

<b>Bath &amp; North East Somerset Council</b>		
MEETING:	<b>Housing &amp; Major Projects Development Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel</b>	
MEETING DATE:	<b>Tuesday 29th July 2014</b>	EXECUTIVE FORWARD PLAN REFERENCE:
TITLE:	<b>Strategic River Group</b>	
WARD:	All	
<b>AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM</b>		
<p><b>List of attachments to this report:</b></p> <p>Appendix 1: Strategic River Group structure and membership</p> <p>Appendix 2: Update report River Safety Group</p> <p>Appendix 3: Draft Canal &amp; River Trust Annual Report 2012/13</p>		

The purpose of this report is to provide an update to the Panel on the Strategic River Group (SRG) and Working Groups especially the River Safety Officers Working Group. The Panel requested at its March meeting an update report and action plan on River Safety activities.

B&NES has recognised the importance of the River Avon in its draft Core Strategy and Green Infrastructure Strategy. It has worked closely with a range of stakeholders to ensure that the area makes the most of its economic, environmental, cultural and social value.

A River Corridor Scrutiny Day took place in May 2012, building on the work of the

River Corridor Group. The PDS Panel Recommendation was accepted by the Cabinet, the rationale being: "This Administration is keen to ensure that any future developments near or related to the River will not "turn their back" on the river, but see the river as the excellent asset it is, and enhance the river frontage for public access"

In addition on 16 January 2014 Full Council accepted a motion to set up the Strategic River Group chaired by the Cabinet Member for Sustainable Development: "Under the leadership and guidance of the Council's Strategic Director for Place to urgently form a Round Table Working Group from the top level decision makers of the Canal & River Trust, the Environment Agency, Wessex Water, The River Regeneration Trust, and Senior Officers from this Council to discuss the river on a wider basis including flooding issues and proposed flood mitigation projects and other aspects such as usage."

The Strategic River Group was formed in March 2014 (Appendix 1 structure and membership of SRG) and has met twice so far in March and May with next meeting due on 18<sup>th</sup> July

The group is made up of Senior Officers from Wessex Water, Environment Agency, Canal & Rivers Trust and from B&NES the Director of Place, Divisional Director for Environmental Services, Divisional Director for Community Regeneration, other council officers, the River Champion, The River Regeneration Trust and is chaired by Cllr Ben Stevens Cabinets Member for Sustainable Development

Within the SRG there are 5 working groups:

- Waterside Communities
- Economy
- Water Management
- Connectivity
- Leisure

And there are two cross cutting themes, Health & Safety and Green Infrastructure

## **River Strategy**

One of the recommendations of the River Corridor Scrutiny Day in May 2012 was the need for a River Strategy. There have been a number of recent reports and studies which would be used to inform the strategy

To move the River Strategy forward it has been agreed there is a need for a River co-ordinator and currently there are discussion between Wessex Water, Environment Agency and B&NES on funding the post

## **River Corridor Fund**

At Cabinet meeting 6<sup>th</sup> June the Community Regeneration Capital Programme 2014-15 was approved which included the River Corridor Fund of £340K, which included identified edge protection safety works at Widcombe

## **River Safety Officers Working Group**

The River Safety Officers Working Group is made up of Avon Fire & Rescue, Avon & Somerset Police, Canal & Rivers Trust, RoSPA, B&NES Officers

The last meeting took place on 5/6/2014, quarterly meetings have been set up and will report back to the Strategic River Group

Appendix 2 Update report for ECD outlines current actions being progressed by the River Safety Group. For those actions to be progressed by B&NES, costs will be covered by existing budgets.

The Environment Agency has undertaken an inspection of access ladders within the canalised section of the River Avon within Bath. The majority of these ladders are in a good state of repair although it is noted that they are not designed to allow public access and egress from the river.

Through work carried out it has been suggested that attaching timber battens to the steel sheet piling might improve egress from the river in an emergency situation as well as improving the river edge visually and the biodiversity of the river. The Environment Agency are supportive of this approach and idea of setting up a trial area is being discussed.

## **Waterside Communities**

In July 2013 a Task and Finish Group chaired by Cllr Eleanor Jackson produced a report on Boat Dwellers and River Travellers with a series of recommendations. To create capacity to take this work area forward and the other elements of the Strategic River Group the role of 'river coordinator' is being explored with SRG partners. It is hoped to secure this post and start to make progress on some of the recommendations by the Autumn.

## **Kennet & Avon Canal Annual Report 2013/14**

B&NES provides funding to K&A Canal as part of a legal agreement which was set up as a condition of a significant Heritage Lottery Fund bid in 1996 for the restoration of the canal.

As part of this agreement CRT are required to produce an annual report, which summarises maintenance and operation expenditure on the K&A Canal. A draft copy of this is attached as Appendix 3.

Over 7,500 hours of volunteer involvement was recorded for 2013/14 in the B&NES section of River Avon and K&A Canal

For the current financial year 2014/15 CRT propose to invest £700,000 on River Avon Navigation Improvements on the Bath to Hanham section of the river. This has no financial implications for B&NES.