

Natural Flood Management

Timetable	
Meeting	Date
Climate Transition, Resources and Environmental Services Policy Advisory Committee	8 July 2024
Cabinet	24 July 2024

Will this be a Key Decision?	No
Urgency	Not Applicable
Final Decision-Maker	Cabinet
Lead Head of Service	Mark Green, Director of Finance, Resources and Business Improvement
Lead Officer and Report Author	Mark Green, Director of Finance, Resources and Business Improvement
Classification	Public
Wards affected	Headcorn and Sutton Valence

Executive Summary

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommended to Cabinet in 2023, and it was agreed, that £100,000 be allocated to developing feasibility studies, to be matched by external providers, to support the progression of schemes designed to improve the water management cycle. This report sets out a proposal to carry out scoping, feasibility and design work costing £57,000, which would be matched by funding from the Upper Medway Internal Drainage Board for the delivery of the schemes arising from this work.

Purpose of Report

Recommendation to Cabinet

This report makes the following recommendations to the Cabinet: That

1. £57,000 be allocated to scoping, feasibility and design work, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report, with other measures considered over time as appropriate;
2. The Director of Finance, Resources and Business Improvement, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Climate Transition and Nature Recovery, be delegated authority to conclude agreement on terms for disbursement of the funding with the South East Rivers Trust and the Upper Medway Internal Drainage Board; and
3. A review of the outcomes from the proposed work be reported to Cabinet within 12 months.

Natural Flood Management

1. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	The decision will support all four strategic plan objectives by reducing flood risk, but in particular supports the strategic priority of making the borough safe, clean and green.	Director of Finance, Resources and Business Improvement
Cross Cutting Objectives	The report recommendations support the objective of respecting biodiversity and environmental sustainability.	Director of Finance, Resources and Business Improvement
Risk Management	Already covered in the risk section.	Director of Finance, Resources and Business Improvement
Financial	The Council has a capital budget of £350,000 to fund the Flood Action Plan projects described in this report.	Director of Finance, Resources and Business Improvement
Staffing	Monitoring of the proposed grant spend would be carried out by the Head of Property and Leisure and her team.	Director of Finance, Resources and Business Improvement
Legal	The initiatives to manage flood risk detailed in this report will help the Council to continue to discharge its statutory duties as a risk management authority. In this capacity it can carry out flood risk management works.	Deputy Head of Legal Partnership
Information Governance	The recommendations do not impact personal information (as defined in UK GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018) the Council Processes.	Information Governance Team
Equalities	An EqIA will be carried out as appropriate for each individual project.	Equalities & Communities Officer
Public Health	The report recommendations support the public health agenda by reducing the risk of individuals being affected by flooding.	Director of Finance, Resources

		and Business Improvement
Crime and Disorder	There are no implications to Crime and Disorder	Director of Finance, Resources and Business Improvement
Procurement	Council and statutory procurement requirements will be met in relation to all procurement and commissioning carried out as part of flood risk management work.	Director of Finance, Resources and Business Improvement
Biodiversity and Climate Change	The Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan is relevant to this report, namely that long term adaptations are required in response to flooding impacts, which are projected to increase due to climate change. This report sets out actions to be taken to promote natural flood management which are in keeping with the Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan objectives, particularly; Action 6.4 to 'Enhance and expand wetland coverage across the Borough to support nutrient neutrality, flood prevention, and enhance biodiversity.' And Action 6.5 to 'Implement a Nature Recovery Strategy, linking habitat restoration and creation to improve flood protection and water quality.'	Biodiversity and Climate Change Manager

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Since the major floods of 2013/14, the Council has sought to take measures to reduce flood risk and increase resilience. Money has been set aside in the capital programme under the heading of 'Flood Action Plan' and a number of initiatives have been undertaken.
- 2.2 In the immediate aftermath of the 2013/14 floods, work was carried out to investigate large scale infrastructure projects that might address flood risk. It became clear that such projects were not viable in the areas to the south of Maidstone borough most affected by flooding. Instead, measures with a more local impact were found to be more appropriate and cost-effective. In particular, Natural Flood Management schemes have the two-fold benefit of increasing flood resilience and supporting the biodiversity and climate change agenda. In this context, Natural Flood Management can mean small 'leaky dams', new hedgerows, river bank restoration, targeted tree planting and techniques to hold water temporarily on land to 'slow the flow', reduce and delay flood peaks and store more water away from homes.

