

The Somerset Levels and Moors Flood Action Plan

“We cannot let this happen again”

Prime Minister, David Cameron, 13th February 2014

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This executive summary outlines the key objectives of the Action Plan. It highlights the way to achieve those objectives, and it concludes with the next steps to be taken.

The Somerset Levels and Moors Flood Action Plan contains further details and proposals in line with our agreed Vision. It has been drawn up within the parameters and timescale outlined by the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Owen Paterson within a broad partnership of local and national organisations. It has also received considerable involvement of, and support from, the flood hit communities themselves.

Whilst we recognise that we will never be able to stop flooding completely, the Flood Action Plan sets six key objectives:

1. Reduce the frequency, depth and duration of flooding
2. Maintain access for communities and business
3. Increase resilience to flooding for families, agriculture, businesses, communities, and wildlife
4. Make the most of the special characteristics of the Somerset Levels and Moors (the internationally important biodiversity, environment and cultural heritage)
5. Ensure strategic road and rail connectivity, both within Somerset and through the county to the South West peninsula
6. Promote business confidence and growth

Only the key elements of the Plan are set out below; as a result this Summary must be read in conjunction with the full Flood Action Plan.

We must: Dredge the first 8km of the Rivers Tone and Parrett

- The Environment Agency is committed to dredge 4km of the River Tone upstream of Burrowbridge, and 4km of the River Parrett below their confluence at Burrowbridge, to the 1960s river profile. This will begin as soon as it is safe and practical to do so, ideally from the end of March, and will be completed by autumn 2014, weather permitting.

We must: Increase the capacity of the Sowy/King Sedgemoor Drain recognising that this solution will reduce the cost of pumping during future flooding events.

- The Environment Agency, will make permanent the temporary pumping sites at Dunball by autumn 2014.
- Somerset County Council will, this year, undertake appropriate road works to allow the River Sowy channel to be widened.
- The Environment Agency, working with local partners, will identify and assess the most cost effective solution by the end of 2014 to improving the River Sowy/King Sedgemoor Drain to take more flow from the River Parrett. Based on this assessment, improvements will be delivered.

We must: Invest in flood management and infrastructure solutions having developed a better understanding of their effectiveness

- The Environment Agency will review by the end of March 2015 the effectiveness of temporary operations and if appropriate install permanent infrastructure to enable temporary pumping sites Northmoor and Bridgwater Taunton Canal to be used in the future. They will also consider making permanent existing temporary protection around communities, e.g. at Aller, Westonzoyland and others.
- The Environment Agency and Internal Drainage Boards will repair existing river flood banks and spillways; reinstate banks where overtopping occurred and implement small scale ring bank improvements by end March 2015.
- Somerset County Council will repair and resurface where appropriate 44km of flood affected roads using materials more resilient to flooding by end March 2015, subject to the weather conditions.
- The Environment Agency will expand their existing river model, and working with Somerset County Council, the Local Enterprise Partnership, central government departments and infrastructure owners will develop an initial assessment to identify and prioritise the most effective, timely and best value combination of flood risk management and road, rail, sewage and telecommunications infrastructure solutions. This assessment will be completed by Autumn 2014.
- The Environment Agency, drainage boards and others will review the effectiveness of dredging across the Levels and Moors and if appropriate identify potential locations and funding for further work by 2015.

We must: Accelerate the construction of a Barrier or Sluice at Bridgwater, with objective of achieving delivery by 2024

- Sedgemoor District Council and the Environment Agency will review the design options in summer 2014 for a tidal barrier or sluice at Bridgwater.
- By end of 2014, Sedgemoor District Council and the Environment Agency, and central government will identify options to accelerate the build, funding and financing of the barrier / sluice.

