

Broads Authority

20 September 2024

Agenda item number 8

Strategic priorities- update on 2024/25 and draft strategic priorities for 2025/26

Report by Senior Governance Officer

Purpose

This report sets out the latest progress in implementing the Authority's annual strategic priorities for 2024/25 and starts the process for considering next year's priorities.

Broads Plan context

The Broads Plan is a key part of the Authority's strategic framework.

Recommended decision

- i. To note the progress in implementing this year's strategic priorities; and
 - ii. To consider the draft strategic priorities for 2025/26.
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1. Introduction

- 1.1. Each year the Broads Authority identifies a small set of strategic priorities, which focus on projects that have high resource needs or a very large impact on the Broads, or that are politically sensitive. Setting these priorities helps target the Authority's resources and make the most of partnership working and external funding opportunities. Priorities are set each financial year, although some large-scale projects carry across several years.
- 1.2. In addition, Defra has introduced a new requirement for National Park Authorities and the Broads Authority to provide quarterly updates on deliverables against the Business Plan, as part of its grant funding agreement. These update reports on our strategic priorities are used by officers to comply with that requirement.
- 1.3. The latest update on the agreed strategic priorities for 2024/25 is in Table 1 below.

Table 1

Strategic priorities 2024/25 – progress update

Themes, aims and milestones	Progress	Lead officer
<p>1. Responding to climate change (Broadland Futures Initiative)</p> <p>Aim: To implement the next steps of the Broadland Futures Initiative.</p> <p>Milestones:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Publish at least two editions of the Broadland Futures Initiative BFI newsletter, by March 2025. (ii) Hold at least two meetings of the BFI Elected Members Forum, by March 2025. (iii) Various technical deliverables from BFI consultant including the new hydraulic model expected mid-2024. (iv) Engagement activities, including consultation as required. 	<p>Status: On track</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) BFI Newsletter (April 2024) has been sent out to the subscriber list, which has been updated to include all Parish Councils in the Broads area. Next newsletter under preparation. (ii) April 2024 Elected Members Forum meeting was held. Next Elected Members Forum is set for October 2024 when a new Chair will be elected. (iii) Updates on Product delivery from the EA/Jacobs team have been presented at steering group meetings and Elected Member Forum. All on track. The hydraulic model is being tested using data from recent flooding events. (iv) Additional outputs (outside the scope of BFI) from the hydraulic model regarding capital dredging scenarios are being tested by the EA. A workshop with BA members is being planned, probably early 2025. 	<p>Director of Strategic Services</p>
<p>2. Biodiversity crisis response</p> <p>Aim: Co-ordinate and implement with partners the development of strategies and projects, including</p>	<p>Status: on track</p>	<p>Environment Policy Adviser</p>

Themes, aims and milestones	Progress	Lead officer
<p>the three Nature for Climate projects.</p> <p>Milestones:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Endorsement of Norfolk & Suffolk Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) – timings to be confirmed by responsible authorities. (ii) To complete the “Broads Authority consideration” of biodiversity actions by 1 January 2024. This is the first requirement of the enhanced Biodiversity Duty introduced in the 2021 Environment Act for local authorities and will consider action to take by the Broads Authority to comply with the duty. (iii) To review and refresh the Broads Biodiversity and Water Strategy with partners by March 2025. (iv) To implement Nature for Climate Peat restoration project at Buttle Marsh within agreed budget ~£300k and timeline by March 2025. (v) To implement Nature for Climate Paludiculture Exploration Fund ‘FibreBroads’ project within agreed budget ~£500k and timeline by March 2025. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Attended steering group and several themed working groups. Timing for the public consultation on the draft LNRS is likely to be January 2025. A briefing session is scheduled on 9 December with members. (ii) Completed. (iii) Draft Broads Nature Recovery Strategy (new name for the Biodiversity and Water Strategy) will be discussed with BA members after their meeting in September and taken for adoption in November. (iv) Active dialogue with Environment Agency regarding water abstraction. The start of detailed engineering design for the reservoir is expected to start in October and conclude in December 2024 however this could be extended to spring 2025. (v) All FibreBroads work packages on track. Two Lowland Agricultural Peatland Grants on track, assessing water table management and forecasting the water storage needs to deliver land-based carbon targets in the Broads peatland. Applied for two Water Restoration Fund grants related to water management. 	

