term, holistic water management scheme. A further £4.5 million was provided to support smaller projects (the demonstrator programme) within the Severn Valley area to help support local issues, begin building long term resilience and to enable the testing of key concepts and ideas that will be needed if future delivery of the SVWMS is to be successful.

Significant further funding will be required in the future, and we are investigating a number of options to help build a long-term funding strategy to attract both public and private investment.

## **Consultation**

### **6. Why are you launching this consultation?**

We are developing a strategy because we are trying to mitigate the issue of flooding and drought in the Severn Valley but want to work in partnership with local communities to ensure it's fit for purpose.

This is necessary because communities along the River Severn have a long history of flooding. Significant floods in recent decades have caused damage to homes and businesses and have impacted local infrastructure and disrupted travel.

Flooding in February 2020 and January 2021 resulted in approximately 1,600 homes being flooded across the Severn catchment. Whilst existing Environment Agency (EA) flood risk management assets and schemes prevented 14,500 homes from being flooded, there are still communities and urban centres that remain at risk.

There have also been periods of prolonged dry weather in recent years and measures have been put in place to manage the damaging effects this has on our communities. Because of this, water availability has been closely monitored and managed to ensure a continued water supply. This is vital to everyday life, the environment, farming, and businesses in the region.

The increase in extreme weather conditions is due to a changing climate. The Severn Valley's communities and environment need long term resilience to deal with this situation. We are therefore considering a scheme which is composed of multiple components, which aims to improve how we manage

water across the Upper Severn.

## **7. What are you consulting on?**

The SVWMS has already developed a series of digital tools and models that enable us to understand the scale and type of interventions that might be required. We now need to undertake a detailed appraisal of different options and approaches to ensure that we are delivering benefits across all aspects of the environment, economy and society. To do this, we are initially consulting on a Vision document that sets out the approach that we'd like to take for the catchment, alongside a Sustainability Scoping Appraisal report that outlines how we will assess a programme of interventions to ensure local benefits are delivered.

## **8. How long is the consultation for?**

The consultation opened on **Tuesday 9th April** and will run for six weeks. Following the consultation, we intend to engage extensively with further periods of consultation planned for later in the programme.

## **9. When does the consultation close?**

The consultation closes on **Tuesday 21st May**.

## **10. Have all members of the River Severn Partnership inputted and supported the proposals in this consultation?**

During development of some of the tools and frameworks required to support this work, we have engaged extensively with partners from across the River Severn Partnership and wider partnership and community forums. These have included regular meetings and updates at local Parish Council meetings, environmental forums and communities and the Shropshire Association of Local Councils. In addition, we have been working closely with several flood actions groups across the geography facilitated by our partners National Flood Forum.

## **Wider issues**

## **11. Why doesn't the Environment Agency just dredge rivers instead?**

We assess the need for dredging on a case-by-case basis. Our decision is based on the requirement for us to spend public money responsibly.

We only dredge where it would clearly provide benefit. We don't dredge a watercourse where it represents poor value for money in comparison to other flood risk measures.

In extreme flooding events (like those in 2020 and 2021), the relatively small increases in width and depth achievable by dredging the channel, would not provide anywhere near enough capacity to contain the excess flood water.

You can read more on the EA's approach to dredging [here](#)

### **12. Don't flood defences just push the problem elsewhere?**

The impact of every flood scheme on up and down stream communities is assessed and presented in the form of a 'Flood Risk Assessment'. Environment Agency projects are not allowed to go ahead unless it is demonstrated that they do not adversely affect communities, or if they do, that they have put measures in place to mitigate this.

### **13. Will this scheme mean that there isn't money left for other flood defence projects in the region?**

The development of the SVWMS will not reduce funding for smaller scale flood defence schemes within the Severn Catchment Area as these schemes are funded separately via the Environment Agency and the Regional Flood and Coastal Committee.

It is also expected that, thanks to the catchment wide approach of this water management scheme, the need for other flood defence and mitigation projects will be reduced. This is because the scheme aims to improve the whole catchment's resilience to extreme weather conditions.

More information on our Grant in Aid funding calculator is available [here](#).

### **14. With major floods hitting the region in recent years, what are you doing to mitigate flood risk in the short term?**

We have a programme of flood recovery works underway. This will look to rectify any damage to flood risk infrastructure caused by recent floods and will also collect evidence and information that will enhance our understanding and may identify interventions that are beneficial in the short term.