

UPDATE ON DEVELOPMENTS IN SOMERSET

Date: 15 May 2013

Programme: Flood Management

To: Secretary of State
Richard Benyon

Issue

1. Update on developments in relation to Somerset flooding following Richard Benyon's recent visit.

Update on Somerset

2. The meeting of the Wessex Regional Flood and Coastal Committee (RFCC) which took place on 22 April 2013 agreed to support the dredging of lengths of the River Parrett and River Tone around Curry and North Moor. The Committee allocated £300k of local levy money into a partnership fund as its contribution towards the total cost of dredging work in 2013/14. However, this financial support is conditional on the County and District Councils, Somerset IDBs and local agencies joining in partnership with EA to achieve a transition programme to more sustainable flood risk management over the next five years.

3. The total capital costs for this work is estimated between £1.8m and £4.1m depending on the preferred option (that does not include EA's ongoing maintenance work). The Defra GiA contribution is estimated at between £300k and £400k (plus the £300k of local levy allocated by the RFCC). The capital shortfall requiring local partnership funding contributions is therefore between £1.1m and £3.4m depending on the preferred option. Somerset County Council has indicated that it is willing to contribute (without yet saying how much). Other organisations in the area with an interest in flood risk management, including the relevant District Councils, IDBs, local farmers, landowners, Local Enterprise Partnership, Network Rail and NGOs such as RSPB would also need to contribute to the fund for it to be successful. None of these bodies or individuals has yet indicated a willingness to pay.

4. Work is gaining pace on establishing a Task Force for the Somerset Levels and Moors, with the objective of articulating a more sustainable long-term vision (to meet the challenge posed by the RFCC) and developing a route map. EA and Somerset County Council have offered to part-fund this initiative (pledging £7k each) and others are now stepping up with smaller contributions including the RSPB, IDBs and Sedgemoor District Council. The

various partner organisations have agreed on the need for a catchment-wide approach and for grass-roots buy-in to any vision. IDBs will lead the work to establish that buy-in with local communities. An Executive Board of confirmed funding partners will meet in late June / early July to agree on governance for the Task Force, including a Chair.

5. In addition to the proposed partnership approach to dredging of the Rivers Parrett and Tone, EA is undertaking de-silting work at identified 'pinch points' within the Levels and Moors to improve conveyance through small scale works. This is an interim step designed to maximise the capacity of the existing system whilst longer term approaches are considered. Funding has been identified within EA's recovery programme to undertake this work and EA is working closely with local IDBs and landowners to identify the most beneficial sites.

6. We will continue to keep Ministers informed of developments.