

Lower Otter Restoration Project (LORP)

Project Update April 2018 (for Stakeholder Group meeting 9 May 2018)

Project development

Our engineering and environmental consultants Jacobs (previously CH2M) have been commissioned to carry out appraisal of options and outline design of a preferred option.

Work on the short-listed options has led us to conclude that Option 3 (Big and Little Marsh floodplain restoration) is the best option to progress. The other options have been discounted for the following reasons:

- Option 1 (Full scale restoration)
The costs for this option are prohibitively high. We would not be able to justify funding it when other options are available.
- Option 2 (Assisted natural recovery)
The uncertainties around how this option would develop have led us to conclude that the risks of promoting it are too high.
- Option 4 (Big Marsh South floodplain restoration)
It is uncertain whether this option would provide the amount of habitat of the right quality required to attract Environment Agency funding. It does not deliver more sustainable management in the face of climate change and is not supported by the landowner.

We are therefore concentrating on Option 3, in parallel with investigating technical uncertainties around potential impacts on the drinking water abstractions in the Otter valley.

The computer hydrodynamic model has been built by Jacobs and checked by experts at the Environment Agency. The modellers have 'run' a number of different scenarios through the model. These include simulating two real events that have occurred in the Otter valley, the 2008 river flooding and the tidal storm event of 2014. For each scenario the results from the 'baseline' (existing) situation have been compared with those from the proposed layout. The water levels with the proposed layout are broadly similar to those from the baseline situation. Water levels, and therefore flood risk, in key areas are not increased. The flood defences at Granary Lane are higher than all the modelled water levels. However, we will look at detailed design stage whether there are any relatively minor changes that we could make to actively reduce flood risk.

The modelling has predicted that higher flow speeds than now could occur at the estuary mouth. These are likely to reduce as the estuary stabilises and adjusts to the new regime, but we do need to consider how these increased speeds could impact on the estuary mouth. We will consider possible options in this area, including allowing the estuary mouth to evolve completely naturally and assessing whether making changes as part of the scheme would give more certainty.

We have agreed with South West Water and the Environment Agency the scope of the studies required to assess the potential impacts of the scheme on the drinking water

abstractions in the valley. This work has recently started and will take a few months to complete.

The predictions from the modelling as to how habitats will change and develop across the site are positive. It is highly likely that the habitats created will be suitable for compensating for those lost in the Exe Estuary (one of the main requirements for attracting Environment Agency funding).

We have decided to go ahead with further, more detailed, environmental surveys for protected species such as bats and dormice. This will allow us to work out what, if any, adverse impact the scheme may have on them, and how we can mitigate for such impact. For some species, where survey is unlikely to confirm whether or not they are present, we will concentrate on mitigation. These surveys are starting in April and May.

We have developed three different road alignments for raising South Farm Road, which have been sent to Devon County Council Highways for discussion. These all involve putting the road on an embankment, rather than installing a bridge, because it has become clear that the costs of a bridge are significantly higher than those for an embankment.

The timeline for the development of options has been updated slightly (v4) and is appended to this Project Update.

Funding, including Clinton Devon Estates

As notified to you by e-mail recently, the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) has declined to offer its financial support at this stage. Whilst we are disappointed that the HLF bid was not successful, we remain confident that securing the required funding is still possible. We have made a request for the Environment Agency to consider funding all of the core elements of the project, subject to approval of the business case at the appropriate time.

The regional office of the Heritage Lottery Fund has suggested that there may be scope to adapt the original HLF project proposal to make a smaller funding bid to the regionally-allocated fund. Clinton Devon Estates is meeting with them in early May to discuss what this might be able to cover and the likelihood of success.

Work on the Interreg Va (France Channel England) European funding bid is progressing well, with the Environment Agency as lead partner. As mentioned previously, this is an extensive application and will take several months to complete. It now seems likely that the partners will make the bid in January 2019, for a decision immediately prior to the UK leaving the European Union. Any EU funding agreed before the exit date will be honoured by the UK government.

FAB Link

The FAB project has received approval of its Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) from the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. However, it does not mean the FAB Project will necessarily own the land along the route. The CPO will be used to acquire rights to access land, not to buy the land itself, so that FAB can lay the cables underground, and return in the years to come for any maintenance which may be needed.

The FAB project hopes that it will complete negotiations with all landowners so that they won't need to invoke the CPO at all.

The press release that the FAB project has issued can be found at the following link:
<http://www.fablink.net> .

Technical Steering Group

We are using the expertise of the Technical Steering Group during the project development. For some months this has been via meetings with individual organisations, but a full meeting of the Technical Steering Group is planned for 1 May 2018.

The organisations represented on the Technical Steering Group are:
Devon County Council; East Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty; East Devon District Council; East Devon Pebblebed Heaths Conservation Trust; Environment Agency; Natural England; Otter Valley Association; South West Water; this Stakeholder Group.

Issues Log

The Issues Log has been reviewed and some minor amendments made. A revised version (v9) is appended.