

**ENVIRONMENT AGENCY CATCHMENT FLOOD MANAGEMENT PLANS
CONSULTATION**

Report of the Deputy Chief Executive.

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 The purpose of this report is to bring to Members' attention a consultation from the Environment Agency (EA) on its catchment flood management plans (CFMP) for the region and to seek Members' endorsement of main comments on the proposals and any further comments.

2.0 BACKGROUND

2.1 The EA has published a series of draft CFMPs for the North East that it is consulting on between 15th August and 6th November 2011. CFMPs are high level strategic documents which identify the most sustainable approach to managing flood risk from all sources. These documents are vital elements of the flood risk management planning hierarchy, as described in the EA Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management (FCERM) Strategy for England. CFMPs are river catchment based and cross district boundaries.

2.2 The proposals draw on a range of information including local studies such as the Sunderland Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) and the Preliminary Flood Risk Assessment (PFRA). The plans will help focus local flood management efforts, such as the preparation by the local authority of a Local Flood Risk Management Strategy (LFRMS).

2.3 The EA sees the CFMPs as 'living' documents that may be altered to reflect the outcome of different studies, such as the 'system asset management plans' that are proposed for each CFMP area.

2.4 An earlier set of CFMPs was published in 2009-10. Since their publication a number of significant changes have taken place including the commencement of the Flood and Water Management Act (2010), the Flood Risk Regulations (2009) and the FCERM Strategy for England (2011). In addition, considerable efforts have been made to manage flood risk from all sources – Sunderland adopted its SFRA in July 2010 and the PFRA was formally submitted to the EA in June 2011. EA has worked in partnership with Northumbrian Water Limited and all local authorities in the North East to review a number of elements of the CFMPs. It has reviewed all the action plans to fully reflect the requirements for flood risk management.

2.5 The EA is responsible for managing flood risk that relates to main rivers, lakes and the sea. Therefore, in Sunderland it has responsibility for the;

- River Wear;
- River Don and Usworth Burn;

- Northern part of Lumley Park Burn;
 - Coast.
- 2.6 The City Council, as lead local flood authority (LLFA), is responsible for the 'ordinary watercourses' in the city such as Hendon Burn, or the southern part of Lumley Park Burn and its feeder streams, as well as ground and surface water flooding. The range of actions set out in the CFMPs identify whether the lead responsibility is the EA or the LLFA.
- 2.7 The proposed CFMP actions where the City Council is lead do not directly entail any capital items. They are all of a study nature which will require staff resources with, possibly, some additional consultant expertise. It is likely that costs can be defrayed through use of DEFRA funding that has been made available to the local authority to fund the new burdens placed on them by the Flood and Water Management Act (Sunderland has received £120,000 for 2011/12 and has been allocated £158,000 for 2012/13).
- 2.8 Members will recall that the outcome of the SFRA and PFRA studies indicated that while the city has some locations prone to flooding, the overall risk of more than very localised water inundation in the urban areas of Sunderland is low. This has been a prevailing consideration in commenting on the draft CFMPs.

3.0 THE ACTION PLANS AND THEIR PROPOSALS

- 3.1 The CFMP action plans for Sunderland cover:
- The Tidal River Wear
 - Lumley Park Burn
 - Coastal Streams
 - The Don
- 3.2 Each plan is succinct and comprises a short background explanation, a 'vision' for the particular 'policy unit', key messages, a schedule of changes to the actions set out in the earlier CFMP and finally, a schedule of prioritised actions and the organisations leading and supporting the delivery of each action. The accompanying CFMP text and related four plans, which are A3 size in colour, would not reproduce well as part of this report, but may be seen by following this link <http://www.sunderland.gov.uk/committees/cm5/Meetings/tabid/73/ctl/ViewMeetingPublic/mid/410/Meeting/7292/Committee/1479/Default.aspx>

Copies of the plans will be made available for committee members at the meeting.

- 3.3 Matters where the lead responsibility is the City Council or other actions of particular interest are itemised and commented on below. Before commenting on the particular area actions, the following general comments are made to the overarching structure of the CFMPs. Throughout this report the proposals of the CFMPs and any explanations are indicated in italics.

