

REPORT TO: Environment and Urban Renewal Policy
and Performance Board

DATE: 24th November 2010

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director Environment and
Economy

SUBJECT: Surface Water Management Plan Progress
Report

WARDS: Boroughwide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To inform Members of the process being followed and progress made in relation to the preparation of a Surface Water Management Plan for Widnes.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That

- (1) the Board notes the continuing work undertaken by Officers, the Council's Consultants and Partners (the Environment Agency and United Utilities) in the development of a Surface Water Management Plan (SWMP) for Widnes; and**
- (2) further reports be presented to the Board as work on the study and plan progresses.**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 At its meeting on 16th June, the Board considered a report on Flood Risk Management and the various plans and funding arrangements which support the introduction of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010. The Board were informed that Halton had been granted £100,000 for the development of a Surface Water Management Plan (SWMP) for Widnes, which is ranked 156th in Defra's list of settlements in England, susceptible to surface water flooding, and that work was underway to establish partnerships and to identify the scope of the SWMP study. The finished plan will describe the causes and effects of surface water flooding and set out the most cost effective way of managing surface water flood risk for the long term.

3.1 Surface water flooding can include:

- Water runoff as a result of high intensity rainfall before it enters the underground drainage network or watercourses, (known as pluvial flooding);
- flooding from groundwater below the surface;
- sewer flooding, when the capacity of underground systems is exceeded due to heavy rainfall,
- flooding from open-channel and culverted watercourses.

- 3.2 Ultimately, the study will establish an action plan to manage surface water in areas of Widnes which are susceptible to surface water flooding and should determine or influence matters such as:
- The level of capital investment required to reduce flood risk;
 - The preparation of drainage maintenance and improvement programmes;
 - Land-use, spatial planning, and sustainable drainage options for future development;
 - Emergency planning for high flood risk areas.
- 3.4 Defra identifies four distinct phases involved in the preparation of a SWMP. The first three relate to undertaking the Study, and the final phase to the plan itself:
- **Preparation**, which includes Partners setting the objectives and scope of the study;
 - **Risk Assessment**, including collating and analyzing the information to identify areas at greatest risk of flooding and the use of modeling techniques to assist in the understanding of the causes of flooding and to test mitigation measures;
 - **Options**, where specific measures to manage the risk of flooding are identified and assessed, and preferred options are agreed with Partners;
 - **Implementation** phase, meaning the preparation of an agreed Action Plan based on the evidence gained from the SWMP study, and the implementation and review of the plan.
- 3.5 In accordance with Defra's guidance on the preparation of SWMPs, a Partnership has been formed between Halton Council (as Lead Local Flood Authority - LLFA), the Environment Agency and United Utilities (as the water and sewerage company for the area). Each partner has agreed to engage actively in the SWMP process, working together in co-operation and sharing information with all partners openly. Decisions made by the Partnership, in respect of the Plan and its implementation, will also affect other stakeholders such as riparian owners, adjoining Local Authorities, developers and, of course, members of the public. Indeed, stakeholders themselves can help the process, through the provision of local knowledge and information, and the partners must decide how and when to engage with them as the process evolves.
- 3.6 Initial meetings have been held with partners to scope and plan the study and to identify and agree the exchange of information necessary to carry out risk assessments. Mott MacDonald, the Council's Framework Engineering Consultants have been commissioned to assist in undertaking the Study. It should be noted that a significant amount of work has already been undertaken to map flood risk in Halton as part of the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment Level 2. This work focused primarily on flood risk from main rivers in relation to potential development sites. JBA Consultants who carried out those

assessments have also been engaged to provide hydrological modelling support and advice as the study proceeds.

- 3.7 Halton together with its partners will need to agree and publish the stated aims and objectives of the Study, which should be tailored to address the flood risk situation and local priorities. Defra guidance suggests some generic objectives which could be common to all SWMPs. These are described in Appendix 1 and they will form the basis for discussion with Partners. Halton's successful 'Early Action Bid' for funding to produce the SWMP identified the surcharging of sewer systems under storm and tidal conditions as a source of flooding at various locations. We would expect the study and plan to address such problems and to help to inform drainage strategies for major new developments in Widnes, including:
- Widnes Waterfront,
 - the Mersey Gateway Regeneration Strategy for southern Widnes
 - the Housing growth Point area of north Widnes.

United Utilities have stated that they wish to reach agreement with local authorities to produce a strategy to deal with highway drainage and gully connections. Key and local objectives will be discussed at the Partnership meeting on 10th November and a verbal update will be given to the Board on progress.

