Suffolk Holistic Water Management Project

Felixstowe Peninsula Landowner Group meeting 12th April 2018 at Bromeswell

Attendees:

Tim Darby	ESWAG	TD
Jane Burch	Suffolk County Council (SCC)	JB
Giles Bloomfield	East Suffolk IDB	GB
John Patrick	Project Manaer	JP
John Symes	Landowner	JS
Bruce Kerr	Landowner	BK
Alan Parken	Landowner	AP
Stuart Hollingsworth	Landowner	SH
Tim Jolly	Landowner	TJ
Will Jolly	Landowner	WJ
James Foskett	Farmer	JF
David Adams	Landowner	DA
Andrew Williams	Landowner	AW
Henry Birch	Clarke & Simpson	HB
Ian Taylor	Landowner	IT
Neil Smith	Landowner	NS

Notes and Actions

Please refer to papers circulated ahead of the meeting by JP.

1. Water quality and impact on suitability for project

JP outlined the results of the latest monitoring of conductivity (salinity) levels. They peaked at 1.45µS at the end of Feb and have since declined to a level of around 1.1µS. Further investigation of the issue, by taking separate readings from the urban Trimley end of the catchment and the more rural Kings Fleet area, seemed to indicate that the problem largely emanates from urban run-off. It was clearly exacerbated following the cold period where roads were regularly salted and following high rainfall/snow melt, when the level rose to 15 µS .

Discussions with landowners/growers have indicated a range of conductivity levels that would be acceptable – dependant on cropping and the ability to mix with low conductivity water. Acceptable levels ranged from 1.1/1.2 – 1.4 µS.

There is little consistent evidence about the impact of salinity on the yield and quality of various crops.

It was suggested that there was sufficient water available to shut off flows during levels of high conductivity (could all be automated) – but the group would need to agree at what level this shut off occurred. The problem was not felt to be insurmountable and JP had calculated costs on the basis of not taking water at high levels of conductivity. For this amount of water, two pumps should be adequate.

2. Decision on volume commitments and associated unit costings of water supply

JP stated that the main factor determining the overall cost of the project per group member is the total volume of water requested. The aim has always been to deliver the project at c. £20/acre inch but with the reduced volumes requested, and increases in some other costs, the figure has risen to nearer £27/ acre inch.

JP had canvassed all potential participants in the scheme and the current total volume required has fallen From 600 to 455 ML. There are several reasons for this, including quality concerns and some group members no longer wanting to participate in the scheme. In addition, the sale of Lawson's land has fallen through reducing the quantity by a further 100ML.

Anglian Water continues to be interested in the project but are unable to commit investment for the next 5 years.

The group expressed serious concerns about the increased cost, which could further reduce volumes required. At £27/acre inch no one was prepared to commit to a volume at this stage.

However, there was an acknowledgment that this was likely to good value in the future and would offer some insurance against the impacts of licence reviews in the coming years.

The costs could also be reduced by taking out the loan for a longer period, say 40 years but this was not favoured as the licence would only be for 20 years.

Costs are also very dependant on obtaining the RDPE grant (40%). Other factors, such as build costs, archaeological investigations, etc could also affect costs.

3. Discussion on planning permission challenge and decision on which timescale to pursue

JP outlined the results of discussions with Suffolk Coastal DC planners, who, having taken legal opinion, have indicated that the project is likely to need full planning consent – largely due to the scale of the project and in-combination effects. A planning application will need to be accompanied by an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). JP has engaged professional services to start to scope the EIA and provide further help with the application. The EIA has become a more complex process due to recent legislative changes.

It is highly unlikely that it will be possible to achieve planning consent in time to meet the Grant timescale even with full support from all parties, including the planning authority.

Without the 40% Grant the project is not financially viable, thus the group agreed there were two possible courses of action:-

a) Seek political support to get the Grant application deadline to be extended. It is known that other applicants seeking grants for reservoirs are having difficulty meeting the deadline due to planning/EIA requirements so collective lobbying would be possible.
b) Postpone the project until the next round of Grants are made available - meanwhile continue to pursue the licence, planning and all necessary consents so the project is fully ready to apply.

4. Implications of Archaeology

One of the key impacts identified in the EIA is that of archaeology. The pipeline route has already been locally re-routed around know archaeological interest, but the recent investigation of the East Anglia Offshore Wind pipeline route has indicated a much more extensive archaeological interest in the area.

The archaeological costs, included in the project to date were for an archaeologist to be onsite during the pipeline laying operation (c £60k). However, there is a significant risk that any finds could seriously delay works, adding to costs. The alternative would be pre-works investigations/trenching – but the cost of this along all 18km of the route would be considerable (possibly up to £500k)and significantly increase the costs of the scheme (by some £3-5/acre inch) – further reducing the project viability.

JB confirmed that SCC and the planning authority were somewhat bound by legal requirements that apply but she would ask Matt Hullis for further support in this matter. GB suggested that the archaeological risk could be lessened in the EIA scoping by taking the view that 100s miles of similar pipeline had already been installed in the area.

The key frustration of the landowners was that laying such a pipeline on their own farms (which already had many hundreds of miles of pipeline laid in the same way) had no archaeological investigations. All trench material was returned so no remains were actually lost. **JB agreed to relay this view.**

5. Final decision on how to proceed with project

The group was left with three options:-

a) Lobby to get the grant window extended and press on with planning, etc as quickly as possible to meet the current grant requirements. We would need political support for this to be a realistic option and it may not succeed.
b) Continue to pursue licence, company formation and planning, etc, having a project ready for the next round of grants. There is no certainty of if and when there will be further grants although all felt it was likely to be in the next few years. A delay in the project would allow more time to seek demand for a great volume. However, costs would be incurred upfront.
c) Abandon the project now on the basis that costs were too high – particularly around the archaeological risk- and volumes too low to make this a viable proposition.

The landowners agreed to consider all three options and JP would seek views in the next few days before final decision was made and group members committed to a specified volume at a cost of around £27/acre inch.

It was agreed that the project would continue to pursue the abstraction licence as this is an important aspect of the national pilot and helps set a precedent for similar projects.

JP/JB agreed to develop a set of key messages to convey the group's decision to all parties.

JB outlined a possible bid for Water Environment Grant funds to restore the Kings Fleet outfall and saltmarsh. The application was due shortly and would commit SCC to undertaking the work within the next 3 years. This would not be possible if the project did not progress.
However, further discussions with GB and DA may have found a way to undertake this work to deliver the environmental outcomes without the reduced pumping activity associated with the water project.