GENERAL

- 3.4 **Action Plan Visions:** *In relation to EA's 'vision' for each CFMP, it is noted that these are very similar. Each plan's vision is to better understand the policy unit (EA's term for the catchment plan area) through improved flood mapping and apply this to further detailed appraisals and future proposals for management of flooding. Then the second part of each vision seeks to discourage inappropriate development in areas at risk of flooding unless where exceptionally necessary they meet the requirements of Planning Policy Statement 25 Development and Flood Risk (PPS25).*

Comment: It is considered that the visions in their current form add little to the CFMPs. It is suggested that EA should revisit the 'vision' for each CFMP and, instead of it being process-based, write it on a spatial basis. This could identify a long-term outcome for flooding and the general management of the catchment rivers in each policy unit with the main mechanisms for control of water, such as, say, retaining or enhancing local flood plains, or an emphasis on SUDS (sustainable drainage systems), or improving critical drainage, etc. It is also suggested that the second part of each vision concerning development could be deleted, as already both EA and the local authority must abide by the provisions of PPS25.

- 3.5 **Sustainability:** *Several actions throughout the plans state that they will be undertaken using the most sustainable approach, though no explanation is given as to what would define sustainability for the matters in question.*

Comment: some further consideration and clarification of the meaning of sustainability for different actions and circumstances should be included in the document.

- 3.6 **Cost –effectiveness:** *Feasibility options are seen as a way of identifying the most cost-effective approach to reducing flood problems e.g. as proposed for the Wear at Fatfield.*

Comment: EA is asked to explain its meaning of cost-effectiveness in the context of flood control and threat to life and property. A clear explanation should be included in the documents on how cost-effectiveness is established; will it, for instance, adopt lifetime cost/benefit principles?

- 3.7 **Key Messages:** the Key Messages for each CFMP include a brief indication of the types of flooding that the policy unit is at risk from, for instance river flooding or from surface water. Whilst the areas may be at risk from some flooding from these sources, an indication of the level of risk, location and extent should be included in the messages: as pointed out earlier Sunderland's risk from flooding is generally low and it would be undesirable to imply anything more than this except for the few areas identified through the SFRA and PFRA.

- 3.8 **Additional comment – biodiversity:** The City Council wishes to ensure that flood management measures for the main rivers that EA is responsible for do not have a negative impact on Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) species and habitat assets. This needs to be ensured for all four of the CFMP Policy Units that relate to the city.

THE CFMP ACTION PLANS

- 3.9 **Tidal River Wear:** Covering the area around the River Wear from the western city boundary to the mouth of the river. The policy unit is at risk of coastal, tidal, surface water and river flooding. *CFMP policy is to take further action to reduce the risk of flooding, including;*

- ***Tidal flood plain:*** *Ensure that the tidal flood plain does not see an increase in development.*

Comment: The tidal flood plain is not extensive in the city. The City Council has adopted a Strategic Flood Risk Assessment report that includes a similar recommendation and it applies the provisions of PPS25 Development and Flood Risk in taking decisions on planning applications and considerations on the locations for future growth

- ***'System Asset Management Plan';*** *The EA is to give high priority to producing a 'System Asset Management Plan' for the tidal Wear to ensure the most sustainable approach to managing flood defence related assets to ensure flood risk is reduced.*

Comment: This is to be welcomed, though note the above comment on sustainability.

- ***Register of structures:*** *Sunderland City Council to establish a register of structures or features likely to have a significant effect on flood risk.*

Comment: This is a requirement of the Flood and Water Management Act. The priority for this will be determined by the City Council in preparing its Local Flood Risk Management Strategy.

- 3.10 **Additional comment – biodiversity:** The Wear CFMP should aim to identify habitat protection, enhancement and creation of wildlife opportunities related to flood risk management measures, in particular to identify saltmarsh creation and protection opportunities, control of invasive species and conservation of BAP species such as otter and water vole. The tidal and fluvial main river water quality should be improved and a sensitive clearance programme of litter and other detritus instigated.

- 3.11 **Lumley Park Burn:** Encompasses the urban and rural areas from the Burn's source near Easington Lane to the western boundary of Shiny Row near its confluence with the River Wear. Flood risk in the policy unit is river-related. Further study of the effects of climate change is proposed

by the EA. *The CFMP policy is to continue with existing or alternate action to manage flood risk at the current level;*

- **‘System Asset Management Plan’:** *The EA is to give high priority to producing a ‘System Asset Management Plan’ for the Lumley Park Burn to ensure the most sustainable approach to asset management, continuing the current level of maintenance, though recognising that the standard of protection will reduce over time due to climate change.*

Comment: The Sunderland SFRA identifies Lumley Park Burn as one of the areas of the city most prone to flooding and it has both of the city’s main raised defences at Osman Terrace and Dairy Lane. Just maintaining the defences at their current level will mean increased risk of overtopping due to the impacts of climate change. Therefore it is recommended that maintenance of defences should be improved in proportion to the increasing impact of climate change so as to maintain the same risk level of flooding in the defended areas. The likely effects of climate change in the Lumley Park policy unit area should be further studied and actions included in the CFMP to ensure the risk to currently undefended property does not increase.

