

WATER MANAGEMENT CYCLE WORKING GROUP - NOTES

THURSDAY 15 DECEMBER 2022

3 P.M. – 4.30 P.M. VIA MS TEAMS

Present: <u>Members</u> Councillor English (Chairman) Councillor Harwood Councillor Cleator Councillor Garten Councillor Jeffery <u>Reserve Member</u> Councillor Springett		<u>Officers</u> Director of Finance, Resources and Business Improvement Biodiversity and Climate Change Manager Emergency Planning and Resilience Manager Democratic Services Officer
Item	Minute	
1. Apologies	Apologies had been received from Councillor Brice.	
2. Substitute Members	There were no Substitute Members in attendance. Councillor Springett was in attendance as a Reserve Member in accordance with the Overview & Scrutiny Committee's previous agreement that Reserve Members would be welcome to attend all Working Group (the Group) Meetings.	
3. Interviews with Council Officers, in accordance with the lines of enquiry.	<p>The Groups Members and Officers introduced themselves.</p> <p>Each of the Council's Officers in attendance were asked to provide introductory remarks:</p> <p><u>Director of Finance, Resources & Business Improvement, Mark Green:</u></p> <p>The Director of Finance, Resources & Business Improvement referenced the briefing note provided to the working group at its meeting on the 5 December 2022. The previous actions taken to improve resilience across the borough was reiterated.</p> <p>The group was advised that they could explore how the previous actions taken could be built upon and assess what else is needed across the Borough, as much of the work undertaken has been reactive. This would ensure that schemes could be developed and prioritised and be ready to implement when funding was available.</p> <p><u>Emergency Planning and Resilience Manager, Uche Olufemi:</u></p> <p>The Emergency Planning and Resilience Manager outlined their role in leading the Council's emergency preparedness, ensuring that the Council was ready to respond to incidents including flooding. The previous actions taken following the 2013/24 flooding experienced within the Borough, including engagement with the Kent Resilience Forum, the provision of equipment to improve the flood resilience of properties susceptible to flooding and the creation of the Medway</p>	

Confluence Framework, was outlined. The latter included implementing a plan for all partners to respond to during incidents of flooding, as part of a combined response through a well-practised framework.

The actions taken to improve the resilience of parishes was outlined, with the importance of working together with the Council's Members reiterated.

Biodiversity and Climate Change Manager, James Wilderspin:

The Biodiversity and Climate Change Manager referenced the Council's Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan (BDCCAP), stating that the plan had 12 actions within it that related to the Water Management Cycle.

These included; a section on the Council adapting to flooding and identifying longer-term actions to assist in its management, including in response to extreme weather; strengthening water supplies and critical water infrastructure and the importance of linking the action plan to planning policy and community resilience, particularly when considering housing developments, with the example given being the Design and Sustainability Development Plan Document that had recently undergone its Regulation 18A public consultation.

Specific attention was also drawn to the actions that focused on biodiversity, such as expanding wetland and tree coverage, that were effective and affordable.

During the discussion, the group highlighted the following points:

- The importance of emergency planning and resilience in response to flooding, with reference made to ensuring that urban drainage systems were sustainable.

In response, The Emergency Planning and Resilience Manager reiterated the work undertaken to build community resilience and encourage local areas to respond to incidents.

The group highlighted that whilst responsiveness and resilience were important, adapting to the changes seen to the climate and water management cycle generally should be emphasised.

- The importance of ensuring that water management cycle related schemes were readily available for implementation. The group felt that these should be applicable across the water management cycle, rather than to mitigate flooding only. The importance of identifying areas for change, as opposed to identifying the existing problems, was reiterated.

Examples of where these schemes could be applicable included agricultural land, due to its affect on water pollution, and for public recreational use. This included identifying where previous measures, such as culverts and wiers, were no longer required and removing them to contribute to re-wilding.

The Biodiversity and Climate Change Manager stated that the BDCCAP included SuDS and nature-based solutions such as wetlands, to reduce surface water run-off. The importance of implementing schemes that combined elements of the water management cycle was highlighted, as this increased a scheme's cost effectiveness. For example, tree planting would slow water flow rates and increase biodiversity and habitat creation.

- The importance of ensuring that the Council's policies supported the delivery of projects to improve the water management cycle. This would enable resources such as CIL and Section 106 monies to be used for any schemes and/or actions identified and assist in securing appropriate conditions to planning consents. This was raised within the context of increased housebuilding and the alternative routes available to progress schemes that benefitted the water management cycle.

In response, the Director of Finance, Resources & Business Improvement stated that to progress with the types of schemes required, a small fund should be allocated to developing feasibility studies. This would assist the council in identifying and defining what action was required, so that specific proposals could be developed in response. The Council would need to commission this work. Other organisations, such as the Upper Medway Internal Drainage Board, were currently looking into conducting feasibility studies for this aim. The group supported this suggestion.

