

Report to	Policy & Programme Committee
Date	26 January 2017
By	Director of Countryside & Policy Management.
Title of Report	The Big Chalk – update on progress.

Recommendation: The Committee is Recommended to note progress on the delivery of the ‘Big Chalk’ work programme.

1. Summary and Background

- 1.1 The Big Chalk is a programme of work that has been developed by a consortium of partners who have come together to resolve some of the big environmental issues affecting the lowland chalk landscapes. A short synopsis of the project is included in **Appendix 1**. The geographic scope is based upon the extent of the chalk protected landscapes in Lowland England, a map is included in **Appendix 3** of this report.
- 1.2 This consortium is being led by South Downs National Park Authority and is currently composed of eight AONB Partnerships, two National Park Authorities, the Environment Agency, Natural England, the Forestry Commission as well as a growing number of research groups, catchment partnerships and River Trusts.
- 1.3 The primary focus of the project is the groundwater and chalk river catchments that are key to these special landscapes. The programme seeks to address the wider land management issues affecting, or influenced by, groundwater and surface waters; such as sustainable arable farming practices and livestock management, the role of trees and woodlands, ecological connectivity, water resources, flood management and spatial planning.

2. Implications of the Brexit decision on the Big Chalk LIFE+ Integrated Project

- 2.1 The original intention was for the programme to be funded by the EU delivered through the LIFE+ Integrated Project (IP) strand. A first phase Technical Assistance (TA) bid was planned for September 2016 with a view to progressing towards the full IP early in 2018. In the light of the vote to exit the European Union taken in June 2016 this option was effectively closed off - as the Integrated Projects were intended to run for up to ten years (2019-2030), this took it beyond the period that the UK Government would support EU funded projects or programmes.

3. What has happened in terms of developing the project subsequently?

- 3.1 The project partners considered that there were still elements of the Big Chalk programme they would still wish to work on together. The 18 months of development work that had gone in prior to the TA stage had provided us with a detailed analysis of the underlying root issues and a work programme with clear objectives to tackle these. A high level summary of the areas covered during these planning session is included in **Appendix 2** of this report. There remains a commitment to take this forward and to consider other options for funding and delivering shared objectives under the programme. These include:-
 - Development of a research hub – Potentially to be led by Forest Research, Southampton University and the SDNPA. A workshop session is planned for February to identify which research priorities from the ‘Big Chalk’ work programme to take forward as bids

(October 2017 deadline). This will involve research partners such as the Centre of Ecology & Hydrology (CEH), the water companies and other potential research partners.

- A submission to the Landscape Research Group to match fund a Big Chalk seminar in July. This session would bring together a wide constituency of partners and identify key delivery priorities, and would also inform the development of the Landscape & Biodiversity Delivery Plan. The current plan is to link this with the planned SDNPA Research Conference.
- The work that was done to develop the 'Big Chalk' work programme/objective tree pre-empted some of the recommendation of the EAC report 'the future of the natural environment after the EU referendum' i.e/ that the development of new agri-environment schemes, needs to set a higher bar in terms of what is delivered especially in terms of water quality. The project group were keen to capitalise on this work to try and influence the direction and design of future schemes.
- Pilot projects/areas of work are developing that will deliver items within the Big Chalk work programme, for example :
 - Landscapes for water – a project focussing on the potential for new woodland planting to protect water sources and provide natural flood management,
 - The Channel PES Interreg bid which is looking to pilot 'Payments for Ecosystem Services' (PES) within the Rother Valley and the chalk block that provide Portsmouth Water with its groundwater supply.
 - Brighton CHAMP project (Chalk Management Project) which is aiming to reduce Nitrate levels in aquifers within the Brighton Chalk Block by promoting land management that help improve water quality.
 - Bee-Lines – a project that is seeking to enhance pollination services.
 - Chalk Grassland grazing project to improve the long-term sustainability of chalk-grassland sites.

4. Plans for the future

- 4.1 There are still elements of the work programme that could form the basis of separate or discrete funding bids, The project group are considering a range of funding options including the potential for a bid for Heritage Lottery Fund 'Landscape' funding, Payments for Ecosystem Service pilots and through influencing the next cycle of investment plans of the water companies.

5. P&P Committee Considerations.

- 5.1 The P&P Committee previously considered a report relating to this project on 21 July 2016. This was when the intent was still to submit a bid for technical support under the LIFE+ Integrated Programme in the September of 2016. At that stage the Committee were recommended to consider the following recommendations.
- Approve expenditure to support a bid for technical assistance funding for the Big Chalk Project
 - Consider different options for achieving funding support for the Big Chalk project in the longer term.

