



River Yeo Catchment Strategy Project

The focus of the project is on developing a strategy to rehabilitate habitats, assist nature and landscape recovery and reconnect people with the water environment within the catchment of the River Yeo in Somerset.

The catchment incorporates urban areas as well as countryside and is subject to significant pressures arising from farming, urban diffuse and point source pollution, climate change, and urbanisation which have degraded many of the habitats within the catchment and contributed to species decline. The project is needed to mitigate these pressures and address the most significant impacts which are priorities for stakeholders, e.g. Somerset Catchment Partnership, Environment Agency, Somerset County Council, Natural England, parish councils, private landowners, conservation organisations as well as the wider community. Increasing resilience to climate change and ecological decline within the context of the emergency declared by local authorities and in alignment with the Governments 25 Year Plan are key aims of the project.

The project is designed to be delivered in phases with this first phase focused on obtaining baseline data for the catchment through desk top assessment and extensive walkover surveys and data collection (e.g. water sampling). The information obtained will enable the identification of key catchment pressures and impacts which will be analysed to prioritise and outline design measures for rehabilitation, mitigation and enhancement to address the identified impacts. SMART objectives will be prepared and an evaluation, monitoring and management programme will be prepared for the highest priority measures.

A major element throughout the phase is establishing and developing landowner and stakeholder engagement which will include engaging with and seeking the involvement of the wider community, including schools, organisations such as Guides and Scouts, Community Associations, special interest groups, e.g. angling groups, as well as businesses, e.g. Wessex Water. Yeovil Rivers Community Trust will work with existing partners (e.g. Environment Agency, Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (SW), Somerset Catchment Partnership, Somerset Rivers Authority, Wild Trout Trust, Wessex Water and South Somerset District Council) to collate any existing information.

In order to undertake the project investment in new software and field equipment (surveying, measuring and monitoring equipment, drone, safety equipment, etc.) will be required.

Project outcomes will be:

1. Definitive Catchment Strategy and Restoration Plan with baseline data established, key impacts and pressures identified, appropriate mitigation/restoration/enhancement measures identified, SMART Objectives with approximate costs and benefits defined, stakeholder buy-in and relevant permissions and management/maintenance agreements obtained or in progress. Programme for implementation prepared with outline evaluation, management and monitoring proposals.

2. Key "multiple benefit" projects within the strategy identified for implementation as funds permit in future project phases, e.g. potential for the creation of a new wetland nature reserve on the southeast of Yeovil which will deliver multiple benefits, i.e. flood attenuation,



carbon sequestration, creation of reed habitat which is scarce in South Somerset, biodiversity improvements, new public amenity resource close to the town in an area with few accessible reserves, education and wider community engagement opportunities created, etc.

3. Involvement of stakeholders is sought at every stage of the project to promote community and stakeholder input into the design of measures, implementation where possible through volunteering, commitment to post project monitoring to measure increased species abundance/diversity (e.g. citizen science programmes), specific engagement opportunities (e.g. local schools and interest groups) for adults and children.