TARLAND TO COULL RIVER RESTORATION

Meeting for regulators, 6 April 2023, MacRobert Hall, Tarland

Meeting notes

Present

Susan Cooksley, Dee Catchment Partnership (DCP), James Hutton Institute (JHI) (Chair)
Kathy Dale, Chair of Tarland Wetlands Group (TWG), Tarland Development Group (TDG) (Notes)
Hamish Moir, Design Director, cbec eco-engineering
James Davidson, Environment Planner, Access and Ecology Aberdeenshire Council (AC)
Alasdair Matheson, Senior Hydromorphologist, SEPA Hydromorphology Team
Iris Krammer, Flood Risk Planning Manager, Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) Floods Team
Sean Baird, Flooding Officer, SEPA
Anna Chavasse, Environment Performance Team Grampian, SEPA
Lee Watson, AC Floods Team
Jonathan Duncan, AC Floods Team
Steve Addy, Fluvial Geomorphologist, JHI
Edwin Third, River Operations Manager / Head of Restoration Team, Dee District Salmon Fishery Board

Apologies

John Flett, Scottish Water
Mark Wilkinson, JHI
Angus Tree, NatureScot
Simon Power, The MacRobert Trust (MRT)

Aims of the project

To produce a fully (flood) modelled restoration design, building on the many foregoing related studies in the area and in the context of the significant feedback that the Project Team has received from the public.

Site history to date

Maps

The Roy map shows a sinuous thread channel but this is unreliable. On the 1820s map there is a large channel with large islands. It was thought to have been previously a loch but probably it was a wetland, or it may have been an excavated waterbody. Straightening of the channel is marked on the first series of OS maps.

Drainage history

The area was drained in the 1950s. In the 1970s there was dynamiting at Coull where the bed is now even lower than it should be. One of the farm tenants has detailed knowledge of the drainage. The field drains flow away from the channel into a catch drain. The Coull area is the first to flood. This comes from the ditches and while there is some overbank flow this is only from the south side. The road causeway forms a barrier.

Dredging

The burn was dredged up until the late 1990s. The MacRobert Trust Estate dredged the bottom half about 10 years ago. Dredging was done after Storm Frank by the tenants. The farmers would like to dredge and maintain the burn as a drainage channel. This would take place under the Controlled Activities Regulations (CAR) - note flood risk is not considered as part of CAR.

Site classification

The Tarland Burn is a Heavily Modified Water Body (HMWB) classified as Moderate Ecological Potential under the Water Framework Directive (WFD).

Feedback from drop in event and subsequent emails

This project is immediately downstream of a flood risk village and flood risk to the village and farmland is the main concern of respondents who are not in favour of the proposals. There is feeling locally that the burn should continue to be managed by dredging to let the water 'get away', although there is also acknowledgement that interventions upstream of the village are what are needed to manage floodwaters.

A roughly equal number of people who responded do not oppose a restoration and many are strongly in favour, citing the benefits for climate, nature and landscape.

Regulatory procedures

Planning

- There should be no planning issues but it will be a public process and representations should be expected. Once a preferred design has been produced, if this is to progress then the Project Team should submit a pre-planning application.
- AC considered that there are no showstoppers with this potential scheme – it was felt that it would be beneficial if linkages to any future flood defence schemes for the village were considered.
- SEPA's Hydromorphology Team view would be that this scheme would improve the morphology so would pass their tests.
- SEPA's Flood Team view would be that the project would be viewed positively so long as it didn't exacerbate flood risk to any property or the village.
- NatureScot will assess impacts on the SAC and carry out a Habitats Regulation Appraisel. This appraisal has to accompany the planning application. If the answer to the first question (Is the proposal related to the management of the site?) is yes, no further work is required, apart from mitigation for the construction phase.
- The CAR licence required would be free as the project is an environmental benefit. Mitigating construction impacts is essential and the Method Statement will be assessed by SEPA's Environment Team. It may be possible to work offline. It would be around four months for a CAR licence.

Other topics discussed

Potential to cause flood risk

No scheme that would increase flooding potential in Tarland would be put forward. The flood modelling is an iterative process that demonstrates what the flood risk is, and the design is altered and remodelled until no

flooding outwith the footprint of the project is achieved (under the required range of flow and climate conditions). SEPA would scrutinise the potential for backing up flow during the planning consultation. For 200yr+cc flood it would be expected that the river would flood all along its length but this is due to Coull and the Whiteley Burn backing up. If the existing conditions model is extended into the village then this might give reassurance that the model matches the local perception of flooding. The design modelling is more complex as it models how the river will behave after the works.

AC flood risk management plan

The Floods Team has in the past looked at a lot of flood storage areas, some very large, for protecting Aboyne. The Project Team needs to work together with the Council on their flood risk management plans but these are a few years off. The options for Tarland are upstream storage or a high flow bypass. A bypass could flow into a restoration scheme, or reconnect further downstream – the first tributary backs up so a bypass entry would have to be further downstream. cbec could look at the feasibility of links to a bypass channel.

Drainage

It would be possible to design deeper pool areas where the field drains come in, which would provide an overall potential benefit, drawing the waterlogged area closer to the channel and away from the fields.

Disposal of cut material

An inset floodplain cannot be cut and fill neutral. Cut material can't be taken offsite as this would be too expensive.

Ecological conditions

- North East Scotland Biological Records Centre (NESBReC) should be contacted for ecological data.
- Stoneyford Burn has salmon spawning in it, especially above the farm where there is decent habitat. Also present in the Small Burn. Very few parr were observed this year during JHI invertebrate surveys - assumed to reflect the impact of the November floods on redds and younger stages.
- In terms of evaluating the ecological effects of the potential restoration there are many years of data available. The Eddleston and Allt Lorgy also have pre and post restoration monitoring data. Fisheries data from the Beltie (whole burn) shows poor spawning in the canalised reaches. Marine Scotland have standards for fish.
- An ecological summary of all the current condition would be produced as part of the design report. This would then be added to as further studies are undertaken.
- While all new restoration projects need to be beaver aware, given that there are no plans for reintroductions to Deeside this isn't relevant to this project. An inset floodplain is good for mitigating the effects of beaver activity. Beaver management plans for Scotland are in place.

Access

AC welcomes the inclusion of public access considerations.

Next steps for project

- Completion of design and flood risk assessment is due by the end of June
- Community input on flood-modelled design
- Submission to MacRobert Trust for approval

Steps required to progress to delivery

- Seek funding
- Regulatory procedures (planning, CAR)