

# Catchment First

## Collaborating to transform our catchments

### Overview

Catchment First is our plan for bringing catchments into the heart of our decision making in order to achieve a more resilient service and environment. We are evolving our approach so that we deliver more holistic solutions with wider environmental and societal benefits.

Our catchments face many challenges including pressures from climate change, invasive species and growth coupled with the need to provide sustainable water supplies while protecting the environment.

Given the pressure on drinking water supplies in our region, we are starting off by looking at a number of schemes in catchments where future water quality and resource pressures mean we are planning for a range of costly engineering solutions over the next 50 years (informed by our draft Water Resources Management Plan).

Through our Catchment First approach, we plan to demonstrate that investing in more natural solutions such as catchment management, river restoration and 'slowing the flow' measures can help deliver a sustainable supply of high quality drinking water in a cost-effective way while delivering wider benefits for biodiversity, recreation, health and wellbeing, flood risk etc. We plan to deliver this approach as part of a wider package of schemes which may include reservoirs, desalination, water re-use, aquifer storage and recovery, increased water efficiency and leakage reduction.

We are currently undertaking a high level scoping and costing exercise for our business plan for 2020-2025 and want to work with partners to refine our approach and explore opportunities for collaboration.

Catchment First aims to work with stakeholders and customers to:

- Develop a long-term, shared vision and strategy for the catchment
- Provide certainty of funding to enable long-term planning
- Implement large-scale integrated catchment management measures
- Return rivers to a more natural state
- Work with customers and stakeholders to design and deliver schemes and monitor progress
- Develop customer education campaigns to reduce water use (domestic and business)

### Locations and Timescale:

As this is a new and innovative approach, we need to be confident it will deliver the outcomes we need. The first phase of this work will involve evidence gathering (monitoring and modelling), feasibility and design. This first phase will run across three catchments from 2020-2025:

- The River Test in Hampshire
- The Arun and Western Streams in West Sussex and Hampshire
- The Medway in Kent

We will work with partners in each of these catchments to develop our approach and ensure our plans align with other strategies, plans and investments in these locations. Working together will maximise what we can achieve.

While there will be a possibility of some early interventions being delivered during the first phase of this work, the bulk of our delivery work is expected to take place in 2025-2030 and beyond.

## **Budget:**

The current budget for the initial investigations phase is £5m at each of the three locations.

The estimated budget for the subsequent interventions phase is likely to be in the region of £20-30m across one or more of the areas where viable projects are identified.

## **Benefits:**

Catchment First has the potential to offset the need for far more costly and intrusive water supply schemes, such as desalination schemes, that have the potential to cost more than £800m, while enabling the investment of time and money into protecting and enhancing the natural environment.

The project will establish a robust, shared evidence base which can be used to support future catchment initiatives and projects. We envisage using research and development to inform our thinking and want to explore opportunities for innovation.

We plan to use natural and social capital accounting tools to identify opportunities to deliver wider benefits and we will be developing catchment metrics to inform outcomes and measure success.

There will be many opportunities to collaborate, including:

- Sharing evidence and helping us to identify and fill gaps
- Identifying and designing appropriate measures/solutions
- Piloting innovative delivery mechanisms at a catchment scale
- Opportunities for co-delivery or delivery by a third party
- Aligning with partners' funding streams and delivery mechanisms
- Developing community education campaigns
- PR and communications
- Endorsing our approach to our regulators
- Provide new green infrastructure for our customers and communities
- Lobbying for regulatory changes to enable sustainable use of water.

We recognise that there will be many opportunities to deliver in partnership with, or through, others. We want to work with partners in these catchments to ensure we are developing strong business cases to demonstrate the benefits of such approaches which provide benefits to customers and the environment.

## **Risks:**

This is a new and ambitious approach for Southern Water and we need to recognise the risks that accompany this:

- The catchment approach is untested at this scale and complexity

- The effectiveness of catchment methods (vs traditional engineering solutions) will need to be proven but if we do not try this approach in a measured way – nothing will change
- There can be a long timeframe to see benefits of investment (e.g. reducing nitrates in groundwater)
- Requires a long-term investment commitment from Southern Water (beyond our five year business planning window). We need to bring our regulators with us on this journey too
- Success requires strong support from our stakeholders and customers.

## The River Test

The Test is a renowned chalk stream for salmon fishing and Site of Special Scientific Interest which provides drinking water to many thousands of people across Hampshire and the Isle of Wight.

Catchment First will explore options, working closely with stakeholders, to work towards achieving a vision for the River Test by creating an exemplar chalk river system. We believe a range of interventions will be required to restore and enhance the form and function of the River Test catchment. These catchment solutions can be delivered alongside more traditional water supply solutions in order to maintain a constant supply of high quality drinking water for our customers, while delivering wider benefits for people and wildlife.

## The Arun and Western Streams

Work in this catchment will focus on the Upper Arun and Western Rother. We will build on work we are already doing with partners to address pesticides, nutrients and sediment problems through more natural solutions.

Catchment First will look specifically at options to address diffuse pollution and improve the resilience of the water environment by supporting natural processes through river restoration and structure removal. These options will also have the potential to provide wider benefits such as improved public access, landscape and biodiversity.

## The Medway

The Medway is a large catchment and its water issues are complex. Three water companies have interests in this catchment and we are already working together to address a range of water quality issues.

Catchment First will provide a mechanism to build on this work to look at wider water issues including opportunities to align with the Medway Flood Action Plan.

## Next steps:

The first step in this innovative project is for us to work with partners to agree a shared vision for each of the three catchments and to identify opportunities to work collaboratively to achieve these.

We are keen to capture information from our partners to understand and record what is currently being done and the ideas and projects that are under way or planned for the future. We aim to provide a key resource in developing and progressing catchment partnership strategies by thinking Catchment First.

Catchment First is a fantastic opportunity to use our significant investment and our partners' expertise to transform these catchments into exemplars of what can be achieved for people and wildlife through real collaboration.