

Managing Big Problems in Small Places in Rapid Response type Catchments: Approval to submit Outline Business Case to deliver a flood resilience partnership project across Devon funded by the government's Flood & Coastal Resilience Innovation Programme

Report of the Head of Planning, Transportation and Environment

Please note that the following recommendations are subject to consideration and determination by the Cabinet (and confirmation under the provisions of the Council's Constitution) before taking effect.

Recommendation: that the Cabinet be asked to:

- (a) approve Devon County Council lead a Partnership to develop an Outline Business Case to deliver a flood resilience partnership project across Devon "Managing Big Problems in Small Places in Rapid Response type Catchments";
- (b) delegate authority to the Head of Planning, Transportation and Environment in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Public Health, Communities and Equality to approve the details of the project, allocation of funding, and the preparation of collaboration agreements with partners covering the delivery stage of the project;
- (c) approve the submission of the Outline Business Case to the Environment Agency to bid for funding to the amount of £7,608,000 from the Flood & Coastal Resilience Innovation Programme for the delivery of the project. The submission includes match funding secured from DCC and partners by way of staff time and potentially financial contributions.

1. Summary

In the 2020 Budget, DEFRA announced a new programme of funding for innovative projects to help communities be more resilient to flooding and coastal change. The programme which is managed by the Environment Agency allocated £150 million to 25 partnership projects across England through a competitive process.

DCC and our Partners have successfully been selected to develop a project which will increase flood resilience at a catchment level within communities in rapid response 'type' catchments where traditional flood defences are shown not to be appropriate or cost beneficial.

This is an ambitious project which looks to achieve:

- Measurable reduction in potential flood damage and disruption in hard to help communities which will go beyond the properties directly at risk and extend to community assets, businesses, local infrastructure and communities downstream.
- Improved and more informed planning decisions in Rapid Response 'type' Catchment areas including future climate impacts considerations.

- An increased knowledge of the state of resilience of communities or catchments in Devon in order to better inform future flood resilience projects, and collaboration between Risk Management Authorities.

Devon County Council as the lead partner of the project is delivering its functions in its statutory role as a Lead Local Flood Authority. Cabinet approval is sought to allow the project to progress to the delivery stage following approval of the Outline Business Case (OBC). Delivery will only commence once the OBC is approved.

2. Introduction

In the 2020 Budget, DEFRA announced a new programme of funding for innovative projects to help communities be more resilient to flooding and coastal change. The programme, called the Flood & Coastal Resilience Innovation Programme (FCRIP) is designed to demonstrate how practical innovative actions can work to improve resilience to flooding and coastal erosion across an area. The FCRIP aims to develop and test new and emerging approaches and ambitions set out in the new Government Policy Statement and the National Flood & Coastal Erosion Risk Management Strategy. The programme which is managed by the Environment Agency is allocated £150 million to distribute to 25 partnership projects across England through a competitive process.

A DCC led partnership including other Flood Risk Management Authorities, local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and universities were successful in securing capital funding until 31 March 2027 following the submission of an expression of interest.

Our project, called Managing Big problems in Small Places in Rapid Response type Catchments aims to increase flood resilience at a catchment level within communities in rapid response 'type' catchments where traditional flood defences are shown not to be appropriate or cost beneficial.

The project will contribute to the Council's Devon Local Flood Risk Management Strategy (2021-2027).

3. Proposal

Devon has a long history of flash flooding in rapidly responding catchments. These events are the result of intense periods of heavy rainfall occurring on the steep, small, fast responding catchments that typify Devon's flood risk. A national programme identified 384 Rapid Response Catchments in England, 15% of which are located in Devon.

The allocation of funding nationally, based on number of properties affected, does not reflect the very real risks and issues in Devon. With only a handful of large urban areas, the risks spread across many small communities meaning it is often difficult to deliver a step-change in levels of resilience under the current national funding rules.

This project seeks to address several challenges and pre-existing barriers to delivering flood resilience in rapid response type catchments. These challenges and barriers are:

- The effects of climate change, where more intense rainfall events are a growing concern with increased risk of flooding.
- Lack of a single source of information on flood events and flood resilience.
- The current definition of a Rapid Response Catchment which does not pick up key Rapid Response Catchment communities, such as Modbury in July 2012.
- A large percentage of communities are relatively small in terms of property count and commercial businesses, compared to other more urban areas with larger cities. This combined with relatively high costs of delivering traditional flood defence schemes precludes value for money solutions.
- Community engagement in flood risk issues, with many still expecting authorities to act on their behalf.
- No provision for surface water flood warnings within current systems which reduce the ability to warn communities to prepare and be flood ready.

