

Severn Estuary

Flood Risk Management Strategy

February 2010: Briefing Note

Shoreline Management Plans consultation

The formal consultation period for the Severn Estuary and North Devon and Somerset Shoreline Management Plans (SMPs) closed in January. These Plans are crucial documents for the Environment Agency to consider as it draws up its Flood Risk Management Strategy. We have the task of turning the policies agreed within the SMPs into workable solutions for flood risk management.

The consultation responses are now being reviewed by the Coastal Groups who develop the SMPs, to see if any of the proposed policies should be amended. We are advised that the final document should be available for adoption by the relevant authorities by mid-summer.

Those responding to the consultation were in general agreement that the most important features of the estuary to consider in planning for the future are critical infrastructure, housing and designated natural environments. There is an understanding that it will be difficult to continue to provide flood protection to isolated properties or small communities as climate change increases flood risk.

Developing solutions

Many of our defences will remain as traditional earth flood banks or the sea walls usually seen in urban environments. It will not always be possible to simply raise existing defences to tackle rising sea levels. Structures may change shape, change position locally or have secondary lines of defence, to provide the appropriate level of protection. In some locations the existing defences will already provide the appropriate standard of protection and therefore will not require change.

In other locations, climate change will force us to consider realigning defences inland from where they are now. Understandably, this causes concern even though these potential changes are likely to be decades away. Where realignment is required our strategy will consider how we can realign defences over time – in some locations we might be able to take a phased approach to make it easier for us to adapt. Realigning defences could bring a reduction in flood risk to property and infrastructure because the defences can be made more secure.

Some of the most challenging areas are where there are long lengths of defence protecting relatively small numbers of houses. These areas will not achieve a high priority for national funding for improved defences. This situation occurs in some parts of Gloucestershire and on the Steart peninsula in Somerset. There is potential to manage the flood risk better and maximise opportunities to adapt though by introducing local measures to improve flood resilience for the communities affected



A recently completed new length of flood bank on the Congresbury Yeo in North Somerset, built further inland for long term security.

What next?

The Environment Agency's Strategy team is now considering how, where and when defences should be built or improved to follow the SMP policies.

We have learnt from the SMP consultation process and adapted our plans accordingly. We will seek technical help from several existing working groups that already exist to discuss estuary or water management issues. We will share our thoughts with technical experts from councils, drainage boards and conservation groups to find how the possible solutions might work locally. Much of this work will be completed in small local meetings.

Formal public consultation will occur in Summer 2010.

Overall, we will target our consultation on those areas that might experience change in the shorter term ie in the next 20 years. Our plans for flood risk management after 2030 will need to be kept under review as we monitor major influences such as climate change, tidal power projects and food security. In this situation we consider that detailed consultation would be more useful nearer the time of potential change.

Where to get further information

We are publishing our documents on

www.severnestuary.net

This site contains information for both the SMP and the Strategy.

To contact the team who are developing the Strategy please email

Severn_Estuary_FRM_Strategy@atkinsglobal.com

A reminder

SMP: It is owned by the Severn Estuary Coastal Group. It provides the policy for coastal units from a choice of advance the line, hold the line, retreat or abandon the defence.

Strategy: It is owned by the Environment Agency. It provides the economic case for investment, defines defence alignments and the optimum standard of protection for each flood cell.