

**Report to:** Cabinet

**Date:** 8 December 2022

**Title:** Natural Flood Management within the Ouse and Eastern Adur catchment

**Report of:** Tim Whelan, Director of Service Delivery

**Cabinet member:** Councillor Matthew Bird, Cabinet member for sustainability

**Ward(s):** All

**Purpose of report:** This report sets out the next steps for Natural Flood Management in Lewes district, which encompasses the Ouse and Eastern Adur catchments.

**Decision type:** Key

**Officer recommendation(s):** (1) That Cabinet approves the strategic approach presented and agrees as follows:

a. To continue to provide governance, support and resource to the Natural Flood Management (NFM) programme beyond the current end date of March 2023 and to delegate authority to the Director of Service Delivery in consultation with the Cabinet member for waste and recycling to negotiate the terms of and enter into any necessary agreements to facilitate this provision.

b. To build upon the NFM approach (as outlined in this report) and support inter-linked projects with partners and stakeholders such as habitat restoration and nature recovery in the Ouse catchment.

(2) That Cabinet endorses the approach set out at Appendix 1 'Lewes District Council (LDC) Briefing: Natural Flood Management within the Ouse and Eastern Adur catchment' and Appendix 2 'Wilder Ouse, Vision & Targets'.

(3) Approve a waiver to the Contract Procedure Rules (CPR) as set out in paragraph 2.4.1 (a) of the CPR to enable the Council to enter into agreements with partners in relation to this strategic approach.

**Reasons for recommendations:** LDC has been successfully working in partnership delivering Natural Flood Management (NFM) projects with the Sussex Flow Initiative (SFI) and Ouse & Adur Rivers Trust (OART) since 2016. This approach has delivered a raft of benefits on which to build in a collaborative effort to improve climate resilience in the coming years.

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## 1 Introduction

- 1.1 In 2016, LDC entered into a partnership with the Sussex Flow Initiative (SFI) and Ouse & Adur Rivers Trust (OART) to deliver a range of initiatives to use natural processes to make space for water and thus reduce the risk of flooding in the Ouse Catchment.
- 1.2 This pioneering lowland Natural Flood Management project aims to create a climate resilient landscape. OART is the primary delivery organisation of river enhancements across the entire catchment with over £5m of enhancements in the past nine years. The SFI small team of experts also works with communities and landowners to help people and wildlife to adapt better to extreme flooding and drought.
- 1.3 The project is a collaboration between Sussex Wildlife Trust, the Woodland Trust, the Environment Agency, and Lewes District Council with OART as an equal delivery partner. The present agreements end in March 2023.
- 1.4 In 2019, Lewes District Council committed to reduce council greenhouse gas emissions to net zero and to become fully climate resilient by 2030 and to address the ecological disaster (Feb 2021). Meaningful nature-based solutions are at the heart of these ambitions.

## 2 Proposal

- 2.1 Proposals can be summarised as:

- ✓ To continue with this important area of work, learning from our experience and adopting new and emerging ideas around climate resilience that align with this project and LDC's strategies and policies.
- ✓ To provide baseline funding from April 2023 to 2028 to support the partnership approach to NFM and associated nature-based solution projects across the catchments.
- ✓ To link with other nature-based initiatives along the Ouse Valley Catchment such as those generated through Ouse Valley Climate Action and the Railway Land Trust.

2.2 The detailed approach is set out at Appendix 1, Lewes District Council (LDC) Briefing: Natural Flood Management within the Ouse and Eastern Adur catchment.

### **3 Outcomes and performance management**

3.1 The SFI project showcases and delivers working examples of NFM best practice. Over the past five years SFI has delivered a large number of NFM projects, demonstrating a range of different NFM techniques, with key outcomes from that period below:

- Planted >65,000 native shrubs and trees.
- Reconnected 4.95 hectares of floodplain.
- Built 568 leaky dams and trained 24 staff and contractors in leaky dams, scrapes and ponds.
- Stored over 17 million litres of flood water (or around 17,000 tonnes) – much of which is held back each time there is a new flood event.
- Created 1.92 hectares of new freshwater habitat.
- Given advice to 11% of the Ouse catchment area (101 landowners across 6,826.6 hectares), supporting communities and landowners to restore nature while creating flood and drought resilience.
- Restored essential natural capital services including pollinator habitat, air purification, improved access to nature, water purification and natural flood storage.

3.2 LDC seeks to continue support and delivery of NFM and wider linked projects, within the Eastern Adur and Ouse catchments and thus:

- Help to reduce flood risk through the delivery of NFM projects (not inclusive of coastal flood risk)
- Improve drought resilience and climate resilience
- Work with communities and increase their resilience to flood, storm and drought events
- Enhance carbon sequestration
- Provide blue/green corridors for nature recovery and thus improve biodiversity
- Provide natural mechanisms for improving water quality

3.3 It is proposed that for governance purposes, the established working group, comprising 2 councillors, officers from SWT and OART and council officers continue meeting twice a year, with regular briefings every two months between officers and Lead members.

