

Rivers Parrett and Tone Dredging Project

Progress over the last week

We are on target to start dredging by the end of March 2014, provided water levels continue to drop, and the banks and adjacent land is dry enough for the specialist dredging contractors' machinery to work safely. We will start the dredging work on a 200 metre stretch of the River Parrett at Moorland House Farm.

As the water levels continue to drop and the land and banks dry out we will be able to start dredging at a number of locations along the 8km length. By the end of May we could be dredging at up to eight locations.

We have met with the National Farmers Union, Country Land and Business Association and Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group as well as the RSPB, Natural England and the Somerset Wildlife Trust to brief them on the project. We have also shared project details with County and District Councillors, and with the public at ongoing flood surgeries being held by Sedgemoor District Council. We are also speaking to the Flooding on the Levels Action Group (FLAG) on a weekly basis.

We are talking with a number of farmers with arable landholdings, to look at options for spreading the dredged silt onto their land. Our discussions have so far been encouraging, with substantial areas of land likely to be available for spreading the dredged silt.

Forward Look

Over the next couple of weeks we will continue to prepare for the start of the dredging work by:

- Meeting with Somerset County Council Highways to produce a traffic management plan that is mindful of other activities going on in the area.
- Collecting silt samples to understand the makeup of the silt; these samples will be collected using a small item of floating machinery (as per photo). The results of the silt sampling will be shared with landowners before spreading to their land. The machinery to complete the actual dredge will be much larger than the sampling equipment (shown below).
- Continuing to Plan the logistics of the dredging operation
- Answering queries on the Environmental Statement for the works. A copy of the report is now available on our website and for viewing at the Environment Agency's Bridgwater office. <http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/research/library/consultations/152104.aspx>



The silt sampling machinery to be used to collect samples on the Parrett and Tone

Background

As a reminder to the background to this work, the Secretary of State when visiting Somerset in January asked for a 20 year Action Plan to be developed in six weeks. The plan will look at the various options for the sustainable management of flood risk on the Somerset Levels and Moors. Dredging is part of that plan and we are now progressing with a project to complete a dredge of 8km of the Rivers Parrett and Tone. The plan has now been published and you can find out more at: <http://somersetnewsroom.com/2014/03/06/a-big-step-forward/>

The 20 year Action Plan includes a proposal to assess the effectiveness of dredging elsewhere in the wider catchment.

How will we keep you updated on progress?

Weekly updates will be sent to our partners, District and County Councillors and Parish Councils for wider dissemination. We will be including this briefing in our community update messages. We are also putting these weekly updates on the Environment Agency's website:

<http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/homeandleisure/floods/152033.aspx>

Information on the dredging project will also be shared at any flood surgery or public meeting being hosted over the coming weeks by the District Councils. Please let us know if you want to receive these updates by email and feel free to disseminate wider.