Partnership working within flood risk agencies within Devon is very strong, providing an excellent and positive platform to build new ideas upon. Key links between all the Risk Management Authorities are well embedded in daily working through Devon Flood & Water Management Group, and the South West Regional Flood & Coastal Committee. There are also strong and positive relationships with Environmental NGOs, Local Planning Authorities, key infrastructure operators such as South West Water.

The project aims to increase flood resilience at a catchment level within communities in rapid response 'type' catchments where traditional flood defences are shown not to be appropriate or cost beneficial.

The project objectives are:

- a) Empower local communities and stakeholders to participate in the development, delivery, monitoring, maintenance and ownership of flood resilience interventions by piloting a range of low-cost resilience actions including Nature Based Solutions.
- b) Promote and support the installation of Property Flood Resilience measures in community assets and with small businesses so that they can recover quicker from flooding.
- c) Enhance existing warning systems by developing local and tailored surface water flood warning tools so that communities are able to react in time.
- d) Identify & develop alternative funding models for communities to fund and maintain flood resilience measures.
- e) Develop new spatial planning tools and approaches which can support the delivery of flood resilience measures at a catchment scale in Rapid Response type Catchments. Also improve and embed flood resilience in planning and land use policies and decisions.
- f) Define, quantify and share levels of community resilience and potential for resilience gain within a catchment through the development of Flood Resilience Hub on the web.
- g) Deliver robust and replicable learning: Demonstrate how different actions work together at a catchment level; identify what level of protection can be afforded

to a community; improve evidence on the costs and benefits of innovative resilience actions including co benefits (biodiversity, carbon, socio-economic and health).

The project delivery consists of eighteen partners:

Blackdown Hills AONB	Dartmoor National Park	Devon Communities Together
Devon Wildlife Trust	Exmoor National Park	Food, Farming and Countryside Commission
Environment Agency	National Trust	North Devon Biosphere
North Devon Council	Plymouth Council	South West Water
Westcountry Rivers Trust	Torbay Council	Teignbridge District Council
Torridge District Council	University of Exeter	University of Plymouth

All Partners including DCC are the delivering agents of the project. DCC is the lead partner responsible for the delivery of the project to time, quality, and budget in compliance with the funding programme requirements.

4. Options/Alternatives

The Flood & Coastal Resilience Innovation Programme is an opportunity to support Devon communities who would normally not benefit from any Flood Defence Grant in Aid or other flood risk management partnership funding. In the absence of funding there would be no support available to these communities and the status quo would remain.

The ethos of the project is to test and trial new and innovative options. Various options will be considered throughout the programme of works to learn as many lessons as possible and inform government for the ongoing implementation of the National Strategy.

5. Consultations

Flood risk management authorities, local authorities, community organisations, non-governmental organisations and local universities were invited to contribute project ideas following the launch of Flood & Coastal Innovation programme and the call for expression of interest.

Each participating community will be invited to participate in the design process of the flood resilience solutions with the support of the project partners. Each community will be consulted on the nature-based solutions that are proposed to take place in order to maximise support and ensure the best possible long term outcome.

6. Financial Considerations

Estimated cost(s) of the proposals and funding sources/budgets

External Funding (Flood & Coastal Resilience Innovation Programme)
£7,608,000

Devon County Council 's flood risk management officers will be providing a proportion of staff time towards the project. In addition, staff time will be provided by the Partners as part of the programming, delivery & monitoring of the interventions. The Partners have been instructed that this staff time must be documented to show that they have made a contribution to the project. This project fits within a wider programme of flood resilience measures and there is potential to match funds from other projects.

A first tranche of funding of the value of £656,000 was released in August 2021 to help project partners develop the project further, undertake feasibility studies and produce the Outline Business Case. The remaining amount will be released over the next 5 financial years once the Outline Business Case has been approved.

Further approval will be sought to add any approved figure to the capital programme along with its profile over future years, once awarded.

