North Somerset Local Flood Risk Management Strategy (LFRMS) Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)

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North Somerset LFRMS SEA: Non-technical summary

North Somerset Council

September 2013
1 North Somerset Local Flood Risk Management Strategy

Non-Technical Summary

1.1 Introduction and context of the LFRMS

Under the Flood and Water Management Act 2010\(^1\) North Somerset Council (NSC) is now a Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) with new statutory powers and responsibilities for managing flood risk from surface runoff, groundwater and ordinary watercourses\(^2\), and providing a leadership role for all sources of flooding.

One of our overarching responsibilities as a LLFA is to “develop, maintain, apply and monitor a strategy for local flood risk management”\(^3\) in our area (a ‘local flood risk management strategy’). The Local Flood Risk Management Strategy (LFRMS) will set out our high level vision for flood risk management in North Somerset, and provide the framework for identifying and prioritising the specific measures which should be undertaken. The LFRMS will also identify how NSC will work together with its fellow Risk Management Authorities\(^4\), other stakeholders, and local communities to manage local flood risk\(^5\). Furthermore, the LFRMS will provide the evidence base to target future capital and operational investment to manage flood risk in North Somerset. It is important to note that the LFRMS focuses on managing flood risk to people and property due to surface runoff, ordinary watercourses and groundwater, in accordance with our statutory duties and responsibilities.

The LFRMS contains a set of high-level objectives that have been formulated to facilitate the implementation of the strategy. It also contains a range of measures which need to be taken by North Somerset. Finally, the LFRMS has identified the communities within North Somerset that are most vulnerable to flooding from surface runoff, groundwater and ordinary watercourses. Action Plans, containing strategic actions for these communities, have been developed to direct the focus of future flood risk investigations.

1.2 Assessing the impacts of flood risk management on the environment

Flood risk management can have impacts on the environment, although through good planning and management any potentially negative impacts can be offset. In addition, there are opportunities to enhance the environment through our flood risk management activities, for example through the construction of a flood storage area which can create habitat.

In order to assess the potential impact of the LFRMS on the environment, and to maximise opportunities to enhance the environment, a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and a Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA) and screening have been undertaken alongside the development of the LFRMS.

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2 Watercourses not managed by the Environment Agency and Internal Drainage Board.
3 Section 9 of the Flood and Water Management defines what the Local Flood Risk Management Strategy must include.
4 Risk Management Authorities are defined in the Flood and Water Management Act as the LLFA, district/borough councils (where present) the Environment Agency, water and sewerage companies, the highways authority and internal drainage boards.
5 Local Flood Risk is from surface waters, ordinary watercourses and groundwater.
1.3 The SEA

The SEA has been prepared in accordance with The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (SI 2004 No. 1633). The SEA considers the potential impact of the strategy on various environmental receptors. It should be noted that the SEA has been specifically developed to ensure compliance with the Water Framework Directive. The SEA is split up into two components: the Scoping Report and the Environmental Report. The Scoping Report was produced and consulted upon between February and March 2013. Consultation feedback from NSC, Natural England, the Environment Agency and English Heritage were incorporated into the Environmental Report, which is the next stage in the SEA process. The Environmental Report stage includes an assessment of the environmental performance of the LFRMS. The Environmental Report will also be subject to consultation, and comments received during the consultation will be incorporated into the final Environmental Report.

1.4 The Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) Screening Assessment

HRA is undertaken in order to protect internationally designated nature conservation sites, or ‘Natura 2000’ sites, which comprise Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs). Wetland sites designated under the ‘Ramsar’ Convention are also included in HRAs but these sites always have an SPA designation. HRA is required in order to ensure the LFRMS complies with the EU Habitats and Birds Directives and the UK legislation that relates to them. The first stage in HRA is often referred to as the ‘screening’ stage and involves an initial assessment of a plan or project to establish whether it is likely to have a ‘significant effect’ on a European site. This assessment is carried out alone and in combination with other relevant plans or projects. If the screening stage finds that significant effects on any Natura 2000 sites are likely to occur, a Stage 2 ‘Appropriate Assessment’ is required, to determine if the significant effects are likely to be ‘adverse.’ The screening stage found that significant effects on seven international designations were unlikely to occur, three international designations were only likely to encounter minimal effects and one international designation (North Somerset and Mendip Bats SAC) required further HRA work to be undertaken at the project level. This will be required when further design detail on potential schemes is known.

1.5 Results of the SEA

To measure the environmental performance of the LFRMS, SEA objectives have been used to assess the LFRMS objectives and the LFRMS Action Plans for the communities most vulnerable to flooding from surface runoff, groundwater and ordinary watercourses.

All of the LFRMS objectives were assessed to have positive impacts on the natural and built environment. Although some impacts on the environment are likely to be indirect, the results are predicted to be positive nonetheless.

The assessment of the Action Plans for the most vulnerable communities showed that there are likely to be major positive effects on property and human health, but for most other environmental aspects the effects are likely to be neutral. As the majority of the measures in the Action Plans are related to further investigations into flood risk, it is difficult to ascertain the potential effects of the Action Plans on the environmental receptors at this stage. Therefore, during the development of mitigation measures ‘on the ground’ further environmental appraisal will be required to ensure there are no negative impacts on the environment, and any enhancement opportunities are maximised. To assist this, the SEA has considered potential environmental enhancement opportunities for each of the most vulnerable
communities. If implemented, these opportunities should provide particular benefits for biodiversity and amenity.

The HRA screening has shown that significant effects on most Natura 2000 sites in and around North Somerset are unlikely. However, it was recommended that project-level HRA screening should be undertaken for any future schemes in Claverham, Congresbury East, Hutton, Winscombe and Wrington, due to potential effects on the grassland and woodland qualifying interests of the North Somerset and Mendip Bats SAC.

1.6 Monitoring

The SEA includes a proposed monitoring framework to measure the environmental performance of the LFRMS throughout its lifetime. Specific monitoring indicators are provided alongside the SEA objectives that they are relevant to. These are largely based on monitoring that is already being undertaken by NSC and other organisations. It is suggested that this monitoring framework is reviewed in 2017 and 2023, to coincide with the review of LFRMS implementation. Project level reviews will also take place for any LFRMS schemes implemented ‘on the ground.’

1.7 Next Steps

The Environmental Report will be placed on public consultation for a period of 8 weeks. After this, the comments received will be taken into account in a revised Environmental Report. The SEA Scoping Report, Environmental Report and LFRMS will be placed on North Somerset Council’s ‘eConsultation Portal’.

In order to ensure positive effects of the LFRMS (and any Surface Water Management Plans, SWMPs) on the environment, it will be necessary to ensure that project level environmental assessment of flood risk management schemes is also undertaken. This environmental assessment should influence the choice of location and scheme design for any new LFRMS schemes. Statutory Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs), where required, will need to include measures to mitigate any potentially harmful effects on the natural and built environment. An EIA screening opinion, which determines whether an EIA will be required, will need to be obtained from Natural England for any LFRMS schemes that could potentially have a significant effect on the environment.