

Policy and Resources Committee	
Meeting Date	18 October 2023
Report Title	Partnership working with the Environment Agency on the delivery of the Medway Estuary and Swale Coastal Flood Risk Management (MEAS) Programme
EMT Lead	Emma Wiggins, Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods
Head of Service	Joanne Johnson, Head of Regeneration, Economic Development and Property, Interim Head of Planning
Lead Officer	Anna Stonor, Senior Planner
Classification	Open
Recommendations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To note the proposed approach regarding partnership working on the MEAS; and 2. To agree that the Council join the Partnership

1 Purpose of Report and Executive Summary

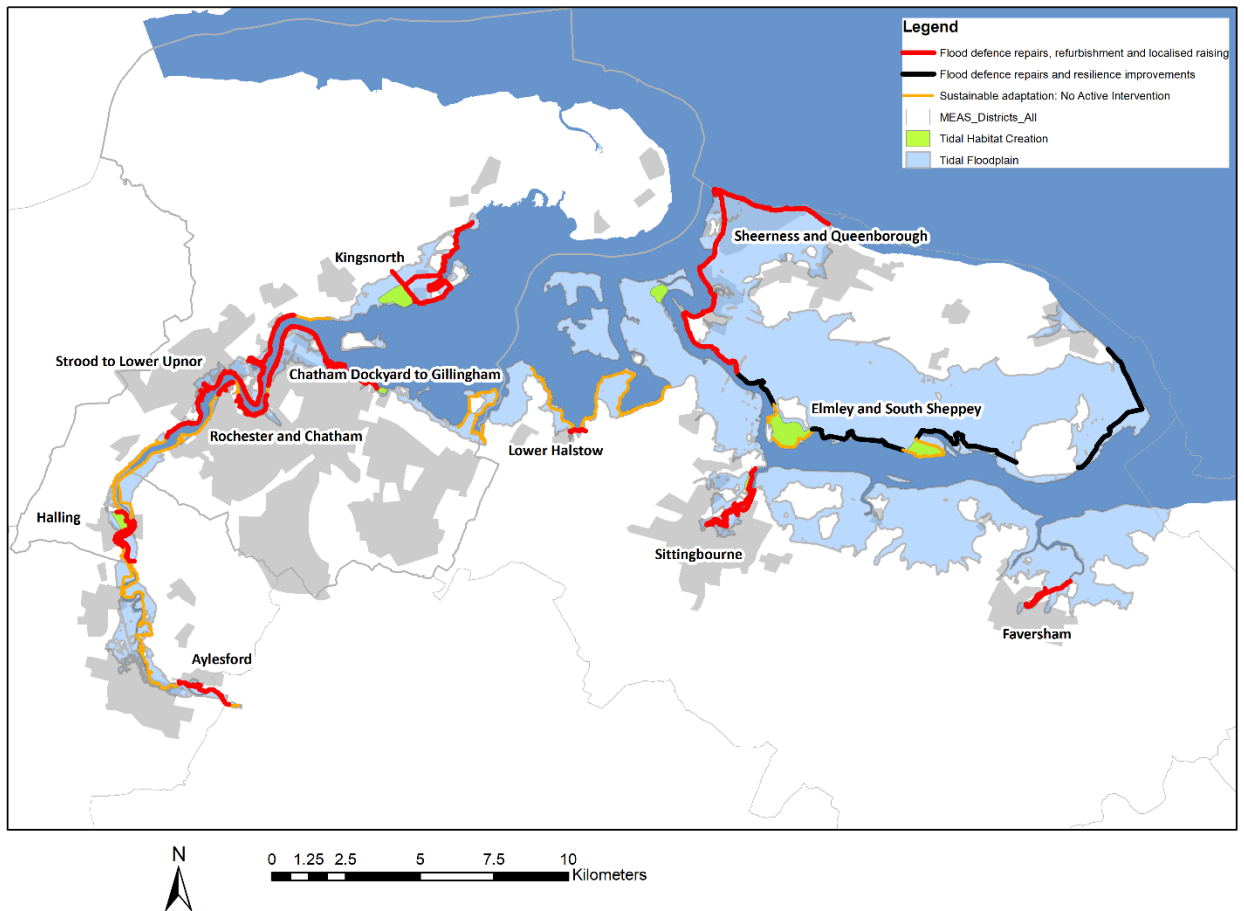
- 1.1 The Medway Estuary and Swale Strategy (MEAS) was approved by Defra in 2019. As a strategy it seeks to: reduce flood and erosion risk to properties and infrastructure around the Swale and Medway Estuaries; maintain the integrity of the Natura 2000 sites (Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas) sites and contribute to wider sustainability objectives.
- 1.2 The purpose of this report is to set out the proposal for partnership working between the Environment Agency and Swale Borough Council on the delivery of the first 10 years of the Medway Estuary and Swale Strategy.
- 1.3 The proposed Partnership with the Environment Agency will also include Medway Council and Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council as well as Kent County Council and Natural England.
- 1.4 Planning and Transportation Policy Working Group members reviewed an earlier version of this report on 19th September 2023 and supported the recommendations.

2 Background

- 2.1 Many areas around the Medway Estuary and Swale are low-lying and at significant risk of flooding. Due to ageing flood defences, rising sea-levels and climate change, this risk will increase over the next 100 years, putting approximately 18,000 properties, over 10,000 hectares of agricultural land and key infrastructure at an increased risk of tidal flooding. Furthermore, much of the area is also nationally and internationally designated habitat, which will be lost as

sea levels rise and ‘squeeze’ it against the existing defences. In addition, where new sustainable flood defence lines are created through the MEAS schemes, existing habitat designations will need to be carefully managed and compensated for within the strategic area. The MEAS seeks to address these risks in a sustainable way by implementing the recommendations set out in the MEAS Strategy.