The Biodiversity and Climate Change Manager reiterated the importance of aligning the planning and biodiversity aspects of the Council's work. The biodiversity net gain as contained within the Environment Act 2021 was referenced, which was akin to a tax in that developers would have to provide a set percentage net biodiversity gain. If the Council had undertaken feasibility studies and had schemes ready for delivery, the biodiversity net gain could be maximised. The opportunities contained within documents such as the D&S DPD was reiterated, alongside the use of previously published information such as the Council's Flood Risk Assessment (2016), to direct the Council's actions in positively impacting the water management cycle.

The Biodiversity and Climate Change Manager stated that they were currently working to identify the opportunities associated with the biodiversity net gain.

In response, the group requested that a proposals map be created, to outline the areas where there could be multiple benefits across the water management cycle. It was also suggested that the group request that a similar proposals map be attached to the D&S DPD, although this request would have to be made to the relevant Lead Member as the Regulation 18A public consultation had now closed.

- Previous actions taken by the Council in relation to the BDCCAP and possible future actions.

The Biodiversity and Climate Change Manager explained the previous 'call for sites' exercise undertaken in 2021. Landowners would submit sites for the Council to plant trees and/or take other actions such as pond and wetland creation, as appropriate. There had been 16 applicants, although most had withdrawn from the scheme due to its requirements, such as that the trees had to remain planted for at least 30 years in accordance with Defra guidelines.

However, one scheme had been successful in the area north of Yalding, with the Council currently waiting on the Environment Agency's sign-off on a scheme to plant trees along the riverbank. The aim was to slow the river bank's erosion and the water flow. As the scheme had progressed due to the landowner's interest, it was proposed that suggestions on how to discuss the benefits of a scheme with other landowners be included within the proposals map requested.

Several Members of the group raised the importance of the Council progressing with these types of scheme, with examples given to the projects undertaken by other Councils within the Kent County, including Canterbury City Council. This included increasing the amount of open spaces available and improving biodiversity within these areas. The possibility of compulsory purchase was raised.

In response, the Biodiversity and Climate Change Manager stated that they were producing a business case whereby numerous schemes could be implemented onto the same piece of land, to increase the effects to the local environment. If the work could be linked to the biodiversity net gain (as outlined above), the business case could facilitate significant improvements. An example was given of a developer that had purchased a 20-hectare site within the borough for use as a 'bio-bank' in meeting their future biodiversity net gain quota.

The Council could investigate setting up similar areas through purchasing local land, provided that it was aware of what the challenges were to the area, the types of schemes that could be implemented, the benefits of those schemes and the schemes' affordability. The group requested that the business case be progressed, and that a scale of the land available for purchase starting with agricultural land as the most affordable, be included. Any other information as applicable, could be included on the land scale.

The Director of Finance, Resources and Business Improvement stated that the structured approach suggested was a suitable idea, as it would provide the Council with the framework needed to negotiate with other organisations and/or developers in promoting the achievement of the actions within the BDCCAP and positively impacting the Water Management Cycle. The

	<p>Council’s role as a developer for the 1000 Affordable Homes Programme was highlighted, as the Council could assess whether any suitable schemes could be delivered through the programme in addition to house purchase and/or construction.</p> <p>The Director of Finance, Resources & Business Improvement stated that it would be beneficial if the group could discuss the development of feasibility studies with the external stakeholders in January 2023.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The presence of nitrates and phosphates within agricultural land and local rivers. <p>In response, the Biodiversity and Climate Change Manager stated that the forthcoming Natural England has a Nutrient Mitigation Scheme where they work with landowners to create habitats, wetland, and woodlands to receive ‘nutrient credits’ that could be sold to developers, to offset the negative impacts of the development. These types of scheme could be included within the case studies requested by the group.</p> <p>Ahead of the meeting’s closure, the officers in attendance were asked if they had any final remarks.</p> <p>The group thanked the officers in attendance for their contributions.</p>
4. Next Meeting	<p>In response to questions, the Democratic Services Officer outlined the officers that would be attending the group’s next meeting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental Health Manager, Tracey Beattie • Principal Planning Officer, Richard Timms • Interim Local Plan Review Director, Philip Coyne <p>The second and third officers were from the development management and strategic planning service areas respectively.</p>
5. Any Other Business.	None.
7.Summary of Agreed Actions	<p>Actions: That</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Director of Finance, Resources & Business Improvement put forward proposals on how to conduct the required feasibility studies; and 2. The Biodiversity and Climate Change Manager be requested to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. produce a proposals map, to identify which areas could benefit from schemes designed to improve aspects of the Water Management Cycle; b. continue to develop the ongoing business case, and that a scale of the land available for purchase starting with agricultural land as the most affordable, be included.

	c. provide case studies types of projects underway elsewhere in the country relating to the Water Management Cycle.
8. Duration of Meeting	3 p.m. to 4.30 p.m.