We must: Establish a Somerset rivers board that has greater control and responsibility for work to maintain and improve water management on the levels

- Local authorities, drainage boards and partners in Somerset, will work with central government, to develop a new management and funding approach. This will improve local control and accountability for flood and water management and long-term maintenance work on the Levels. It will include the development of a new catchment wide funding mechanism to lever in external funds. Initial proposals to be developed by end 2014 with new structures and funding operational from 2015/16 subject to any necessary legislative changes.
- Defra, working with other government departments, will ensure that the impacts of long lasting floods on communities, the economy and strategic connectivity are properly recognised as part of the cost-benefit case for flood defence and connectivity infrastructure.

We must: Support farmers to maximise the benefits from catchment sensitive farming, especially regarding run-off in the upper catchment

- Somerset, with support from government, to develop and pilot a skills and support programme by 2015, building on Catchment Sensitive Farming to cover flood risk management as well as water quality. This will provide an integrated, comprehensive advice and support package for land management in upper, mid and lower catchment areas. Includes advice and support on voluntary adaptation and restructuring of farm businesses where appropriate. Includes locally administered capital grant fund.
- Defra will this year consider how best to secure flood risk benefits in the forthcoming decisions on approaches to all Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) funding.

We must: Manage urban runoff by ensuring best practice in planning and Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SuDS) implementation

- All Somerset Local Planning Authorities will review their planning policies with regard to flooding and if necessary, develop new local requirements or standards in line with the National Planning Policy Framework.
- Local partners with support from central government will explore options for early funding, financing and delivery by 2017 of the Upper Tone Catchment attenuation scheme
- Local Planning Authorities, Defra, Wessex Water and the Environment Agency will identify hotspots with a high risk of urban runoff and work with owners to retrofit appropriate schemes where feasible to tackle the problems.
- As Government will enact the Sustainable Urban Drainage provisions legislation in October 2014, then by March 2015, Local Planning Authorities in conjunction with Somerset County Council, will determine whether national Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) Approving Body standards are sufficient for the requirements in Somerset and whether more robust standards are needed.
- Defra to ensure by June 2014 that the Planning Inspectorate has regard to this plan in determining appeals.

We must: Sustain and enhance business and community resilience capacity

- Somerset Civil Contingencies Partnership will ensure an enhanced website and social media presence by Autumn 2014 providing comprehensive and easy to access information sources to help householders and businesses reduce their flood risk and improve their resilience to future events.
- Over the next three years, Somerset Civil Contingencies Partnership will support locally led action to plan, design and implement solutions to increase resilience and adapt to future events.
- We will ensure that learning from recent flooding is embedded into our response plans.

We must: Ensure strong local leadership with full engagement of local partners and communities

- Immediate delivery of the Action Plan will be overseen by an Implementation Group led by Somerset County Council consisting of local and national partners (including Local Authorities, Drainage Boards, the Local Enterprise Partnership, Environment Agency, business and farming interests, community groups, conservation bodies and other stakeholders together with central government led by Defra). The Implementation Group will commit to providing strong local leadership, including a commitment to engage with the community to build consensus and agree which actions should be implemented and how the community can increase its own resilience.

NEXT STEPS

We must: establish a long term governance for the development and implementation of the Plan and where outstanding issues remain, local and national partners must commit to resolving these together. This will include working in partnership to develop new approaches for long term funding of management work on the Levels and identifying additional and innovative sources of funds to deliver elements of the plan. Detailed assessments and business cases will need to be produced to make the case for some of the investment choices, including how they compare to other projects across the country.

We must: review progress against the plan regularly. Defra ministers will meet with local partners regularly to review the plan and ensure progress is being made.

We must: review governance arrangements after two years to ensure they are fit for purpose, including managing the transition of appropriate responsibilities to the new Somerset rivers board.

National government has provided additional resources to respond to the situation in Somerset, with £10m from Defra for flood risk management, £10m from DfT for transport work, and £0.5m from CLG for community resilience. In addition, Somerset business, farms and households are eligible for support under a variety of national level flooding recovery programmes. Furthermore prior to this plan local partners had identified over £1.5m towards future flood risk reduction work.