Summary notes of the meeting of the Strategic Flood Working Group held on 25th January 2022 at 18.00 to 20.00hrs

Attendees: Cllrs. Chris Tyler (Chair), David Fenwick, Marcus Themans, John O'Dowd and Mike Grace. Luke Neal (Shropshire Wildlife Trust) and Dr. Nick Covarr (Harper Adams University).

Apologies: Cllrs. Wilf Grainger, Daniel Thomas and Duncan White.

The meeting covered a range of issues and possible options that would be relevant for Much Wenlock:

Effectiveness and feasibility of tree planting and other nature based solutions?

- Tree planting would be an effective intervention in the MW catchment and probably best as part of a combination of nature based solutions. A combined approach would almost certainly have a positive impact on reducing flood risk for the whole town. However, no approach will remove all flood risk.

- There is a strong and evolving evidence base for the effectiveness and value for money of natural flood management schemes. The Environment Agency is currently refreshing its 'Working with natural processes - Evidence Review', due for publication shortly.

- Substantial funding exists for new tree planting through the England Woodland Creation Offer; this covers the costs of planting and management with additional bonuses for public benefits such as improved water quality and other services, including locations close to settlements. These could provide approximately £2000/ha. Landowners could increase this through exploiting the woodland carbon code to draw in up to a further £4000/ha.

- Tree planting solutions need not exclude other agricultural practices and uses; agro-forestry approaches can combine to generate mutual benefits for woodlands and livestock.

- Much Wenlock's catchment has thin soils over a relatively impermeable limestone base. Tree planting can help protect and decompact soils, improve infiltration through soils and the underlying rock, pump water to the atmosphere through evaporation and slow rain falling to the ground through its leaf layer.

- Pickering in North Yorkshire was cited as a comparable location and the work in Corvedale (funded by the EA and Shropshire Council) allows us learn lessons that may be effective locally. These have highlighted some cost effective interventions with solutions such as 'leaky dams', hedgerow planting and attenuation ponds.

- However, it is difficult to directly transfer evidence and experience from other catchments to Much Wenlock as each area has unique characteristics and opportunities. A detail study and modelling of the MW catchment to apply nature based approaches would likely be a substantial (PhD level) task.

Potential Approaches for Much Wenlock

- We have a fair amount of knowledge about the MW catchment and a future approach needs to take into consideration real-world opportunities alongside this understanding

- Woodland and tree planting is well funded and often well-supported by landowners. It must be recognised as a long term commitment that will have implications for current and future land management and farming practices. Initiatives such as funding through the 'carbon code' may be more complicated and involve other liabilities.

- There are potential multi-use and economic benefits that could arise from new interventions such as shooting, fishing, shelter benefits, woodland egg production. Other funding such as the AONB's 'Framing in Protected Landscapes Fund' and the 'Woodland Planning Fund' can help support economic activity and improve the resilience of farm businesses.

- The commitment and support of landowners and farmers will be vital to any successful schemes. The advice was to put to in place a 'Catchment Officer' who would work in collaboration with landowners, farmers, community organisations and funding agencies. This role would identify potential solutions and options across the catchment.

- The opportunity exists to align current activity by Shropshire Council and the Environment Agency with Much Wenlock's needs. For example, EA is about to commission work on specific proposals for natural flood management in the Corvedale; this work could be extended to include Much Wenlock. New evidence from the EA is likely to shift funding away from expensive site specific 'grey infrastructure' to more cost-effective nature based interventions.

- We recognised that Shropshire Council's Flood Risk Management Officer supports catchment and nature based approaches. SC's strategic solutions for the town appear to be twofold; solving the risk cased to residents at Hunters Gate by a 120 house development (HG2) and the Dept of Transport funded study suggesting attenuation ponds associated with main roads. The NFF endorsed 'Local Flood Group' has recently widened its membership and is active in addressing issues with local drainage.

- Noting the connection between development and flood management made by SC in the Draft Local Plan, we recognised (a) that the potential for involving landowners extends well beyond the owner of the HG2 site and (b) the town-wide flood risk needs to be part of the case the TC will make at the EIP

- The Town Council has the opportunity to work with SC, EA and as part of a joint approach with the Local Flood Group to take the lead in promoting catchment-wide work.