**River transfer project brings ‘new wave’ of responsibility for local communities**

A project designed to give local organisations and communities more say over the management of local watercourses has entered a new phase with the launch of public drop-ins in four pilot areas throughout October 2017.

The project is exploring the potential to re-designate several sections of selected ‘Main Rivers’ as ‘Ordinary Watercourse,’ (a process known as ‘de-maining’) where, in agreement with the Environment Agency, local partners such as Internal Drainage Boards (IDBs) and Lead Local Flood Authorities (LLFAs) are willing to take on the day to day management and/or regulation of the watercourses.

The project is piloting these changes in five locations. Four of these locations are now approaching the consultation stage of the process and drop-in events will be held in:

* Areas of Norfolk and Suffolk
* Stour Marshes in Kent
* The Isle of Axholme in the East Midlands
* South Forty Foot Catchment in Lincolnshire

The final pilot, Wormbrook and Allensmore Brook in the West Midlands, will be running to a different timeline.

The project aims to bring significant benefits to local communities, allowing those who know the layout of their land to take control of their local watercourses, and could help pave the way for further de-maining opportunities throughout England.

For the Environment Agency, the project will also ensure resources are prioritised where the greatest impact on reducing flood risk can be achieved.

Rachael Hill, Flood and Coastal Risk Manager for the Environment Agency, said: “The Environment Agency is committed to listening and working with local organisations and acting on new initiatives to strengthen local decision making to make our environment a better place for people and wildlife.

“Internal Drainage Boards and Lead Local Flood Authorities are very much on the ground in local communities. Giving them responsibility over their own watercourses is a win-win situation that will ensure that the right people are managing the right watercourses and flood risk management assets in the right places.

“De-maining is an extremely exciting opportunity for the Environment Agency to transfer responsibilities to IDBs, LLFAs, local authorities, farmers, landowners and the wider community to manage their own local watercourses. We welcome the launch of the community drop-in sessions and we look forward to working together to make the project a success for everyone involved.”

Innes Thomson, Chief Executive of the Association of Drainage Authorities (ADA), added: “This is an unmissable opportunity for local communities to have their say on how they would like to see their local watercourses managed in the best way to make use of the funds available, whilst improving the quality of those watercourses, the environment and community wellbeing associated with healthy, maintained rivers and streams.”

“The drop-in sessions are an ideal way to find out more about the plans, help allay possible concerns and, very importantly, to provide support for these trials so please do try and find time to come to one of them.”

Gaining local support for the transfer of watercourses through engagement and consultation is essential for the success of the project. The public drop-ins will be an opportunity for local communities and interested parties to ask questions and influence the proposals.

This will be followed by a formal consultation on GOV.UK currently scheduled for December 2017 which will seek further views on these proposals, as well as proposals to de-main additional local watercourses. If there are no major objections, changes to the watercourses will take place in July 2018.

Details of some of the watercourses proposed for de-mainment in the Norfolk and Suffolk pilot area, along with venues, dates and times of the corresponding drop-in sessions can be found below.

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| **Pilot Watercourse** | **Drop-in Location** | **Drop-in Date** | **Drop-in Time** |
| River Stiffkey | Kettlestone Village Hall | 16/10/2017 | 14:00 - 19:00 |
| Wendling Beck | Dereham Memorial Hall Meeting Room | 19/10/2017 | 14:00 - 19:00 |
| River Wang | Halesworth Methodist Church | 24/10/2017 | 14:00 - 19:00 |
| Cookley Watercourse |
| River Tiffey | Wymondham Central Hall | 26/10/2017 | 14:00 - 19:00 |
| River Hun | Hunstanton Community Centre | 27/10/2017 | 15:00 - 19:00 |
| Tunstall Dyke | Sea Palling and Waxham Village Hall | 31/10/2017 | 14:00 - 19:00 |
| Waxham Cut |

**Further information:**

An Internal Drainage Board (IDB) is an independent public body responsible for water level management in low lying areas. They also play an important role in the areas they cover (approximately 10% of England at present), working in partnership with other authorities, such as the Environment Agency and Lead Local Flood Authorities (such as County Councils), to actively manage and reduce the risk of flooding.

Lead Local Flood Authorities (LLFAs) (County Councils and Unitary Authorities) provide leadership and strategic co-ordination across all sources of local flood risk and establishing local flood risk management strategies.They also manage the risk of flooding from surface water, groundwater and ordinary watercourses (i.e. watercourses which are not designated as Main Rivers).