

Our ref: EC20203

Your ref:

Date: 5 February 2024

Dear Cllr Waite,

Thank you for your letter dated 18 December 2023, where you outlined your concerns regarding ongoing maintenance of flood defences and flood risk infrastructure within North Somerset. We are committed to undertaking routine maintenance across North Somerset. We recognise the important role that both the Environment Agency and North Somerset Council has in ensuring flood risk is managed appropriately so communities and infrastructure are resilient to the impacts of sea level rise and climate change.

I will respond to your points in the order they were written.

Routine Maintenance and Inspections

As you are aware, the Environment Agency carries out annual routine maintenance to deliver Flood Risk Management along the Main Rivers across North Somerset, using our permissive powers. It is the responsibility of all riparian landowners to carry out watercourse maintenance work. Therefore, only where the Environment Agency are a riparian landowner are we obligated to carry out maintenance work.

Due to the permissive nature of our powers, we are unable to carry out maintenance for non-flood defence reasons, such as removal of rubbish from watercourses.

Major flood defence structures across North Somerset are attended on a weekly basis and coastal embankments are mowed annually. Asset inspections take place annually between Portishead to Sand Bay and biennially between Weston Bay and the tidal Axe embankments.

The Main River watercourses within North Somerset are:

Lox Yeo, Uphill Great Rhyne, Cross Rhyne, Banwell, Congresbury Yeo, Kenn, Black Ditch, Clevedon Boundary Rhyne, Tickenham Boundary Rhyne, Yearlings Ditch, Blind Yeo, Land Yeo, Portbury Ditch, Walton Brook, Weston Brook, Clapton Brook, Sperrings Rhyne, Sandy Rhyne, and Drove Rhyne.

Maintenance funding is allocated on an annually from a national revenue allocation and distributed on flood risk benefit verses costs basis. It is therefore subject to annual change caused by national allocation levels.

All capital maintenance interventions bid for funding separately and the solution must demonstrate it is economically viable.

We attach in Appendix A details of our current maintenance schedules for the locations in North Somerset in your letter.

Coastal Flood Defences

We welcome your concern about coastal flood risk to the North Somerset Council area. There are currently more than of 30,000 properties within the tidal flood risk area in North Somerset, which is substantially more than any other local authority in the Southwest. There is an extensive network of flood defence embankments, walls and outfalls which provide protection to communities and infrastructure in North Somerset. The potential impact of sea level rise combined with the ageing of defences will further increase that risk in the future.

The long-term policies for managing the coast are set out in the Shoreline Management Plan (SMP). There are two SMPs that cover the North Somerset Coastline, the North Devon and Somerset SMP covers Weston-super Mare and westwards, whereas the Severn Estuary SMP covers the area to the East of Weston super Mare. The SMP is owned by the coastal groups and the SMPs have both been formally adopted by North Somerset Council along with the other local authorities in the area they cover. There are also Beach Management Plans (BMP) for Sand Bay and Weston-super-Mare to Uphill which look in more detail at the activities required to maintain the sea defences as well as options, costs and timing of future interventions.

The SMP and its policies should be a material consideration in the local planning process as well as informing communities of the policies. Consequently, the local plan should reflect the SMP policies and ensure that development can only be permitted where it can be demonstrated as being safe for the duration of its expected lifetime as set out by the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). Where those conditions cannot be met and/or where there is a need to allow specific and appropriate types of development a Coastal Change Management Area (CCMA) can be designated to ensure that inappropriate development is avoided. We understand that North Somerset Council has not yet designated any area as a CCMA, but are seeking to designate CCMA's as part of their emerging Local Plan.

Whilst the Environment Agency have the powers to address tidal flood risk under the Water Resources Act, North Somerset Council have responsibility for coastal protection under the 1949 Coast Protection Act. North Somerset Council are also the owner of many coastal assets such as the sea walls at Clevedon.

Woodspring Bay and Sand Bay form part of the defences that protect a large area from Weston-super-Mare to Clevedon including the M5 and mainline railway. For Sand Bay, the SMP policy states Hold the Line throughout the next 100 years. The SMP recognises that the sand dunes and beach are critical to this and will require various management interventions to achieve that goal over the next century. Marshall's Bank, Salthouse Fields and Woodspring Bay are all in the same SMP policy unit which states Managed Realignment for the next 100 years. It does not clarify which sections should be realigned, when, or to what extent as this needs to be defined in future through studies and negotiations with individual landowners. For the Marshall's Bank area it would be impractical to realign the defences, so any future upgrades are likely to be carried out on the existing alignment. In line with the

policy, we constructed about 300m of new set back bank on the Congresbury Yeo in 2016, creating a higher, more robust defence as well as a valuable intertidal area widely utilised as a high tide roost. The Environment Agency has commissioned an Adaptive Pathways study for the Clevedon to Sand Bay area. Work is currently ongoing, but when completed it will provide updated modelling of the flood risks and will consider the requirements for the flood defences into the future. The report will set out options, costs and timescales that will inform discussions with the local community that we expect will form the basis of a community engagement programme. Ultimately, the project will enable us to create a prioritised programme of future capital works along the coastline.

