



Committee and Date

Cabinet

18 November 2019

Item

Public

RIVER SEVERN PARTNERSHIP

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1. Summary

- 1.1 This report advises Cabinet of and seeks its approval for the Council's involvement in a proposed strategic approach to future partnership and collaboration along the River Severn. The River Severn Partnership ("RSP") is a newly formed strategic coalition initially comprising Shropshire Council, the Environment Agency, Natural Resources Wales, Telford and Wrekin Council, Worcestershire and Gloucestershire County and District Councils and the new regional water planning group Water Resources West but with a view to expanding further. The RSP aims to take a strategic view of flood and water resource management along the River Severn, with a shared set of expectations and aspirations as well as establishing an up to date and comprehensive baseline hydraulic model for the whole river and main tributaries, including climate change allowances. Shropshire Council working with the Environment Agency have led the exploratory work with potential partners to date.
- 1.2 The RSP will enable a long-term view of future water management needs and allow testing of water management scenarios to enable identification of a potential strategic package of environmental infrastructure investment and development along the river corridor. Currently, each area looks at the water management in its own specific area and this approach will allow a corridor conversation on these issues to be held and a more strategic view to be discussed. This approach will help support the management of water resources and assist in place-based resilience to flood risk whilst seeking to identify a long-term programme of water infrastructure that supports sector-based growth needs and helps to unlock sustainable development.
- 1.3 The RSP will also explore appropriate funding streams which will support the aims of the partnership and enable appropriate modelling and testing to take place. The River Severn Partnership will meet on a quarterly basis and has no delegated decision making powers but will help to provide a strategic overview of water resources and flood along the River Severn Corridor. There is potentially a further round of One Public Estate funding due shortly and the RSP would be looking to approach the fund and bid for monies to support the strategic river corridor modelling aims.

2. Recommendations

Cabinet agree:

1. To support Shropshire Council's involvement in the River Severn Partnership
2. That the Executive Director of Place enters into a Memorandum of Understanding for the River Severn Partnership.
3. To support a submission to the One Public Estate Programme for £500k support towards feasibility studies and modelling.

REPORT

3. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

- 3.1 Do nothing – this approach means that collaboration will be minimal, with limited data to support and inform decision making along the River Severn within Shropshire only with the Environment Agency. It would rely on just the Council and Environment Agency to take this forward and the corridor opportunities would not be realised.
- 3.2 Forming the RSP creates opportunities, including financial and information sharing collaboration which will maximise the ability to enhance and improve water resource management and flood resilience as well as sustainable growth along the entire RSP. This work offers the opportunity for a collective approach to Government to develop future interventions and measures to address flood risk and realise the inherent value in the river.
- 3.3 **Key opportunities through the River Severn Partnership are:**
 - **Place based resilience-** align water management and growth ambitions along the River Severn corridor
 - **Informing long term investment and planning decisions-** up to date hydraulic model for the Severn
 - **Reducing economic blight in places experiencing repeat flooding-** Shrewsbury, Bewdley, Ironbridge, Worcester, Tewkesbury, Gloucester
 - **Unlocking opportunities for developing the river as an asset as part of sustainable growth-** Shrewsbury Big Town Plan, Worcester City Masterplan, Ashchurch Garden Town, Gloucestershire 2040 vision
 - **Ensuring infrastructure and future infrastructure investment resilient to climate change-** underpinning future connectivity
 - **Contribute to wider environmental objectives-** assisting future water security for sector based growth and explore the potential for energy generation initiatives.

4. Financial Implications

- 4.1 All the partners have agreed to look at providing funding to support any future funding opportunities and to maximise any external monies which maybe available. For example, discussions are underway with the national One Public Estate Programme in relation to a £500k bid submission for feasibility work and modelling.
- 4.2 There maybe a requirement to provide up to £100,000 of revenue to match any applications which will be funded from existing budgets in the Place Directorate if required.

5. Background

5.1 Strategic Opportunity

- 5.2 There is an opportunity for a comprehensive approach to water management along the River Severn which brings together the two water infrastructure strands around flood risk and water resources to underpin and stimulate and support sustainable housing and employment development along the River Severn corridor. Within a context of significant development aspirations across multiple Local Authorities, which capitalise on the value of the River Severn, the existing flood risk and the potential for water security issues have been identified as constraints to growth including the main tributaries. These constraints are likely to be further exacerbated by the effects of climate change.
- 5.3 A strategic partnership has therefore been formed, initially led by Shropshire Council and the Environment Agency, bringing together other unitary, county and district Local Authorities along the length of the river (including Telford and Wrekin Council, Worcestershire and Gloucestershire County and District Councils) Natural Resources Wales and the new regional water planning group Water Resources West but with the aim of expanding further. Engagement has also already taken place with the Marches LEP as well as neighbouring LEPs and Grow Mid Wales. The initial aim of the RSP is to outline a strategic package of water based environmental infrastructure which can be used to underpin and unlock growth and prosperity along the Severn. By looking at flood risk, water resources needs and growth in an integrated way, new options will be identified to bring multiple benefits in ways that may that may be uneconomic to achieve in isolation. Working in partnership will support and facilitate multi-sector investment opportunities.
- 5.4 Existing flood risk and water management issues are already known to pose a significant constraint to sustainable growth ambitions and existing economic resilience along the corridor, which the RSP is focused on seeking to address and unlock.
- 5.5 Given the future economic growth, development and place making opportunities within the Big Town Plan for Shrewsbury, supported by the North West Relief Road and other developments further downstream such as the former Ironbridge Power Station, the timing will be helpful in informing future strategies, plans and projects.

5.6 Flood Risk and Water Security Constraints

5.7 The River Severn has a long history of flooding which is a known critical constraint to both the resilience of towns and cities along the corridor and their aspirations for growth as well as supporting existing businesses which are impacted upon by flood and water resource issues.

5.8 Climate change will have an impact on future growth. As well as higher air temperatures, people and businesses will experience climate change through its effects on the River Severn Corridor, increasingly through floods and droughts. A precautionary climate change prediction for the River Severn suggests a potential increase in peak flows of >850mm in the upper reaches and >600mm in the lower reaches, with a 4 degree rise in temperatures also likely to have a significant impact on future water security. Regardless of the exact level change, the general scale of peak flow change suggested warrants establishing a collective approach, a much deeper understanding of the potential impacts and research into potential measures to mitigate this.

6. Alignment with Corporate Priorities

6.1 The Council declared a climate emergency in May 2019 and through this RSP approach a more comprehensive way of looking at the likely impact of climate change along the entire river is possible. Through the strategic modelling work, this will help to identify potential solutions which will manage and mitigate flood and water resource issues along the entire length of the Severn. This includes exploring energy generation opportunities.

6.2 Looking at the river and its impact and importance on a place- based geography will enable a much more strategic overview allowing more innovative approaches and solutions to be considered to help support the sustainable growth aspirations along the RSP area.

List of Background Papers- None
Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder) Cllr Robert Macey
Local Members – Councillors- Gwilym Butler, Madge Shington, Dave Tremelle, Tina Woodward, Robert Tindall, Michael Wood, Les Winwood, Elliott Lynch, William Parr, Christian Lea, David Turner, Simon Harris, Claire Wild, Ted Clarke, Jane Mackenzie, Tony Parsons, Pam Moseley, Kevin Parady, David Vasmer, Alan Moseley, Julian Dean, Nat Green, Peter Nutting, Lezley Picton, Ed Potter, Matt Lee
Appendices – None