Themes, aims and milestones	Progress	Lead officer
<p>3. Local Plan for the Broads</p> <p>Aim: To produce an updated Local Plan for the Broads.</p> <p>Milestones:</p> <p>(i) Preferred Options consultation: March 2024.</p> <p>(ii) Publication consultation: December 2024.</p> <p>(iii) Submission: By end of June 2025.</p> <p>(iv) Adoption: By end of 2026.</p>	<p>Status: On track</p> <p>Comments received as part of the Preferred Options being assessed. Next version of the Local Plan being produced.</p>	<p>Planning Policy Officer</p>
<p>4. Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL)</p> <p>Aim: To run the FiPL programme and allocate Broads grants to farmers and landowners, and support the Broads and Norfolk Coast Land Management Board to allocate their funding.</p> <p>Milestones:</p> <p>(i) Hold six Land Management Board meetings, by March 2025.</p> <p>(ii) Allocate all grant funding to projects, by December 2024.</p> <p>(iii) Engagement activities to promote and showcase FiPL, by March 2025.</p>	<p>Status: On track</p> <p>(i) There have been three FiPL Board meetings – the last was held on 29 July.</p> <p>(ii) £119,234.48 grant funds for 24/25 have been allocated to projects already out of a total grant budget of £380,785.</p> <p>(iii) The FiPL Officer will attend the Norfolk Landscapes Conference on 2 October and will have a stand with other officers. We have joined the Defra Twitter campaign to highlight the success of FiPL with the first tweet sent 27 August.</p>	<p>Catchment & Farming Officer</p>

Themes, aims and milestones	Progress	Lead officer
<p>5. Navigation IT Aim: To replace current tolls system and provide improved online functionality.</p> <p>Milestones:</p> <p>(i) Develop timetable and tender document by June 2024 for amendments to core system and a replacement web interface.</p> <p>(ii) Publish and then review tender responses by end of September 2024.</p> <p>(iii) Award contract (depending on affordability) and agree timescales with contractor.</p>	<p>Status: On track</p> <p>(i) The upgrade of the internal tolls system to the latest software version has been completed and testing is ongoing.</p> <p>(ii) Work continues on the replacement online payment system which is being totally rewritten. The initial application will provide the key functionality required to renew a toll online. It will utilise the latest security technologies such as one-time passcodes for logon thereby simplifying the current process.</p> <p>(iii) We plan for the above works to be completed in time for the 2025/26 tolls season.</p>	<p>Head of ICT/Collector of Tolls</p>

2. Setting strategic priorities for 2025/26

- 2.1. The role of strategic priorities in our strategic “golden thread” is set out in appendix 1. The strategic priorities for 2025/26 will feed into the 2025/26 budget setting process.
- 2.2. Due to the recent change in Government and the uncertainty over its priorities and future spending plans, it has been difficult this year to predict likely funding sources and opportunities for partnership working. This means drafting possible strategic priorities for the Broads Authority has been even more challenging than usual.
- 2.3. The Management Team’s initial draft ideas for next year’s strategic priorities are listed below, as a starting point for members’ consideration:
 - Responding to climate change (continued involvement with the development of the Broadland Futures Initiative)

- Implement the five Ps¹ of the Race to Zero Programme – by progressing from Pledging in 2024 to having a refreshed Climate Action Plan in 2025.
 - Biodiversity crisis response by implementing the Broads Nature Recovery Action Plan
 - Developing partnership arrangements for external funding bids
 - Tolls system – phase 2
 - Working with Natural England on the apportionment of Protected Landscapes targets for the Broads
 - Submitting the Local Plan for the Broads to the Planning Inspectorate
- 2.4. It is important to remember that much of the Authority’s resources is already committed into the future: in providing statutory services such as navigation safety and tolls, planning, and undertaking essential works such as maintenance of the waterways.
- 2.5. Members’ views are welcome on the suggested priorities.
- 2.6. As part of the strategic priorities update report to the Authority in November, the agreed priorities for 2025/26 will be presented, together with expected milestones for reporting progress, wef April 2025.

3. Financial Risks

- 3.1. If the Authority fails to comply with any of its obligations in the Grant Funding Agreement, DEFRA may, at its discretion, reduce, suspend or terminate payments of grant, or require any part or all of the grant to be repaid.
- 3.2. Over-committing to additional work or priorities will have an adverse impact on the budget (see para. 2.4 above).

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Background papers: none

[Broads Plan](#) strategic objectives: all

Appendix 1 – “Golden thread” strategic framework

¹ Pledge; Plan; Proceed; Publish and Persuade

Appendix 1 – ‘Golden thread’ strategic framework

Fig. 1

‘Golden thread’ strategic framework