7. Legal Considerations

Collaboration Agreements have been drawn up for the development stage of the project and similar agreement will be drawn up for the delivery stage of the project. These create legal contractual obligations which DCC may owe to the delivery partners, and to the Environment Agency. All agreements will be reviewed by the legal team to ensure that the terms do not create unnecessary risk to DCC.

The lawful implications/consequences of the proposals have been considered and taken into account in the preparation of the project proposal. Outside of the required contractual obligations, there are statutory planning regulatory requirements when the interventions will take place near or in statutory designations such as protected landscapes, historic features and wildlife habitats and near or in watercourses. For each pilot community intervention, project partners leading the intervention will undertake an environmental impact considerations assessment and an equality impact assessment.

8. Environmental Impact Considerations (Including Climate Change)

The core of the project is to deliver a range of flood resilience interventions which are in effect climate adaptation interventions. By using nature-based solutions, the interventions will reduce the risk of flooding not only to properties and community infrastructure but also to local wildlife which is often affected as a result of flooding. The nature-based solutions delivered in this project also have the potential to increase water quality of watercourses, create new and diverse wildlife habitats and provide additional carbon sequestration. Overall, the project will have a positive benefit to biodiversity and climate change.

Statutory planning regulatory requirements will be considered when the interventions are being designed and developed particularly where it is located near or in statutory designations such as protected landscapes, historic features and wildlife habitats and near or in watercourses. For each pilot community intervention, project partners

leading the intervention will undertake an environmental impact considerations assessment.

9. Equality Considerations

Where relevant to the decision, the Equality Act 2010 Public Sector Equality Duty requires decision makers to give due regard to the need to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other prohibited conduct;
- advance equality by encouraging participation, removing disadvantage, taking account of disabilities and meeting people's needs; and
- foster good relations between people by tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.

Taking account of age, disability, race/ethnicity (includes Gypsies and Travellers), gender and gender identity, religion and belief, sexual orientation, pregnant women/new and breastfeeding mothers, marriage/civil partnership status in coming to a decision, a decision maker may also consider other relevant factors such as caring responsibilities, rural isolation or socio-economic disadvantage.

In progressing this particular scheme/proposal, an Equality Impact Assessment has been prepared which has been circulated separately to Cabinet Councillors and is also available alongside this Report on the Council's website [Flood Resilience: Managing Big Problems in Small Places Project - Impact Assessment \(devon.gov.uk\)](http://devon.gov.uk), which Councillors will need to consider for the purposes of this item.

10. Risk Management Considerations

This policy/proposal has been assessed and all necessary safeguards or actions have been taken/included to safeguard the Council's position.

The following project key risks have been identified:

- **Partnership Management**. The risk of delays due to partners withdrawing from the project is low as all partners are fully committed to this project as it is core to their business activities and plans. Because of the large number of delivery partners involved, should a partner withdraw from the project, another existing partner would be able to step in and continue delivering.
- **The risk of delays in delivering flood resilience actions** in selected communities due to the lack of community interest and landowners' engagement or Covid-19. In order to minimise delays, a Stakeholder Engagement Strategy and Plan for the entire project is currently being developed so that delivery partners are prepared to effectively engage with communities and other stakeholders once the funding has been released.
- **The risks of project delays and increased project costs** due to the lack of availability of materials and further increase in material costs. Those risks have been factored into the delivery programme and a financial risk has been included into the budget. As this is a test and trial project any financial

concerns can be alleviated by a reduction in scope and/or deliverables (scaling down).

11. Public Health Impact

The project is piloting in consultation with targeted communities, new flood resilience actions and solutions. By definition these actions are designed to improve community resilience and the ability to recover from flood events and therefore will improve the mental health and wellbeing for those at risk or previously at risk.

12. Reasons for Recommendations

The Flood & Coastal Resilience Innovation Programme is an opportunity to support Devon communities who would normally not benefit from any Flood Defence Grant in Aid or other flood risk management partnership funding.

This project presents DCC with a unique opportunity to inform government on future flood risk management policies and support the implementation of a National Strategy.

Dave Black, Head of Planning, Transportation and Environment

Electoral Divisions: All

Cabinet Member for Public Health, Communities and Equality: Councillor Roger Croad

Local Government Act 1972: List of Background Papers

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Background Paper	Date	File Reference
Nil		