- 2.3 In 2023 Overview and Scrutiny Committee undertook a holistic review of entire the Water Management Cycle. Amongst other recommendations, this proposed that suitable schemes be undertaken that would have a beneficial impact on the Water Management Cycle, recognising that this could serve multiple objectives, eg:
- to ensure that places and infrastructure are resilient and can adapt to future flood risks
 - support the Council's carbon and sustainability ambitions
 - enhance the environment, eg by creating and improving habitat and rivers
 - meet statutory requirements, eg complying with Reservoir Act duties.
- 2.4 A necessary first stage in the development of schemes was to carry out feasibility work, so the Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommended to Cabinet, and it was agreed, that £100,000 be set aside from the Flood Action Plan within the capital programme for this purpose. Cabinet added the stipulation that funding from the Council be matched by external funding.
- 2.5 A proposal has been developed in conjunction with the South East Rivers Trust and the Upper Medway Internal Drainage Board (UMIDB) for scoping, feasibility and design work and landowner engagement, followed by scheme implementation. This work will be focused initially on the River Sherway in Headcorn and Sutton Valence ward, as South East Rivers Trust and the Upper Medway Internal Drainage Board have already started developing relationships with landowners along this river. Whilst this location will be the initial focus of the feasibility work, the approach undertaken, if successful, can be applied in other areas that are vulnerable to flooding. See Appendix 1 for details.
- 2.6 The proposal set out in the appendix envisages that the council will fund the initial scoping, feasibility and design work, with the Upper Medway Internal Drainage Board funding scheme implementation. An agreement will be reached on the terms for disbursement of the funding to ensure that MBC's contribution is indeed matched by delivery on the UMIDB's part. It should be noted that the initial feasibility work has the potential to deliver significantly more schemes than the £72,000 worth currently committed by UMIDB. However, without the initial feasibility work, it will be impossible to unlock further funding.

3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

3.1 Option 1

Proceed with a joint project with South East Rivers Trust and the Upper Medway Internal Drainage Board as outlined.

3.2 Option 2

Seek alternative approaches to fulfilling the remit from Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet.

3.3 Option 3

Take no further action.

4. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 The preferred option is Option 1. South East Rivers Trust have a track record of developing Natural Flood Management schemes and the Upper Medway Internal Drainage Board has many years experience of drainage work in this area.
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5. RISK

- 5.1 The risks associated with this proposal, including the risks if the Council does not act as recommended, have been considered in line with the Council's Risk Management Framework We are satisfied that the risks associated are within the Council's risk appetite and will be managed as per the Policy.
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6. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

- 6.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee investigation into the Water Management Cycle engaged with a wide range of third parties, and its recommendations were based on the consultation that it undertook with them.
- 6.2 The matter was considered by the Climate Transition, Corporate and Environmental Services Policy Advisory Committee on Monday 8 July 2024 with the following recommendations made to Cabinet:

RESOLVED to RECOMMEND to CABINET: That

1. £57,000 be allocated to scoping, feasibility and design work, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report, with other measures considered over time as appropriate;
2. The Director of Finance, Resources and Business Improvement, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Climate Transition and Nature Recovery, be delegated authority to conclude agreement on terms for disbursement of the funding with the South East Rivers Trust and the Upper Medway Internal Drainage Board; and
3. A review of the outcomes from the proposed work be reported to Cabinet within 12 months.

7. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

- 7.1 A formal agreement will be drawn up with the South East Rivers Trust and the Upper Medway Internal Drainage Board.

8. REPORT APPENDICES

- Appendix 1: Proposal from South East Rivers Trust

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None.