

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

RECORD OF DECISION OF THE CABINET

Decision Made: 26 July 2024

Natural Flood Management schemes

Issue for Decision

To seek approval 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.

Decision Made

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.

Reasons for Decision

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.

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.

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.

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.

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 to the report for details.

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.

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.

Alternatives considered and why rejected

Option 2: Seek alternative approaches to fulfilling the remit from Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet.

Option 3: Take no further action.

These options were not selected as South East Rivers Trust have a track record of developing Natural Flood Management schemes and the Upper Medway Internal Drainage Board has many years of experience of drainage work in this area.

Background Papers

None.

I have read and approved the above decision for the reasons (including possible alternative options rejected) as set out above.



Signed:
Councillor Stuart Jeffery – Leader of the Council

Full details of both the report for the decision taken above and any consideration by the relevant Policy Advisory Committee can be found at the following area of the [website](#)

Call-In: Should you be concerned about this decision and wish to call it in, please submit a call-in form signed by any three Members to the Proper Officer by: **5pm on 2 August 2024**