- **Flood risk mapping for Houghton le Spring:** *EA is to carry out a flood risk mapping study to further define the risk of fluvial flooding at Houghton le Spring as a medium priority.*

Comment: This is to be welcomed but in view of the flooding history of the Lumley Park Burn the study should be high priority, preferably linked to the City Council’s production of the Sunderland Flood Risk Management Strategy.

3.12 **Additional comment – habitats:** Lumley Park Burn CFMP should aim to identify habitat protection, enhancement and creation of opportunities related to flood risk management measures, including control of invasive species and conservation of BAP species such as otter, water vole and great crested newt. The river water quality should be improved and a sensitive clearance programme of litter and other detritus instigated. EA should work in partnership with the City Council and others to agree improvements.

3.13 **Coastal Streams:** Numerous small watercourses drain the eastern-most part of the catchment plans’ area to the coast independently of any hydrological connection with the River Wear or each other. Notable coastal streams in Sunderland are Cut Throat Dene, Hendon Burn and Cherry Knowle/Ryhope Dene. Flood risk is fluvial (from water courses) but predicted damages here are very low. *CFMP policy is for ‘no active intervention’.*

- **System Asset Management Plan:** *EA is to give high priority to producing a System Asset Management Plan to determine the most effective approach to managing assets, hence it proposes to cease all flood risk management activity.*

Comment: The Sunderland PFRA has identified clusters of properties in the urban area that are at risk from surface water flooding. Mitigation measures need to be considered in preparation by the City Council of the Local Flood Risk Management Strategy. These measures may involve EA in looking at its assets' management and maintenance. Therefore the proposed policy of 'no active intervention' would seem inappropriate at this point in time and EA should re-consider the policy stance.

- ***Flood risk mapping for Sunderland:*** EA is to give high priority to carrying out a detailed Flood Risk Mapping Study to further define the risk of both fluvial and tidal flooding throughout Sunderland.

Comment: This is to be welcomed, though some clarification is needed as this would appear to be a statement about flood risk mapping for all fluvial and tidal flooding in Sunderland.

3.14 **Additional comment – biodiversity:** The Coastal Streams CFMP should aim to identify habitat protection, enhancement and creation of opportunities related to flood risk management measures, including control of invasive species and conservation of BAP species. The water quality of the coastal streams should be improved and a sensitive clearance programme of litter and other detritus instigated. EA should work in partnership with the City Council and others to agree improvements.

3.15 **The Don:** This river is at the edge of the Tyne catchment and the Don policy unit includes the urban areas of Springwell and north Washington. Usworth Burn is a tributary. The main source of flood risk is fluvial, whilst the management of surface water flood risk may require further investment. Whilst the population density is high, the flood risk is low. *The policy is to continue with existing or alternate actions to manage flood risk at the current level;*

- ***Habitat creation:*** Work in partnership to identify habitat creation opportunities through the removal or abandonment of flood risk management assets.

Comment: Consideration of any abandonment of flood management assets should only be made after the proposed Systems Assets Management Plan has been prepared. Decisions should only be taken after consultations with the local authority and other stakeholders. The CFMP schedule does not state where the habitat opportunities are located and should clarify this. Where flood risk management measures are planned the Don CFMP should aim to identify and include measures for habitat protection, enhancement and creation of biodiversity opportunities including control of invasive species and conservation of BAP species such as otter, water vole and great crested newt. The river water quality should be improved and a sensitive clearance programme of litter and other detritus

instigated. The City Council should be a partner in identifying improvements.

- **Register of structures:** *Sunderland City Council as high priority (by 2015) to establish and maintain a register of structures or features likely to have a significant effect on flood risk, to identify locations where flood water may overflow.*

Comment: This would be part of a city-wide register of structures and features to be prepared by the council as part of its Local Flood Risk Management Strategy, which would determine the priorities.

3.16 **Additional comment – priorities:** It is noted that whilst the flood risk for the policy unit is low, all the actions are given ‘high’ priority. The EA should re-examine the priorities with a view to best managing resources and ensuring true high priorities are tackled first.

4.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Committee is requested to:

- i) Endorse the comments as set out in this report and make any other comments considered appropriate;
- ii) Authorise officers to forward a copy of this report together with their detailed comments to the Environment Agency as representing the City Council’s views on the proposals.

BACKGROUND PAPERS :

- The relevant CFMPs for Sunderland
- Sunderland Strategic Flood Risk Assessment
- Sunderland Preliminary Flood Risk Assessment

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