- 3.8 The report to the Board in June indicated that the EA had offered to jointly fund a post that will take on a co-ordinating and advising role across LLFAs to support their work on Flood Risk Assessments and SWMPs. Originally, Halton was to partner the Merseyside authorities, however following further discussion with the EA it has been agreed that we would join with Warrington, St Helens and the Cheshire Authorities to share this support, with each authority contributing £5000 toward the cost. This arrangement fits better with the cross-boundary work in connection with the SWMP and with the Housing Growth Point.
- 3.9 A report to Executive Board Sub Committee on 23rd September 2010 detailed Halton's response to a Defra consultation on the future funding of the Lead Local Flood Authority Role (Minute ES37 refers). In the consultation papers, Defra had indicated a distribution of funding based on a total of £36m being available to LLFAs, however the level of funding available was subject to the outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review. It has been reported that Defra's capital budget has been reduced by 34% over the course of the CSR period. As yet there are no details available about where cuts will be targeted, although the Government has indicated that improving flood protection remains a priority. We await further information on what funding will be available to Halton in the future to undertake the new duties and responsibilities under the Flood and Water Management Act, and to develop and implement options identified within the SWMP to mitigate the effects of flooding.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The SWMP concept is recognised and promoted within Planning Policy Statement PPS25, and sits within a policy framework of plans and strategies for flood risk management (such as Strategic Flood Risk Assessments, Catchment and Shoreline Management Plans). Whilst there are no specific policy implications in relation to this progress report, future reports brought before the Board will propose policy directions and recommendations. Ultimately, the SWMP will ultimately inform a Local Flood Risk Management Strategy for Widnes.

5.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Resource Implications

The SWMP is funded by grant from Defra. The grant covers work involved in the surface water management studies, risk assessments and the identification and assessment of measures to mitigate the causes of flooding. It does not cover works or the implementation of the action plan. In-house staff resources within the Highways Transportation and Logistics Department are being supplemented by specialist consultants to undertake the study.

5.2 Sustainability

The purpose of the SWMP study is to identify sustainable management responses to surface water flooding. The SWMP Action Plan then enables Partners to make sustainable surface water management decisions that are evidence and risk based, and take account of stakeholders' views and preferences, and the effects of climate change.

5.3 Legal Implications

The preparation of a SWMP will assist Halton to meet its duties and responsibilities as Lead Local Flood Authority under the Flood and Water Management Act 2010.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Children and Young People in Halton

There are no implications associated with this report.

6.2 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton

There are no implications associated with this report.

6.3 A Healthy Halton

There are no implications associated with this report.

6.4 A Safer Halton

There are no implications associated with this report.

6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

The outputs from a SWMP study are likely to be of considerable value to the spatial planning and development process. In return planners and developers may assist in the achievement of aspects of the action plan. The plan will help to promote sustainable development and support a more strategic approach to implementing surface water drainage infrastructure.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

There are no key risks associated with the proposed action to continue preparation of the SWMP at the present time, and a full risk assessment is not required. However, as options to mitigate flood risk are developed and assessed, and an action plan is agreed between the Partners, there may be a risk that the expectations of stakeholders, residents etc., to resolve flooding issues and reduce flood risk, are raised to a level that may not be easy to meet with the limited resources available. Additionally, some solutions may require the co-operation of landowners, developers or riparian owners for example. The engagement of stakeholders during this part of the process will be key to delivering an action plan that is both realistic and achievable.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

There are no Equality and Diversity issues in relation to this report.

9.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

Document	Place of Inspection	Contact Officer
Early Action Bid for funding from Defra	Highways Development Division, Rutland House, Halton Lea, Runcorn	Dave Cunliffe
Report to Executive Board Sub Committee (23 rd September 2010) Defra Consultation on Distributing Funding for Local Flood Risk Management	Highways Development Division, Rutland House, Halton Lea, Runcorn	Dave Cunliffe

DEFRA Generic Objectives for Surface Water Management Plans

- we will map current and potential surface water flood risk areas, irrespective of source, and engage the community and all stakeholders to share this knowledge;
- we will determine the consequences of surface water flooding, now and in the future, so that we can establish our priorities and understand and compare the merits of different mitigation strategies;
- we will identify effective, affordable, achievable and, cost-beneficial measures to mitigate surface water flood risk which achieve multiple benefits where possible;
- we will develop a strategy to inform the strategic planning of drainage provision in large new developments;
- we will develop an implementation plan showing how partners and stakeholders will work together to finance and implement the preferred strategy, and;
- we will periodically review the plan and monitor the effectiveness of chosen solutions.