Part I – Item No.

Electoral Divisions affected:
West Lancashire West,
West Lancashire South,
West Lancashire North

Alt Crossens Catchment Proposed Internal Drainage Board (IDB)
(Appendix 'A' refers)

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Executive Summary

The Environment Agency is committed to reducing its land drainage work in the Alt Crossens catchment, following a reduction in its revenue budgets, and in line with current Defra policy, which focuses future Defra funding on protecting people and properties from flooding.

Modelling work along with economic assessments has considered the consequences of the Environment Agency switching off the pumps, and reducing its watercourse maintenance regime. An Alt Crossens Advisory Board and local stakeholder Partnership Group have explored various options to allow for future water level management by other means following the impending strategic withdrawal of the Environment Agency.

The formation of an Internal Drainage Board (IDB) supported by a yearly Special Levy from the Local District Authority, along with Drainage rates imposed on the landowners, will enable the continuation of pumping and maintenance duties to be undertaken by an IDB, following gradual withdrawal of the Environment Agency over the next 2 years.

Recommendation

The Cabinet Member for Public Protection and Waste is recommended to approve that Lancashire County Council offers a contribution of up to £15K per year from the Environment Directorate’s revenue budgets for 2 years to assist West Lancashire Borough Council in meeting its obligation for the Special Levy payment, and allow for the establishment an IDB within the Alt Crossens catchment to manage future water levels in areas of the Alt Crossens catchment.
Background and Advice

The river Alt and Crossens catchments includes large areas of artificial land drainage in the flat, low lying, mainly agricultural parts of the Alt Crossens catchment. The low lying land stretches from Hightown and Ince Blundell in the south to Banks and Mere Brow in the north. It lies to the east of Formby and Southport and to the west of Rufford, Haskayne and Halsall. It also includes an area of farmland just outside the catchment, north of Banks and south of the Ribble Estuary.

The network of manmade dykes and ditches were constructed when the land was improved in the 1900's and saw many of these artificial waterways and associated pumping systems taken on by the National Rivers Authority and latterly by the Environment Agency, which currently carries out maintenance duties and responsibilities with particular regard to the pumps and management of water levels.

Due to recent budgetary constraints and policy changes being imposed on the Environment Agency (EA), Partner organisations have joined the EA hosting a series of consultations with the landowners and the public, on the future of land drainage and wider flood risk management in the Alt Crossens Catchment. The aims of the consultations were to find out people’s thoughts about possible changes to flood risk management and land drainage in the area.

The feedback from the consultations was mainly concerned with the consequences of the EA switching off the pumps, and the potential impact subsequent flooding may have on their jobs, businesses, homes and local infrastructure. In the public’s response to the consultation feedback, the EA accepted that this initial consultation was not managed as effectively as it would have liked. On the advice of Lancashire County Council’s Scrutiny Committee, an Alt Crossens Advisory Group was established.

The Alt Crossens Advisory Group

The Advisory Group is made up of local councils (both officers and councillors), local farmer representatives, the National Farmers Union, the Country Land and Business Association, the Environment Agency, Natural England and United Utilities.

The Alt Crossens Advisory Group's role is to agree and oversee the informing and consultation process. Its aim is to make sure that local people have the opportunity to have their say on the proposed options for the catchment.

The Partnership Working Group

A Partnership Working Group was also established to work on developing potential scenarios for future flood risk and land drainage management for the catchment. The members of this group are local farmers, local councillors, local council officers, the National Farmers Union, the Country Land and Business Association, United Utilities, Natural England and the Environment Agency. The working group has undertaken modelling work and explored options available to continue water level management following withdrawal by the EA.
The preferred option which has been recommended to the Advisory Group would provide for future management under the jurisdiction of an Internal Drainage Board (IDB). An IDB as a public body would be established under statute in areas of special drainage need in the Alt Crossens catchment, with permissive powers to undertake work to provide land drainage and water level management within their Internal Drainage District (IDD). Each IDD would have a defined area, with the IDB having powers to deal with matters affecting water levels, land drainage and flood risk in that area.

The Current situation

Following a comprehensive consultation with all interested parties and advice from partners, an IDB is the preferred option to deal with future water level management in the area. Appendix ‘A’ details the options and associated funding mechanisms in operating a range of alternative solutions from an IDB covering the entire Alt Crossens catchment, to a scaled down boundary option (without watercourse maintenance) which covers specific localised areas of land served by 6 fixed pumps within the administrative boundary of the West Lancashire district.

The scaled down boundary version of the IDB (without watercourse maintenance) proposal is considered to be the favoured option by Lancashire County Council, at a total cost of £182K per year which would be funded by West Lancashire Borough Council £49K, Sefton MBC £22K (for the Ince Blundell pump), and Drainage rates from local landowners £111K.

Under the scaled down option of the IDB, the watercourse maintenance would be the responsibility of the riparian owner of the land through which the drainage channel flows. Currently there is a pilot scheme in operation supported by the EA within the Alt Crossens catchment which is encouraging local landowners to move fully towards this riparian approach of maintenance.

The Environment Agency will continue to operate the two main Crossens and Altmouth pumping stations which pump out the drainage systems to the sea, because these are large strategic pumping stations which provide reduced flood risk to residential properties throughout the area.

The offer of LCC making a contribution of £15K per year for the first 2 years to assist with West Lancashire Borough Councils (WLBC) Special levy payment is dependent on WLBC agreeing to meet the remaining £34K per year over the first two years. The risk to the longevity of the IDB beyond the initial 2 years funding package proposed is reliant on WLBC fully funding the Special Levy payment in future years.

Consultations

N/A
Implications:

This item has the following implications, as indicated:

Finance

The proposal will cost the County Council an additional £15,000 in each of the financial years 2014/15 and 2015/16 and will be met from existing resources within the Environment Directorate's revenue budget.

List of Background Papers

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Reason for inclusion in Part II, if appropriate

N/A