3.4 Associated targets are set out in the partnership agreement at Appendix 2, 'Wilder Ouse', Vision & Targets.

#### **4 Consultation**

4.1 Colleagues, partners and Lead councillors have been consulted on the accompanying briefing, at Appendix One, as set out in 4.2 and 4.3.

4.2 Natural Flood Management reflection and feedback sessions with partners were held on Tuesday 7th December 2021 and Wednesday 19th January 2022.

4.3 Initial briefing documents were circulated internally, March 2022, followed by a related meeting in May including key partners. Briefing documents were shared with partner organisations, OART, Environment Agency and SFI, in April with discussions ongoing through the summer 2022.

#### **5 Corporate plan and council policies**

5.1 The approach outlined in this report aligns with and complements the Sustainability and Climate Change Strategy and the Biodiversity Strategy and informs our programme of work in nature restoration at a landscape scale.

5.2 For example, there are synergies with the major project taking place on the outskirts of Lewes that will see the realignment of a local stream, the Cockshut, and the creation of a new wetland habitat. The project is a partnership between the council, Ouse and Adur Rivers Trust, Lewes Railway Land Wildlife Trust and South Downs National Park Authority and will bring huge biodiversity benefits and reduce flood risk in the area.

5.3 Officers will continue to explore the so-called 'stackable benefits' of these work streams through, for example, possible biodiversity net gain and carbon offsetting potential as the frameworks, guidance and national requirements become clearer.

#### **6 Business case and alternative option(s) considered**

6.1 There is an allocation of £40k currently set aside for the partnership to continue NFM works through 2023/24.

6.2 £20k per year for the 5-year period 2024/25 – 2028/29 is suggested as a contribution to the continuing programme. This level of LDC funding would be primarily used to attract additional funding from other sources to maximize financial resources (e.g. through match funding). The funding would act as seed money to support initial work, but we would seek to have longer term funding streams in place from a range of public and private sources.

6.3 Partner organisations may have limitations on the funding streams they can apply for, which is why a strategic approach across organisations is required, so that funding opportunities can be maximized.

6.4 LDC would also continue to support partners in strategic applications and bids for funding.

## **7 Financial appraisal**

7.1 There is currently an allocation of £40k that has been set aside for the partnership to continue NFM works through 2023/24. However, the service would be required to come up with savings or consider bidding for additional resources during future budget setting process to fund the £20k per year for the 5-year period between 2024/25 – 2028/29 that is required as a contribution to the NFM programme.

7.2 This level of Lewes District Council funding would be primarily used to attract additional funding from other sources to maximize financial resources (e.g. through match funding). The funding would act as seed money to support initial work, but officers would seek to have longer term funding streams in place from a range of public and private sources.

## **8 Legal implications**

8.1 Under the Localism Act 2011 section 1, general power of competence, the Council has the power to do anything that an individual can do that is not specifically prohibited. The actions proposed in this Report fall within this power.

In addition, the Council in partnership with other organisations has powers to manage coast protection and to take measures against erosion and flooding.

The Council will need to enter into agreements with partners in respect of any flood and water retention works proposed, subject to Cabinet first granting a waiver of the Council's Contract Procedure Rules to permit this.

[KS-LDC-11527 7 November 2022]

## **9 Risk management implications**

9.1 Failure to agree and progress the approach proposed could impact upon the council achieving its ambitions to address the climate and ecological emergency.

## **10 Equality analysis**

10.1 Working with communities and increasing their resilience to flood, storm and drought events, through the delivery of NFM projects, contributes to improving their sense of safety and wellbeing.

## **11 Environmental sustainability implications**

- 11.1 The council is committed to supporting measures to help arrest biodiversity losses, restore habitats and species and work for climate resilience to promote healthy and thriving communities. This is recognised in the NFM approach, where nature-based solutions build climate resilience and enhance and increase biodiversity and nature across Lewes district.

## **12 Contribution to Community Wealth Building**

- 12.1 The Corporate Plan prioritises Sustainability and Community Wealth Building. The council is considered 'an anchor institution' and can use its substantial spending power and influence to drive investment in the local economy to enable a green economic recovery and local job creation and retention. Community wealth is a thread that runs through the overarching climate change and sustainability strategy particularly in relation to procurement but also training and skills.

## **13 Appendices**

- Appendix 1 – Lewes District Council (LDC) Briefing: Natural Flood Management within the Ouse and Eastern Adur catchment
- Appendix 2 – 'Wilder Ouse, Vision & Targets'

## **14 Background papers**

The background papers used in compiling this report were as follows:

- [OART. 2022. Natural Flood Management.](#)
- [Sussex Flow Initiative. 2022. Natural Flood Management Project. End of Year Report 2021/22.](#)
- [Sussex World. 2022. Haywards Heath primary school helping to prevent flooding in the district.](#)
- [National Trust. 2022. River Ouse at Sheffield Park.](#)
- [Natural Flood Management Measures: A practical guide for farmers and landowners of the Solent and South Downs.](#)