6. Other Implications

Implication	Yes*/No
Will further decisions be required by another committee/full authority?	Not at the present time. If a bid is developed for HLF or other major project funding then this will need to be considered in due course.
Does the proposal raise any Resource implications?	Budget approval has already been obtained for delivering some elements of the work programme. This includes: £10K for work on identifying funding options for different elements of the project. £15K for taking for the shared research objectives identified by the project partners and to help establish a research hub to co-ordinate join activity.
How does the proposal represent Value for Money?	Potential for sharing resources and match funding between the partners and across the project area. Demonstrating the collective power of the Protected Landscapes (AONBs and NP) as a platform for delivery.
Are there any Social Value implications arising from the proposal?	None
Has due regard been taken of the South Downs National Park Authority's equality duty as contained within the Equality Act 2010?	Due regard has been taken of the National Park Authorities duties under the Equalities Act 2010.
Are there any Human Rights implications arising from the proposal?	There are no Human Rights implications arising from this proposal.
Are there any Crime & Disorder implications arising from the proposal?	There are no Crime & Disorder implications arising from this proposal.
Are there any Health & Safety implications arising from the proposal?	There are no health and safety implications arising from this proposal.
Are there any Sustainability implications based on the 5 principles set out in the SDNPA Sustainability Strategy: 1. Living within environmental limits 2. Ensuring a strong healthy and just society 3. Achieving a sustainable economy 4. Promoting good governance 5. Using sound science responsibly	The proposal is compliant with all 5 principles set out in the SDNPA Sustainability Strategy.

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Appendices

1. Synopsis of Big Chalk LIFE+ Integrated Project
2. High Level Summary of the areas covered by the Big Chalk Logical Framework.
3. Geographic scope of the project

SDNPA Consultees Chief Executive; Business Service Manager, Operational Managers Group, 'Water & Chalk' Programme Board.

External Consultees None

Synopsis of the Big Chalk LIFE+ Integrated Project

Project Title:

BIG CHALK: demonstrating how better environmental condition and improved water quality can be achieved through integrated land management of chalk river catchments

Statement of the problem/threat the project is seeking to address:-

The natural ecosystems of the chalk landscape ecosystems in lowland England are damaged and continuing to deteriorate, with many of the services that they should be providing dysfunctional. The current approach to tackling water quality and improving environmental condition is ineffective, small scale, piecemeal, uncoordinated and based on very few practical examples, resulting in huge water treatment costs rather than dealing with the problems at source.

What we want to achieve through the project:-

The effective conservation and enhancement of ecosystem services provided by chalk landscapes; in particular, achieving sustainable growth within environmental limits, protecting biodiversity assets such as chalk streams, grasslands and species that are indicators of environmental thresholds.

Overall Goal of the project:

The chalk landscape ecosystems in lowland England are in good ecological condition and the services they provide are fully functional.

Project Purpose:

‘It has been demonstrated how integrated land management of chalk river catchments in lowland England can achieve better environmental condition and improved water quality.’

To achieve this the project will:-

- Help to develop a strategic approach to deliver long-term change and improvement across organisational or geographic barriers or at a large spatial scale within the chalk landscapes.
- It will produce a co-ordinated body of evidence to promote best practice within the chalk landscapes.
- It will influence land use change through strategic collaboration to deliver positive environmental benefits at a large spatial scale within the chalk landscapes.

It is hoped that the lessons learned from this new approach are effectively disseminated and widely adopted throughout all similar chalk landscapes in England and neighbouring European countries.

Big Chalk: a strategy for the chalk landscapes of southern England.

‘A consortium of protected landscapes, government agencies and delivery partners are working together to resolve some of the big problems that affect chalk landscapes. These areas, such as the South Downs and Salisbury Plain, hold economically and ecologically vital stores of water within their underground aquifers and give rise to characteristic chalk streams and rivers. This type of habitat is unique and southern England holds the vast majority of the existing world-wide resource. These delicate ecosystems occur in one of the most busy and pressured parts of Europe and provide natural resources and life support to millions of people. This adds to the challenge, and also the urgency, of conserving and enhancing chalk landscapes.

The consortium is led by South Downs National Park Authority and is composed of nine AONB Partnerships and two National Park Authorities, The Environment Agency, Natural England and Forestry Commission as well as a growing number of research groups, catchment partnerships and River Trusts.

The primary focus is on groundwater and chalk river catchments as they are the key to these special landscapes, but we will address the wider land management issues affecting, or influenced by, groundwater

and surface waters; such as sustainable arable farming practices and livestock management, the role of trees and woodlands, ecological connectivity, water resources, flood management and spatial planning.

At the heart of these issues is the need for greater collaboration between organisations, better cooperation across economic sectors and increased equity between those who receive these vital ecosystem benefits and those who incur the costs.

By activating the power of the protected landscape network, we can face up to the challenges of working across a larger area with more people and a greater diversity of issues, than has been attempted before.'

High Level Summary of the areas covered by the Big Chalk Logical Framework.

During the course of the run up to September 2016 the Big Chalk project group collaborated in a series of planning days use the Logical Framework approach. This planning sessions considered a range of inter-related factors that influence or impact upon the ecological condition of the chalk landscapes in lowland England.

This has resulted in a detailed programme of work that sets out objectives that the group would like to see delivered across the defined project area. This programme covers a wide range of topics including:

- Strategic Co-ordination
- Development of incentives and Agri-environment Schemes
- Research & Evidence
- Public Awareness and understanding
- Demand Led issues (water resources)
- Water quality issues
- Water quantity issues (both low flows and flooding)
- Aquaculture and recreational fisheries
- Semi-natural habitats as buffers – including Chalk Grassland, Trees & Woodland
- Climate Change related issues

This work is also informing the development of the delivery framework for Landscape and Biodiversity for Chalk, Water and Trees and Woodlands. This will help us to set priorities and work with key partners to develop projects that deliver shared objectives.

Geographic scope of the 'Big Chalk' project

