

Holistic Water Management Project

Notes from meeting held on 03 July 2015 at Environment Agency,
Iceni House, Cobham Road, Ipswich, IP3 9JD.

Attendees:

Will Akast (WA) Catchment Delivery Manager, EA
Paul Bradford (PB) Project Consultant, (HWMP) & East Suffolk Catchments Partnership (ESCP)
Jane Burch (JB) Flood & Coastal Policy Manager, Suffolk County Council
(Chairman)
Andrew Hunter (AH) Planning Advisor, EA
Matt Hullis . (MH) Head of Environment Strategy, Suffolk County Council
Chris McArthur (CM) Essex and Suffolk Rivers Trust/ESCP
Karen Thomas (KT) Project Manager, Broads, E. Suffolk & Norfolk Rivers IDBs
Jonathan Thompson (JT) EA, water resources - also representing Natural England (NE)
Will Todd (WT) EA FCERM Advisor
Peter Youngs (PY) Assistant Group Manager, East Suffolk Water Abstractors Group (ESWAG)

1. Introduction (JB)

Aims of meeting:-

To catch up on progress and agree a forward agenda.

To consider a communications strategy given growing interest at local and national (ministerial) level.

2. Updates from Subgroups.

2.1 Debenham flood alleviation and upper Deben (WT, PB)

The project aims are flood risk reduction at Debenham and environmental benefits/WFD improvements, particularly water quality (silt and P) and biodiversity. This will be achieved through the creation of Natural Flood Management (NFM) measures in the headwaters and a dual channel downstream of the village.

A public meeting was held for landowners at Debenham Community Centre on 9 April 2015. 23 landowners attended with seven expressing an interest in constructing a range of NFM features on their land. ESCP, EA, CSF and FWAG staff have visited these landowners to help identify potential NFM features and an additional landowner (in a potentially strategic location) has also been contacted.

JBA (consultants) have been tasked by the project group to model the potential FRM benefits of the existing proposals. Modelling will be completed by the end of August with a view to constructing measures in Oct.

Farmers are not expecting compensation but will require cost recovery. Work will be funded by ESCP Catchment Partnership Action Fund (CPAF) and HWMP. Modelling is funded by the EA. Some of the early adopters are prepared to be demonstrators.

The project group is likely to ask the IDB to quote for the works (October).

Action: KT to flag up to IDB colleagues.

Spoil from the dual channel could be used to construct structures (reducing disposal costs) and one landowner has expressed a possible interest in using the spoil. Potential waste issues need to be resolved at the earliest opportunity. The IDB has experience with stockpiling small volumes of clay spoil for re-use in embankments.

Action: WT to initiate conversation with Alan Martin (EA TL Waste) and KT to discuss reuse of spoil.

Project communications to date have been effective with landowners but additional work is required with the parish council and community. A public meeting is likely to be held in late autumn.

2.2 Mid Deben Channel Enhancements/Restoration. (CM, PB)

This is a joint ESCP and HWMP project. The project has assumed greater importance since the deferral of the Brandeston Weir project. The Brandeston Weir removal was intended as flagship project (similar to Homersfield) but has been postponed due to the reluctance of the landowner. This was despite a series of very positive meetings. This demonstrates how far we still have to go with communicating the benefits of structure removal/ river restoration projects and also the importance of communicating the benefits of the project to a wider group of local stakeholders (landowners and parish councils etc.).

Funds previously allocated to the Brandeston project have been re-allocated to other projects, with an emphasis on meeting similar objectives (ie. Deben channel enhancement/removal of fish barriers).

ESCP has 'in principle' agreement from a number of landowners, between Kettleburgh and Glevering, to a range of river enhancements, weirs, side channels, bankside planting etc. ESCP has just appointed a project officer (Mary Norden) starting full-time, in mid-July who will project-manage this work.

JT commented that there may be an opportunity to link the proposed channel enhancements to a reduction in the requirement for EA river support discharges (Earl Soham). Pete Willett and Trev Bond (EA) could advise on this.

Action; PB/CM to liaise with JT to facilitate.

Proposals will require flood risk modelling to ensure that projects won't adversely impact on flood risk or (better) will improve flood risk. The EA can provide models but this will require some lead time. WA advised that proposals need to get into system asap.

Action: PB/CM to liaise with WA to arrange.

Other consents include Land Drainage Consent (6 week lead time) IDB or SCC depending on location. Natural England consent is probably not required. The projects will be designed with help from SWT (Penny Hemphill).

Action: PB to put together a timeline for work.

Ideally HWM needs to identify a major structure for removal, ideally as a landmark project (14 to choose from). Rackham's Mill may be an opportunity where initial work has been carried out at the request of the landowner, but ongoing management still needs to be agreed.

Potential opportunities at Ufford require further liaison between EA, IDB and SCC before getting back to the landowner. Issues need to include footpaths, fish pass, highways.

Action: JB to coordinate meeting with an agenda to include Ufford and Rackham proposals.

Action: WA to ensure EA Asset Performance team (Ops team) can attend.

Other ESCP projects in the Deben catchment include water quality improvements/sediment control measures in the Sandlings. ESCP will also be contributing to fencing at Butley and back channel enhancement at Bramford.

