**Strategic Framework for the future requirements of water level management on the Somerset Levels and Moors**

# Background to Natural England

Natural England is the government’s advisor on the natural environment. We provide practical advice, grounded in science, on how best to safeguard England’s natural wealth for the benefit of everyone. Our remit is to ensure sustainable stewardship of the land and sea so that people and nature can thrive. It is our responsibility to see that England’s rich natural environment can adapt and survive intact for future generations to enjoy.

# Background to the specific Natural England work area relevant to this piece of work

Natural England have received funding from the Somerset Rivers Authority to deliver a number of projects under a strategic approach to mitigation scheme.

The aims of the strategic approach to mitigation are:

* To develop positive solutions enabling delivery of schemes to reduce flood risk whilst making appropriate use of the flood plain to convey and temporarily store flood water and maintain the special characteristics of Somerset.
* To provide greater certainty and clarity to Flood Action Plan project developers/deliverers, reducing costs and time spent, and provide a positive solution that works for flood risk, people and nature.
* To ensure compliance with relevant legislation which helps reduce the risk of challenge on environmental impacts and legal compliance.

One of the projects was to review and update the series of Water Level Management Plans that cover the Somerset Levels and Moors area, to ensure that all plans provide suitable water level management to maintain the ecological integrity of the Special Protection Area, Ramsar and SSSI features and Functionally Linked Land.

It is clear that future requirements for water management across the landscape go beyond the needs of the designated features. There is a need to look more holistically at other requirements, both in terms of factors influencing conditions now and into the future. After discussions with the relevant authorities (Environment Agency and Somerset Internal Drainage Board) it has been agreed that a strategic document for future water level management is required to set out the context and drivers for change across this landscape.

**Aims**

The aims of this research report are:

1. To identify and describe the main drivers for change across the landscape and how it fits with national, regional and local strategic plans.
2. Explore the present and future pressures and challenges that water level management systems will need to address to enable nature recovery and the delivery of other strategic priorities.
3. To carry out research and make recommendations into how water level management could change to address future demands on the landscape.
4. To present the results of this work into a report and give an online presentation to key stakeholders of the main findings.

**Focus areas**

The report will need to set out the context within which the current water level management system operates, focusing on the following broad areas:

1. Political
2. Social
3. Environmental
4. Economic

It will need to explore the outcomes that the water level management system is expected to deliver. It will also need to present recommendations of how the operations within the water level management system can be updated to deliver these outcomes.

The research report will focus on the following areas:

* **Climate change** – future climate change scenarios will be explored and their impacts on the Somerset Levels and Moors detailed. This will help to understand the future climate scenarios that the Water Level Management Plans will need to operate under.
* **Water quality** – measures needed to improve the water quality on the Somerset Levels and Moors will be explored and detailed. The way in which the water level management system can address the issue of poor water quality will be explored.
* **Peat restoration and carbon** – the ways in which the water level management system can contribute to the restoration of peat on the Somerset Levels and Moors will be explored. Wider considerations around carbon sequestration should also be examined.
* **Nature recovery** – the ways in which the water level management system can contribute to habitat and species conservation on the Somerset Levels and Moors will be explored, including protected sites but also the land outside of them.
* **Agriculture** – the interaction between water levels and agriculture, with reference to changing agri-environment schemes and the delivery of public goods will be considered.
* **Flood/drought risk** – the role of the water level management system in managing flood and drought risk will be explored.
* **Operational issues** – costs, resources required and organisational protocols will be explored and a range of options for future operating models considered.

# Requirements

* Produce a strategic document looking at the future requirements of water level management on the Somerset Levels and Moors to restore nature alongside requirements for farming and people. Primarily desk-based research – utilising existing reports and studies to collate information and present in a coordinated format. The NE project manager will be able to provide information on known reports and studies available.
* Interviews with subject matter experts – covering a range of organisations, such as IDB, Environment Agency, Natural England, RSPB, Somerset Wildlife Trust, Somerset County Council, NFU, Somerset Rivers Authority.
* Give an online presentation of the main findings to key stakeholders.

# Outputs and timescales

The main outputs for this project will be:

* Strategic document looking at the future requirements of water level management on the Somerset Levels and Moors to restore nature alongside requirements for farming and people.
* Interviews with subject matter experts.
* Online presentation of main findings to key stakeholders

**Key Timescales**:

Project start: 5th December 2022

Inception meeting between contractor and NE Project Manager: w/c 5th December 2022

Interviews with subject matter experts: December 2022 and January 2023

1st draft of report: February 2023

Final report due: March 2023

Online presentation: March 2023

Contract completed by: 31/03/2023

Prices will remain fixed for the duration of the contract award period. We may at our sole discretion extend this contract to include related or further work. Any extension shall be agreed in advance of any work commencing and may be subject to further competition.

**Project management**

# The contractor will appoint a project leader who must have sufficient experience, authority to act on behalf of the contractor and time allocated to manage the project effectively. The contractor’s project leader (CPL) will be responsible for the management and delivery of the project and will act as the liaison point, particularly liaison between members of any consortium, with the Natural England project manager.

# Supporting Documentation

The following supporting documentation should be provided:

* + Research Methodologies
  + Health & safety Policies/certificates
  + Environment Policies
  + VAT registration number
  + Public Liability Insurance
  + Professional Indemnity Insurance
  + CV’s
  + Past Work
  + Sustainable Procurement Practices

# Sustainability

As a delivery partner, the successful contractor is expected to pursue sustainability in their operations, thereby ensuring Natural England is not contracting with a supplier whose operational outputs run contrary to Natural England’s objectives. The successful contractor will need to approach the project with a focus on the entire life cycle of the project. The successful contractor is likely to be able to provide a copy of their environmental policy and any environmental accreditation schemes such as ISO 14001 or EMAS which they have been awarded or are working towards.

1. **Operational Sustainability -** Explain to Natural England what your organisation is doing to incorporate sustainability within its operations. This may include any details you are able to provide in relation to steps you may be taking to reduce your carbon footprint.
2. **Environmental Management -** Detail what you will do to assess the environmental impact of completing this project and provide mitigations. Examples may include operational measures to reduce emissions and noise impacts, efficient energy use, efficient use of raw materials and minimisation of waste where possible.

# Key Contacts

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