

21st November 2016

Sheffield and Rotherham Wildlife Trust Briefing Note for the Sheffield City Council Scrutiny Panel meeting 30/11/16 on Sheffield Flood Prevention



Sheffield & Rotherham

The Sheffield and Rotherham Wildlife Trust (SRWT) submitted a detailed 11 page response to the Sheffield Flood Prevention consultation in October. This is publically available via the SRWT website. This briefing note is a summary of our response for the purposes of the SCC Scrutiny meeting on the subject.

SRWT have considerable experience over many years of creating and managing natural areas that deliver for wildlife, reduce flood risk and benefit local people e.g. Centenary Riverside, Catcliffe river restoration and Kilnhurst Ings (working with Local Authorities and the Environment Agency) – we call this **natural engineering**. We have been partners on the Sheffield Waterways Strategy Group since its inception, we formed the River Stewardship Company with SCC and Groundwork after the 2007 Sheffield floods, we run the Living Don Partnership, which co-ordinates like-minded groups working across the area, and we are leading on a large new £4M landscape partnership project in the north-west catchment of Sheffield.

Key Points

- **We welcome SCC and EA investing in flood prevention measures for Sheffield** to protect homes, businesses and communities.
- **There is too much of a focus on hard engineering solutions and contract delivery.** The SCC Highways Dept are managing the overall programme and have appointed Arup (“*an independent firm of designers, planners, engineers, consultants and technical specialists*”) as consultants on the Don and Sheaf Flood Prevention project. Their focus is on large hard engineering solutions to deliver the flood prevention programme eg dams, walls, channelisation.
- **There are opportunities for natural flood risk management and greater community involvement that are being missed.** Whilst we don't disagree with the needs for some hard engineering solutions in the right place, we believe that SCC/Arup are overlooking other important opportunities. For example, applying natural flood risk management solutions, delivering 'natural engineering' schemes, working with external partners and working across SCC's own departments to create a more strategic city-wide programme. Working in this way has the potential to ensure that Sheffield is better protected from flooding and is an exemplar in innovative win-win flood defence solutions in line with national and local strategies.
- **There is a lack of information in the consultation.** This prevents people from understanding the different cost/benefits of schemes and the number of schemes required to keep Sheffield protected – and for what level of event. There is very little information about what the proposals would truly look like or what the impacts will be. The term 'slowing the flow' has been mis-used – currently there are no proposals within the consultation that are considered to be 'slow the flow' schemes.
- **There is a lack of awareness about the consultation.** The current plans risk upsetting and alienating a large number of people in Sheffield who use the valleys and woodlands that would be permanently changed by the proposals under consideration. Local land owners have not been approached about proposals to change their land use. Many of the users of these spaces are not even yet aware of the proposals due to lack of publicity at these places.
- **Specific proposals have major impacts on the local natural environment and people's ability to access green spaces without clearly demonstrating that they are the only feasible solution.** Key proposals will also have a negative impact on sites identified as

key to Sheffield's Outdoor Economy. We are particularly concerned about the suggestion of building large permanent embankments in ancient woodlands and across sensitive valleys designated as local wildlife sites. These are key corridors for ecology, heritage, fish passage and people and the damage in our opinion, would be unacceptable.



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• **Alternative innovative win-win solutions need serious further consideration:**

1. There is a need for more upper catchment Natural Flood Management, which, despite its multiple benefits, seems to have been largely dismissed. SRWT has just secured a £4M project working over the next 6-7 years across most of the Upper Don catchment. We have already been working with major land owners, farmers, the local community and the EA to consider natural flood risk management projects and opportunities. Is there not an opportunity here for better collaboration?
2. There are three successful 'slowing the flow' pilot schemes in England. One of the pilots, Moors for the Future, is on our doorstep and represented at this meeting. With their expertise, upland flood risk management needs to be considered further.
3. The potential use of appropriate reservoirs as a contribution to the programme.
4. Could there be more use of natural engineering to create floodable natural reserves/ green spaces? Centenary Riverside was built as part of the Rotherham flood defence scheme and is managed by SRWT. The site is now a haven for wildlife, visitors and nearby workers.
5. Could there be more multi-functional urban green infrastructure designed to hold flood water – such as Nursery Street pocket park and the Matilda Street project? Simon Ogden – City Regeneration Division Manager and now chair of the Sheffield Waterways Strategy Group- has shown excellent leadership in such schemes.
6. (linked to 2. & 3.) Could there be more consideration of whether any riparian land currently designated for development could either be allocated for a flood prevention scheme, or have flood prevention measures incorporated into development e.g. SUDS, Green Roofs, other permeable features and green infrastructure? This would require working with developers and strengthening policies.
7. Could there be more consideration of creating underground storage tanks (which has precedent in Millhouses and Endcliffe Parks) under low lying area e.g. large car parks?
8. Are SCC missing opportunities with the Streets Ahead contract which could use more permeable surfaces in certain situations?

Overall, it is our opinion that a re-think of whether a larger number of smaller solutions (in many cases natural) along the lengths of the catchment could reduce the need for such a large number of significant hard engineering schemes. In this way we could work with the river systems (in line with the Sheffield Waterways Strategy) and not against it and would achieve additional multiple benefits. We also encourage SCC to continue dialogue with the many specialist and local groups who, between them, can bring enormous knowledge and expertise to the process.