

Report to: Lead Member for Transport & Environment

Date of meeting: 19 October 2020

By: Director of Communities, Economy and Transport

Title: Pevensey Sustainable Drainage (SuDS) – collaborative agreement

Purpose: To agree to East Sussex County Council, in our role as Lead Local Flood Authority, to enter into a collaborative agreement with the Environment Agency for the Pevensey SuDS project.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Lead Member is recommended to agree to East Sussex County Council entering into a collaborative agreement with the Environment Agency to release funds for the Pevensey Sustainable Drainage project and to delegate authority to the Director of Communities, Economy and Transport to make the necessary arrangements to enable the County Council to enter into the agreement.

1 Background Information

1.1. East Sussex County Council (ESCC) is the Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) for the county and is under a duty to manage flood risk from surface water, ordinary watercourses and groundwater. It is also a statutory consultee to the planning system on flood risk matters and as a public authority it must pay regard to the need to conserve biodiversity.

1.2. The catchment of the Pevensey Levels is the focus for growth over the coming decades with Southern Wealden, Bexhill and Eastbourne (the Local Planning Authorities) being the primary locations for growth. However, there are concerns that the sensitive environment of the Pevensey Levels (both a Site of Special Scientific Interest and a Special Area of Conservation) will be at further risk if surface water runoff from new development is not addressed in a strategic and coordinated manner by the Local Planning Authorities.

2 Supporting Information

2.1 Officers of the Flood Risk Management team have been involved in discussions with members of the Cuckmere and Pevensey Catchment Partnership (the Environment Agency, Natural England, the Sussex Wildlife Trust and the Pevensey & Cuckmere Water Level Management Board) to determine what evidence is required to develop a strategy to manage this potential environmental risk. The Local Planning Authorities have also been engaged in discussions.

2.2 Currently there is insufficient information on how water moves within the Pevensey catchment and by extension how pollutants from urban areas may be mobilised by those flows. The Pevensey SuDS (sustainable drainage) project involves a comprehensive assessment of water quality and quantity within the catchment, including extensive baseline hydraulic modelling and water quality assessment, accounting for the potential for increased surface water runoff from new developments and how this would impact the lowland sensitive environment of the Levels.

2.3 This study will additionally include scenario assessments, to understand the impact on water quality of incorporating attenuation only (Pevensey Sustainable Drainage), which do not improve the water quality of the wetland. The scenario testing of SuDS which offer water quality improvement should focus on the SuDS that have the ability to treat those pollutants that have a detrimental impact on the quality of the wetland.

2.4 The outcomes of the project will provide a clear assessment of the potential impact of development, with the required management of surface water volumes and water quality improvements. The findings of the project will inform a policy framework including a SuDS policy which is specific to the Levels. The SuDS policy will list the SuDS features that should be used to manage runoff contributing to the wetland and the minimum stages of water quality treatment to be provided by SuDS features in series.

2.5 This project had been developed collaboratively, although it was clear that the funding stream required a project lead in the charitable sector. The Sussex Wildlife Trust was willing to provide that lead; however, it became clear in recent months that it was unable to do so. Consequently, an alternative (this collaborative agreement) approach was identified. Given the LLFA has a statutory duty to co-ordinate risk management authorities it became clear that ESCC are best placed to take on this lead role. The alternative options would have put the continuation of the project at risk. Consideration was given to any financial risk that the County Council would be exposed to through taking a lead on this project, but as set out in subsequent paragraphs no undue risk was identified

2.6 The policy direction for this project stems from both the adopted East Sussex Local Flood Risk Management Strategy 2016 – 2026 which seeks to “Work in partnership to deliver cost-effective flood and coastal erosion risk management measures which take a catchment wide approach and contribute to wider social, economic and environmental benefits” and the County Council priority of “Driving sustainable economic growth”.

2.7 A costed programme for developing the evidence base has been developed and funding has been secured from the Water Environment Improvement Fund for the first year of the project (this financial year). Subsequent years of this three year project have been allocated but not agreed. To access the funds East Sussex County Council will have to enter into a collaborative agreement with the Environment Agency.

2.8 Contributions towards the project are currently being sought for the subsequent years and officers of the Local Planning Authorities have expressed, in principle, support. Discussions on the final sums have yet to conclude.

2.9 It should be recognised, however, that this project will draw significantly from work currently underway in the catchment (the Pevensey & Cuckmere Water Level Management Board’s survey and modelling programme combined with the fluvial modelling exercise being carried out by Eastbourne Borough and Wealden District Councils).

2.10 The County Council’s exposure to risk is limited as funding is agreed on a yearly basis. Should contributions not be forthcoming funding will cease and there is no obligation on the County Council to continue with the project without the necessary funding.

3 Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations

3.1 The Pevensey SuDS project is compatible with both the Council Plan’s priorities and the objective of the adopted East Sussex Local Flood Risk Management Strategy in that it looks to develop the optimal balance between the economic and social wellbeing of residents and the needs of its unique environment.

3.2 In order for this project to proceed the Lead Member is recommended to agree for ESCC to enter into a collaborative agreement with the Environment Agency to release funds for the Pevensey SuDS project and to delegate authority to the Director of Communities, Economy and Transport to make the necessary arrangements to enable the County Council to enter into the agreement.

RUPERT CLUBB

Director of Communities, Economy and Transport

Contact Officer: Nick Claxton

Tel. No. 01273 481407

Email: nick.claxton@eastsussex.gov.uk

LOCAL MEMBERS

Cllr Tom Liddiard

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

<https://www.eastsussex.gov.uk/environment/flooding/localfloodriskmanagementstrategy/>

<https://www.eastsussex.gov.uk/yourcouncil/about/keydocuments/councilplan/>