2.3 Felixstowe Peninsular Project

JT and PB are continuing to direct EA Science Team's literature search to investigate models for water user associations. PY suggested using information from Benacre and the Lincoln water transfer scheme.

Action: PY to forward details to PB –PB to follow up.

KT reported that flow monitoring at Kingsfleet has been in place from April. Flow monitoring at Falkenham will be going ahead next week.

Action: KT to provide data to Pete Willet as it comes in to enable EA to start testing flow model.

NE has confirmed in writing that they are happy in principle that pumps can be moved (subject to Habs Regs. 'appropriate assessment' but that it is likely that we could use (existing) WEBS data to produce the appropriate assessment.

Action: KT meeting with Emma Hay next week and will update group on progress.

In order to keep momentum going, we need to keep landowners up to date. The DEP is due to be launched in July. It may be useful to invite landowners to the launch mtg. to discuss Felixstowe reservoir proposal. PY to arrange meeting.

It would also be worth drawing up initial designs to consult planners.

Action: KT to provide levelling survey and flow data and check if IDB is able to provide design support.

2.4 Reservoir Planning and Consents Group

The planning and consents group met in March to review existing work and progress. PB has produced a flow diagram showing steps required process. The group remains concerned by lack of engagement from SCDC planners.

Action: PB to update with info. following meeting.

Key success is better engagement with SCC archaeologists who have more data than previously thought and can do a much more detailed initial scope. The Deben Estuary Plan also has useful archaeological data.

Action: PB to speak to Rachel Abraham, SCC.

The Euston Estates study (NFU) provides a useful study of all hurdles for jumping for planning permission.

Action: PB to contact Paul Hammett for details.

2.4 Abstraction Reform (licence trading).

The water company is working with a landowner and the EA towards an agreement to transfer unused pws licence capacity, determined by volume remaining after filling pws reservoir, to the landowner on an annual basis. Sarah Castelvechi is no longer in post.

Action: JT to identify new HWMP contact from Anglian Water.

The WFD requirement to avoid the 'risk of deterioration' has made licence trading and reform discussions difficult. Discussions have taken place between EA and ESWAG with some agreements found but significant obstacles have obstructed proposals to share water both on and off farm. The main difficulty is the potential impacts if water is abstracted across sub-catchments. The Suffolk Crag has multiple small sub-catchments. A possible option is a farmer run water-main.

PY emphasised the continued importance of irrigation water as an issue. ESWAG's review of Irrigation Demand and Supply (P Bradford, 2014) shows water demand in Suffolk increasing by 2-3%/year, based on recent trends (adjusted for climate). The National demand is forecast to increase in the long-term (30+ years) by 42% – 140% depending on prevailing socio-economic conditions (Cranfield, 2013).

At the same time, there is a squeeze on water. The EU 5% efficiency factor may mean a 5% reduction in planned use for permits/funding. This has an impact on reservoir grants and potentially licence renewals. The reduction is likely to apply to time limited licence renewals (and could be more depending on catchments). The EA is considering how to implement this. The reduction on planned used could be moving to night time use, reduced leakage etc. The WFD 'no deterioration' considerations could also have an adverse impact on licence renewals. Defra's abstraction reform programme is due to start in 2020 with a 10 year implementation timetable. EA Area Manager supports idea of using high flow water storage.

Action: PB to get update from PH on NFU response to Abstraction reform and 5% efficiency factor.

2.5 Funding (MH)

All funding is focussing on jobs and economic growth (with the environment a secondary concern). Cranfield/ESWAG reports contain useful info on economic/growth potential of irrigated agri-business. Significant funding is unlikely to be available within 9+ months.

Defra Leader Programme: HWMP is recorded as a potential funding opportunity. Fund is currently going through EU processes. Applications are likely to open to Oct with funding (up to 40k, to be match funded) to be awarded Jan 2016. Accountable body is SCC. ESRT project officer may be able to help (match funding).

New Anglia LEP. Funds available for economic development. Call out at present is for £2.2M for climate change projects. Applications opening Nov (possibly).

ERDF – funding is for small businesses –non-agricultural, although businesses can be on agric holdings.

European Agriculture Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD).

£13M match funded – Agricultural fund is sub divided into a number of elements including Business development and co-operation, Infrastructure development. A call out has not yet been released. An irrigation mains project could be considered within infrastructure development.

SCC has an existing bid in for £6M for business. HWMP could be incorporated into this. It may be necessary to form a company/organisation to put a bid forward and manage fund. MH may be able to generate a single resource to lead a project like this.

EA IEP has WR funding of £5k which can be put towards HWMP project.

ESRT has submitted bid with Rivers trust for £120k over 3 years for project Topsoil (work relating to improving water resources/quality via soil management improvements). ESCP's project officer's time could be used as match funding.

3. Communications Strategy

The HWMP project is currently running on a minimal budget with a very low profile. There is growing interest at local and national levels. The project needs a strategic communications and engagement plan to manage who we want to communicate with and key messages.

Action: KT / JB to develop further.

HWMP to pull together newsletter for project (similar to existing updates).

Action: PB/JB

Also suggest project streams put together a time plan. KT to put together pro-forma for each project stream to provide project headlines.

Continue to use opportunities for presentations, eg. CIWEM.

Include parish councils in distribution list for newsletter as well as DEP mailing list.

Action: CM to provide details.

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