Weston-super-Mare seafront has a policy of Hold the Line throughout the next 100 years. The sea defences including the flood walls and gates at Weston-super-Mare are in the council's ownership and were constructed by North Somerset Council a little over a decade ago. The intention set out by the council when the scheme was approved for Grant in Aid funding was that they would require raising in the future to ensure that adequate flood protection is maintained. North Somerset Council have recently undertaken work to update the Beach Management Plan for Weston-super-Mare. This plan sets out the maintenance need for the defences, including the beach re-profiling that the council undertakes annually to ensure adequate beach material remains across the frontage. It also sets out the requirement for future upgrades to the defences. As the asset owner and Maritime Local Authority, as defined by the 1949 Coast Protection Act, it is the responsibility of North Somerset Council to determine what maintenance and upgrades are required for the defences here and develop a business case, approvals, design and funding package to deliver those works.

The proposals to upgrade the defences at Pill are being led by Bristol City Council. We note and agree with your comments about the need for careful public engagement with the community there and we have made Bristol City Council aware of that. We will also make the council aware of your kind offer of support in that process.

Funding for Flood and Coastal Risk Management schemes is available to all Risk Management Authorities through Flood Defence Grant in Aid. This is allocated through an annual process that is administered by the Environment Agency which allocates funding on a nationally prioritised basis. Funding levels for qualifying schemes are determined through completion of a Partnership Funding Calculator which uses the benefits derived from the proposed scheme such as properties protected from flooding, economic benefits or the amount of habitat created to calculate the amount of Flood Defence Grant in Aid available. It is very rare that a scheme can be 100% funded from Flood Defence Grant in Aid alone, and the expectation is that Partnership Funding will be required from beneficiaries to make up the shortfall and pay for enhancements to the proposed scheme. For example, where we are the promoter of the scheme we would work with the local council amongst others to identify potential partnership funding sources as it is the promoter of the scheme who is responsible for identification of the required funding before approval for the scheme can be granted. As NSC is the asset owner and Maritime Local Authority, we would expect NSC to promote these coastal schemes and lead upon attracting partnership funding for future projects.

We would welcome a meeting with North Somerset Council to discuss ongoing maintenance and ways to work together to manage the flood risk in North Somerset. If you have any questions in the meantime, please speak to Sam Archer, Flood &

Coastal Risk Management, Partnership and Strategic Overview Advisor
sam.archer@environment-agency.gov.uk, or Ben Evans, Asset Performance Officer
ben.evans1@environment-agency.gov.uk for routine maintenance queries.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ed Lockington', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

ED LOCKINGTON
Acting Area Director, Wessex

Appendix A

Routine Maintenance Locations

Portbury Ditch at Portishead, particularly around Brampton Way.

Routine vegetation maintenance is planned on an annual basis in the autumn to the specifications outlined below. The work is carried out from the right-hand bank from Bristol Road to Harbour Road. From Harbour Road to the outfall screen work is carried out from the left-hand bank. Housing development on the left-hand bank has inhibited access to the watercourse to carry out work from both banks.

- M4 specification consists of cutting bankside vegetation to a height of 75mm-100mm up to the water's edge. This cut is carried out along the working bank.
- W1 specification consists of removing all in channel vegetation to the channel bed across the whole width of the watercourse.

Land Yeo at Clevedon.

Routine vegetation maintenance is planned on an annual basis, usually in late summer/autumn.

Vegetation management along the Land Yeo in Clevedon is to the specifications outlined below. The work is mostly carried out from the left-hand bank, some sections are carried out along both banks. Low hanging tree limbs and other access issues are restricting access to the watercourse. Some of this is on land owned by North Somerset Council.

- M3 specification consists of cutting bankside vegetation to a height of 75mm-100mm leaving a 1m margin uncut from the water's edge. This work is carried out along the working bank.
- W6 specification consists of removing all in channel vegetation to the channel bed, leaving the aquatic margins left uncut.

Uphill Great Rhyne at Uphill.

Routine vegetation maintenance is planned on an annual basis, usually earlier in the summer. Health and safety concerns limit our maintenance between Douglas Court and Beaumont Close.

Vegetation management along the Uphill Great Rhyne in Weston-Super-Mare is to the specifications outlined below. The work is mostly carried out from the left-hand bank, some sections are carried out along both banks. Work is carried out along both banks of the river for the full extent of the river within the Uphill area.

- M4 specification consists of cutting bankside vegetation to a height of 75mm-100mm up to the water's edge. This cut is carried out along the working bank.
- W1 specification consists of removing all in channel vegetation to the channel bed across the whole width of the watercourse.

We experience access issues in this location due to the lack of vegetation management from riparian landowners in the area. We would appreciate your support and wish to work with you to help us improve access issues in this location. We require help from North Somerset Council in the removal of fly tipped waste from the riverbanks once maintenance has been undertaken by the Environment Agency.