

Area North Committee – 28 May 2014

11. Somerset Levels and Moors 20 Year Action Plan – Thorney Ring Bank Flood Defence Scheme (item for information)

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Purpose of the Report

To seek a financial contribution from towards a proposed flood defence scheme at Thorney, Kingsbury Episcopi, and provide an opportunity for notes and queries on the progress of the Somerset Levels and Moors 20 year action plan.

Public Interest

This report is to explain a proposal to help prevent flooding to several homes and the highway at 'Duck Corner', Thorney, in the parish of Kingsbury Episcopi, together with a recommendation that the council makes a financial contribution to the costs of the scheme, alongside other partners to the Somerset Levels and Moors 20 Year Action Plan.

Recommendations

Members are asked to:

- (1) Allocate a grant of £10,000 to the Internal Drainage Board from the Area North Capital Programme (Local Priorities) towards the Thorney ring bank flood defence scheme, in support of the Somerset Levels and Moors 20 year action plan. The grant to be subject to the following conditions:
 - a) All other sources of match funding, based on estimated costs are secured including contributions from the Environment Agency and Somerset County Council.
 - b) Publicity for the scheme acknowledges it as being within the 20 Year Action Plan
 - c) Final detailed design and costing are supported by the relevant agencies including consultation with the residents involved and the SSDC Land Drainage Engineer.
- (2) Note that up to a further £5000 has been allocated by the Engineering and Property Services manager – land drainage budget in support of the scheme
- (3) Note and comment on the progress of the Somerset Levels and Moors 20 year flood action plan and current flood recovery plan.

Background

'Duck Corner', Thorney lies on the edge of Westmoor, near to the south-west bank of the Parrett.

The Somerset Levels and Moors is a complex system of land drainage designed so that land near water channels accepts flooding at certain times. This helps limit the flood risk to properties by slowing down and reducing the natural level of the water. As river levels drop the water lying on the moors can be pumped back into the river system.

At Thorney, when river levels are raised the water normally carried by the Parrett overflows into and lies on West Moor. Due to the severity of the weather earlier this year and the inability of the drainage system to cope with the volume of water, several homes were flooded and remained flooded or at risk for several weeks. In the words of a local resident: -

Ten properties at Thorney were damaged by the recent floods; they were among the very first Levels properties to be flooded (the first was on 1st January) and among the last from which the floodwater eventually receded (2nd March), and some suffered flood water in excess of 60cm deep. The only road through the village was flooded up to 1m deep and was effectively impassable for almost all of January and February, causing danger, loss and serious inconvenience to a large number of other local residents and businesses. We estimate the total financial value of the loss to be in excess of £1m.

Properties lying between the 'island' of Muchelney and Duck Corner were isolated on both sides by water, making access to services and normal life extremely difficult. The road at Duck Corner was used as the main access point for the emergency and voluntary services supporting Muchelney. At Duck Corner the houses are very close to highway and even with the most careful of driving, bow waves were a persistent problem.

Benefits

There are no certainties with respect to flood prevention; however the scheme has gained support for its potential, with a relatively low cost compared to the value of property protected and the cost (social and financial) arising from the loss of access to Thorney and Muchelney.

The current assessment is that the construction of a ring bank in this area will divert the water away from the vulnerable properties without compromising the effectiveness of the flood plain for wider household flood protection.

Feasibility and Design

The Internal Drainage Board will lead this project, including design, procurement and project supervision.

The scheme design is well-advanced, with detailed costings in hand. Feasibility work for this scheme was completed last year, and since then has included consultation with local residents, the SSDC Land Drainage Engineer and the Environment Agency.

The ring bank has been designed to provide protection against flooding equivalent to the 2013/14 flood event. A sketch plan of the ring bank is attached at Appendix A.

Project costs

The current cost estimate is £85,000-£125,000 including design fees and other ancillary costs. Costs may be reduced by the local availability of a suitable sub-soil, and the variation in cost is relative to the price of sub-soil.

Funding sources

The Thorney Ring Bank scheme was included in the 20 Year Action Plan submitted to the Secretary of State earlier this year, supported by a range of public and community partners.

At the time of writing there are a number of potential funding sources and as a matter of urgency all partners have been asked to confirm their respective contributions.

The scheme at Thorney has been very much a community led idea, receiving early support from the IDB members covering their area. The local community group set up in reaction to the winter flood events affecting the Langport area – MuchThorn Wings – have pledged a contribution.

Contributions are expected from the Environment Agency (which ‘*supports making a financial contribution to the project, subject to seeing the IDB’s detailed design and cost proposals*’) and Somerset County Council (through the council’s grants for community led flood alleviation schemes). Progress on this will updated at the meeting.

A potential contribution could be achieved by pooling the Government funded Repair and Renew grants available to the householders, which will be further discussed in the light of the detailed Government guidance.

Consents and Procurement

A section of the works will require land drainage consent from the Environment Agency.

It has been confirmed that planning permission is not required for this work – under the general powers for permitted development held by the IDB for flood defence works. The work will require Land Drainage Consent from the Environment Agency.

Construction work will be managed by the IDB using a contractor let by tender.

Project plan and milestones

The table below indicates the main project stages and milestones together with current estimates of the delivery timescales:

Stage / Milestone	Timescale
Confirm final costs and all funding sources	May/June 2014
Tender/letting of contract	June/July 2014
Construction	August/September 2014

Conclusion

The Thorney Ring Bank scheme will help protect households – including a number of listed buildings - and retain an important access road for residents of Thorney and Muchelney if extreme flood events occur again.

The scheme is included within the 20 year action plan and has the in principle support of all the relevant agencies. The scheme will not compromise wider flood protection measures, and has been developed through the involvement of local residents.

The scheme appears to offer good value for money when the costs of the scheme are compared to the numbers of properties protected and the wider benefit for access for the community and emergency vehicles of the vent of future local flooding

It is recommended that a £10,000 contribution is made from the Area North Capital Programme with recognition of its local benefits, subject to the remaining match funding including contributions from the Environment Agency and Somerset County Council.

Financial Implications

Assuming the grant to High Ham playing field is approved, there is £240,536 available in the Area North Capital programme for Local Priority Schemes. If the recommended grant of £10,000 is awarded, £230,536 will remain in this allocation for 2014-15 and for future years.

Council Plan implications

Delivery of the 20 year flood action plan is a priority for the council.

Carbon Emissions & Adapting to Climate Change Implications (NI188)

None from this report

Equality and Diversity Implications

Protecting the highway from surface water helps maintain access to services during flood events. For example carers making home visits.