



**Open Report on behalf of Andy Gutherson, Executive Director - Place**

Report to:	<b>Environment and Economy Scrutiny Committee</b>
Date:	<b>30 November 2021</b>
Subject:	<b>Flood and Coastal Innovation Programme - the Greater Lincolnshire Groundwater Project</b>

**Summary:**

To provide an update on the Greater Lincolnshire Groundwater Project and sets out the next steps in Developing an Outline Business Case.

Following a successful bid for funding into the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA) Innovation Resilience Fund this report provides the Committee with an update on progress in developing the Greater Lincolnshire Groundwater Project and specifically that of working towards the completion of an Outline Business Case by April 2022.

**Actions Required:**

Members of the Environment and Economy Scrutiny Committee are requested to consider and comment on the report and provide guidance as required to help shape the Outline Business Case that will be further brought back for pre-decision scrutiny in 2022, ahead of the final submission in April 2022.

## **1. Background**

In the 2020 Budget, the government announced a £200 million fund for a flood and coastal resilience innovation programme to help deliver the government's policy statement on flooding and coastal erosion and the Environment Agency's National Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Strategy for England.

The programme will allocate £150 million of the £200 million to 25 local areas, which could be a county, city, town or village, or also mean a river catchment, a tidal estuary or part of the coast. Areas making a successful bid will, on average, receive £6 million between 1 April 2021 and 31 March 2027.

Lincolnshire County Council is leading on the development of a collaborative approach founded on the flood and water management partnership and based on the Greater Lincolnshire geography. This includes North Lincolnshire Council, North East Lincolnshire Council, North Kesteven and East Lindsey District Councils, Internal Drainage Boards, the Environment Agency and Water Companies. Within the Council a range of internal services are engaged, including Highways, Emergency Planning & Business Continuity and Countryside Services. The overall emphasis is on the management of current and future groundwater flood risk an area much less understood than coastal, fluvial and surface water risks. The partnership has recognised there is an identifiable impact of groundwater on residents and infrastructure across the Greater Lincolnshire area, and this little-understood subject offers opportunities for innovative approaches to be taken making a strong bid.

The Partnership prepared an Expression of Interest (EOI) to bid for funding and in January 2021 an Executive Councillor decision notice approved the submission of an EOI by LCC on behalf of the partnership. Subsequently LCC were informed of the success of the application and acceptance on to the Flood and Coastal Resilience Innovation (FCRI) programme. It confirmed that capital funding will be received over the next six years to take forward the actions and interventions identified in the EOI. The £150 million FCRI programme was re-confirmed in the Government spending review and confirmation was received that following Ministerial approval, the Environment Agency can now allocate and pay-out this funding for this financial year.

All projects will have to complete an Outline Business Case (OBC) for assurance and approval by the Environment Agency's national project assurance groups. Initial allocations of funding for the supporting studies required to complete an OBC had to be claimed via submission of form FCERM7: Application for approval of studies. This was completed by members of the partnership and outlined key packages of work that will be required to lead to the development of the OBC and the associated indicative costs.

### **Current actions and next steps**

As identified above the first major milestone of the project is to produce an Outline Business Case. This will support the development of a multi-functional Integrated Catchment Model. This model will involve using innovative methods to assess groundwater flood risk at a catchment level and will incorporate input data from partners across Greater Lincolnshire. The capability of the models will be adapted so that it is fit for purpose to be able to assess water resource opportunities and also identify where groundwater flooding is likely to occur. Whilst the modelling work will be core to the development of the overall project other areas which will be explored include potential environmental benefits and resilience to climate change and a key focus on community engagement to better understand the risk of groundwater flooding. To support this, and in developing a robust OBC the key packages of work currently identified by the project team are as follows:

## Project Team Resource

- To establish dedicated resource within the project team to manage the overall programme and undertake day to day tasks such as engagement, procurement, technical input and completion of the OBC. This dedicated resource is seen as fundamental to ensuring deliverables are produced to programme and meet the quality standards expected. This resource will entirely be externally funded for the duration of the project.
- Recruitment of a National Flood Forum Community Engagement Officer to establish effective community groups and facilitate a multi-agency approach to help the residents deliver outcomes.

## Strategic Groundwater Assessment and Gap Analysis

The Strategic Groundwater Assessment has been identified as the first phase of work in assessing what data is available within the wider partnership, what methods can be used and enhanced for modelling and where there are gaps in resource, knowledge or data. The Strategic Groundwater Assessment will consist of the following tasks:

- Desktop review of the Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) of Groundwater flooding;
- Review national mapping products for capability;
- Capability Assessment of the Greater Limestone and Chalk models;
- Collection of localised data to assist with the Integrated Catchment Modelling; and
- Gap analysis – consisting of scope of works for Catchment Modelling and any other required tools

The project team have engaged with consultants who built the Lincolnshire Limestone and Chalk models and will work with them moving forward to refine the criteria for the submission of the OBC.

Confirmation has been received from the Environment agency national team that this project has already been assessed against the criteria relating to project viability and deliverability and it is expected this next stage of project development, will provide the opportunity to further refine the scope of the project and reduce critical areas of risk and uncertainty. Support is available through the Environment Agency to review the business case and, where necessary, will make recommendations which help the project get off to the best start possible to enable the partnership to achieve the planned benefits and outcomes for the project.

## **2. Conclusion**

The Flood & Coastal Resilience Innovation Programme provides the opportunity to develop understanding of a broad range of groundwater risks and opportunities across multiple LLFA areas, leading to a range of practical actions delivered in partnership over the next six years. It is intended that these actions should incorporate multiple benefits, such that environmental and social resilience is built into the approaches developed.

The Expression of Interest form, developed in a relatively short period of time, required the rapid establishment of a partnership involving a broad range of partners from across the Greater Lincolnshire area. The successful establishment of this partnership and the active collaboration of its members indicates the recognition across the region of the climate change challenges faced by our residents, businesses and environment.

With the success of the EOI and acceptance of the FCERM7 (Approval of studies) form, development of a robust Outline Business Case, and drawdown of funds to support that development, will be the focus of the partnership leading up to the submission deadline of April 2022. Once the OBC has been submitted, and approved, the partnership will then be committed to delivering on the objectives set out for this project. Comments and guidance by members of this committee would be welcomed on this process and the project as a whole as this develops further.

### **3. Consultation**

#### **a) Risks and Impact Analysis**

Risk and Impact analysis will be carried out as the project develops as part of the consideration for full business case.

### **4. Background Papers**

No background papers within Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972 were used in the preparation of this report.

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