

Culm Garden Village Stakeholder Forum

Notes of meeting held on 9 September 2020 via Zoom

Connecting the Culm

1. Welcome and introductions

Paul Brockway (Project Lead, Hvas Consultants) welcomed the participants and introduced the speakers. Cllr Richard Chesterton is now Mid Devon's Cabinet Member for Planning and Regeneration, following a Cabinet reshuffle.

2. Project Team update

The Greater Exeter Strategic Plan in its current form will no longer be going out to public consultation following the decision of East Devon District Council to withdraw from the Plan. At the meeting on 26 August 2020, Mid Devon District Council has resolved to look at options for a revised joint strategic plan and to accelerate production of the next Mid Devon Local Plan. The Council reaffirmed its commitment to Culm Garden Village.

Q&A

- 1) What are the relative timescales for production of the joint strategic plan and revised local plan? Programmes for both documents have not yet been established. There should be more clarity over this in the next few weeks.

3. Connecting the Culm

Steven Johnson and Tim Youngs from the Connecting the Culm project team presented slides on the project, outcomes to date and ongoing work including the interactive catchment model (see accompanying slides). More information on the project and information on how to get involved can be viewed on the Connecting the Culm website: <https://connectingtheculm.com/>.

Q&A

- 1) How can people get involved with river monitoring and is there a choice of where to monitor? People can get involved in the Citizen Science programme to monitor water quality and wildlife through the website. People can choose where they work, although there is a need to co-ordinate people across different locations to ensure a broad spread of data. Please see <https://connectingtheculm.com/csi-intro/> for more information and contact us at csi@wrt.org.uk to coordinate with other volunteers.
- 2) The project is part funded by the EU. Will a no deal Brexit affect funding? It is anticipated that funding will continue but this is currently being clarified. The Government has previously indicated that existing projects will be supported in the event of a no deal Brexit.
- 3) It was previously understood that the catchment model would take new development into account but this is not the case. Can the scope of the work be amended to include future development?
The project focuses on the catchment as it is now and does not include future development. It is possible to build on the existing model with additional funding. There will be further work done to build on this baseline work and the Culm Garden Village project team will continue to liaise closely with the Connecting the Culm project team on future work. The scope and scale of the analysis required is still being considered but there will be a holistic approach to this, not analysis on a piece by piece basis.

- 4) What is the reason for the poor ecological status in the catchment?
 There are lots of factors that impact on the status of waterbodies, you can see more information that is collated by the Environment Agency nationally on the catchment data explorer (here <https://environment.data.gov.uk/catchment-planning/OperationalCatchment/3085/> - see 'Reasons for Not Achieving Good') and specifically about hydrology (as mentioned the extremes seen from flooding in February to drought conditions in April/May in 2020 are a stark reminder of the extremes in conditions we face with climate change) at this link <https://eip.ceh.ac.uk/hydrology/water-resources/>. In the Culm, diffuse pollution and sediment run-off is definitely impacting on aquatic ecology. Factors include land management, geology and soil types. The research being carried out will help to understand how these pressures are interacting locally.
- 5) How will slowing the flow higher up in the catchment impact on already poor flow lower in the catchment during dry spells?
 Storing water higher up in the winter does not mean less water downstream in the summer. Mires and springs can recharge during the winter and this water can be released slowly over months rather than flashing through the catchment. The interventions can help with both flooding and drought.
- 6) Nitrate vulnerable zones have been in place for years and should have improved water quality. Has this not worked?
 Improving water quality is a long game. It is improving in some areas but there is some way to go. There are lots of competing factors that determine how land is used and managed and this has a bearing on water quality but this isn't the only aim which everyone is driving toward.
- 7) Would the country park include a lake or reservoir to provide flood attenuation and an attractive environment? There is a community aspiration for a lake and this could be used to future proof water supply.
 The potential for water storage shown in the model are temporary features that are designed to provide capacity to hold water in flood events, slowing its flow through the catchment and infiltrating more of it into the ground for longer term storage. The model can help to consider different options for the country park and can be linked into the masterplanning work to help inform options. The project will tease out where the best opportunities are for nature based solutions and community input is really important in doing this.
 The proposed country parks are key components of the garden village. These have not get been fully defined in scope or extent. The country parks can be explored through a further workshop as part of the garden village masterplanning. Once the extent of the garden village and the country park has been clarified, conversations can be had with water suppliers to consider whether water storage can be incorporated.
- 8) Following the announcement that beavers can stay on the river Otter, are there opportunities to introduce them on the river Culm?
 Beavers are currently living very close to the Culm catchment and if permitted could expand their territories in the future. The evidence presented by Devon Wildlife Trust in the River Otter Beaver Trial (see <https://www.devonwildlifetrust.org/what-we-do/our-projects/river-otter-beaver-trial>) shows that beavers have real benefits in terms of ecosystem services, but these have to be balanced against the issues, and there needs to be a management and brokerage system as those who see the benefits aren't necessarily those who see the negative impacts.
- 9) Network Rail previously had plans for an expensive flood mitigation scheme that was not implemented. Has the Connecting the Culm team been liaising with Network Rail?
 The team has had positive conversations with Network Rail who are interested in the Connecting the Culm approach and the modelling outputs to inform their plans for flood resilience.

10) Is run-off from urban areas being considered as part of the project?

The catchment covers a large area which is mainly rural so the project has been focusing on rural interventions. However, flow from urban areas is a real problem that is increasing with climate change. The model does not focus on urban drainage but the Blueprint for the Culm could if people are concerned about it. The process of developing the Blueprint will be an opportunity to explore, identify and understand the mechanisms and potential interventions to try to address these problems.

4. Next steps

No date has yet been set for the next meeting, but it is anticipated that this will be later in the autumn and will focus on transport, mobility and connections. The date will depend on timing of outcomes from a piece of commissioned work on future mobility.

A further workshop will focus on the country parks, date to be set.

The project team will be focusing on preparing a draft masterplan over the next 6-12 months, and considering the planning policy context.