- 2.2 The Environment Agency are now working on the delivery programme for the first 10 years of the Strategy and are seeking partnership with organisations such as Swale Borough Council, Medway Council and Tonbridge and Malling Council, Kent County Council, and Natural England to ensure a comprehensive and collaborative approach is taken.
- 2.3 The Environment Agency have business case approval for £14.5m for 18 projects (see Appendix I) across the Partnership area and are now working on developing detailed options.
- 2.4 The map below shows the projects to be progressed within the first 10 years of MEAS implementation. This work will reduce risk to 7,200 properties and create 224 hectares of compensatory intertidal habitat.



- 2.5 Within Swale the first projects of the 10 year plan are schemes for Sheerness & Queenborough and Elmley & South Sheppey. Following on from these initial

projects will be schemes for Sittingbourne, Faversham, Lower Halstow and Tailness.

- 2.6 The Environment Agency are at the Developing Partnership Stage of the MEAS and are seeking to work with Swale Borough Council. The Planning Policy and Engineering teams at Swale Borough Council have held initial meetings with the Environment Agency and recommend continuing this engagement.
- 2.7 The Environment Agency and the Planning Policy team are keen to integrate the MEAS programme aims with the local plan to ensure a joined-up policy approach to coastal and estuary flood and erosion risk. Additionally, working with Medway Council and Tonbridge and Malling Council as well as others will enable the development of agreed principles and approaches to development, and ensure consistency and fairness across the strategy area. Furthermore, working in partnership will also lead to efficiencies by sharing resources and information.
- 2.8 The costs of the MEAS are not yet fully established (this work is ongoing). Funding for the MEAS is likely to come from a variety of sources including from national Government but also potentially from development contributions. It is thus vital that the Planning Policy team is engaged in this project.
- 2.9 There will be a resource implication (officer time) in engaging in this partnership with the EA, but it is considered that the benefits in terms of supporting sustainable development and partnership working outweigh the costs.
- 2.10 The Terms of Reference with the Environment Agency are not yet agreed but the Planning Policy team can expect to have an input. For instance, it is likely to include an agreed mechanism for the Environment Agency to secure developer contributions. Also, it is envisaged that an appropriate policy should be included in the Local Plan which requires new development in relevant locations to contribute to MEAS. The justification will be that such developments will benefit from flood protection to utility infrastructure and local services upon which they will depend.

3 Proposals

- 3.1 To note the proposed approach regarding partnership working on the MEAS
- 3.2 To agree that the Council join the Partnership.

4 Alternative Options

- 4.1 The alternative to supporting this partnership with the EA would be to 'do nothing' i.e. not support the EA. This would negatively impact not only sustainable development across the Medway Estuary and Swale but also the reputation of the Council and is not recommended.

5 Consultation Undertaken or Proposed

- 5.1 No formal consultation has taken place, but internal officer discussions within Planning Services and with the Engineering Teams and external officer meetings with the Environment Agency and Medway Council have taken place.
- 5.2 Planning and Transportation Policy Working Group members reviewed an earlier version of this report on 19th September 2023 and supported the recommendations.

6 Implications

Issue	Implications
Corporate Plan	The proposals will help to deliver Objective 2 of the Corporate Plan: Investing in our environment and responding positively to global challenges.
Financial, Resource and Property	The proposals will require officer input from time to time as the work progresses and this can be met within existing resources. This is likely to include developing a consistent mechanism for how Section 106 monies may be identified and used as contribution to relevant MEAS schemes.
Legal, Statutory and Procurement	None identified at this stage
Crime and Disorder	None identified at this stage
Environment and Climate/Ecological Emergency	Collaborative working will help to secure delivery of the key projects identified in the MEAS and deliver the environmental benefits identified in the report.
Health and Wellbeing	Collaborative working to secure delivery of the key projects identified in the MEAS will reduce flood risk to homes and communities within the identified area. This will yield wellbeing benefits
Safeguarding of Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults	None identified at this stage
Risk Management and Health and Safety	Improves the safety of the homes currently identified at risk in the MEAS and provides flood protection to local services, utilities and transport infrastructure, upon which the whole community, including new development, will be reliant.
Equality and Diversity	None identified at this stage

7 Appendices

Appendix I – List of 18 projects mentioned in 2.3 above

- MEAS North Medway – Kingsnorth Tidal Defences
- MEAS North Medway – Abbots Court Tidal Habitat Creation
- MEAS Medway Towns – Strood to Lower Upnor Tidal Defences
- MEAS Medway Towns – Rochester and Chatham Tidal Defences
- MEAS Medway Towns – Chatham Dockyard to Gillingham Tidal Defences
- MEAS Upper Medway – Halling Tidal Defences
- MEAS Upper Medway – Aylesford to Wouldham Tidal Defences
- MEAS Medway Towns – Danes Hill Tidal Habitat Creation
- MEAS Medway Marshes – Riverside Country Park Tidal Defences
- MEAS Medway Marshes – Lower Halstow Tidal Defences
- MEAS Medway Marshes – Tailness Tidal Habitat Creation
- MEAS Milton Creek – Kemsley Tidal Habitat Creation
- MEAS Milton Creek – Sittingbourne Tidal Defences
- MEAS Faversham Creek – Faversham Tidal Defences
- MEAS South Sheppey – Spitend Tidal Habitat Creation
- MEAS South Sheppey – South Sheppey Tidal Defences
- MEAS South Sheppey – Roundfields Tidal Habitat Creation
- MEAS Sheerness – Sheerness and Queenborough Coastal Defences

8 Background Papers

None