

# SRA BOARD MEETING – 20<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 2017

## THE SRA BOARD

Draft minutes of a meeting of the Board of the Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA) held in the Council Chamber at Sedgemoor District Council on Friday 20<sup>th</sup> October, 2017 at 10am.

### PRESENT

Cllr John Osman, MDC (Chair)  
Cllr Anne Fraser, SDC  
Cllr Anthony Trollope-Bellew, WSC  
Nick Gupta, EA  
Matthew Heard, NE  
Peter Maltby, Parrett IDB  
Jeff Fear, Axe/Brue IDB  
Ray Adlam, Axe/Brue IDB  
David Jenkins, WRFCC  
Cllr David Hall, SCC  
Cllr Nick Weeks, SSDC (Sub)  
Cllr Norman Cavill, TDBC (Sub)  
John Lang, Parrett IDB (Sub)

Emma Beardsley, SCC  
Rachel Burden, EA  
Graham Quarrier, EA  
Iain Sturdy, IDB  
Nick Stevens, IDB  
Martin Woods, SSDC  
Paula Hewitt, SCC  
Nick Plumley, SDC  
Jonathan Hudston, SRA  
David Peake, SCC

### In attendance:

Sarah Diacono, SRA

### Apologies:

Cllr Ric Pallister, SSDC  
Tony Bradford, Parrett IDB (Vice-Chair)  
Cllr John Williams, TDBC

### 1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Cllr Ric Pallister – Cllr Nick Weeks to act as a substitute

Cllr John Williams – Cllr Norman Cavill to act as a substitute

Tony Bradford – John Lang to act as a substitute

### 2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Peter Maltby declared an interest on Item 6d.

### **3. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING JULY 21, 2017**

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed as accurate with a comment asking that in future acronyms should be spelled out in the first instance of use.

### **4. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There was one public question from Cllr Roy Mackenzie, a member of the SRA Scrutiny Panel. Cllr Mackenzie asked whether the SRA Board agreed with the SRA Scrutiny Panel's recommendation, from their meeting in January, to update the Flood Action Plan to include flash flooding. The Senior Manager, Sarah Diacono, read aloud the Board's prepared response which explained that in order for this question to be properly considered by the Board the chairman of the SRA Scrutiny Panel should write to the chairman of the SRA Board with the panel's recommendation. The SRA have now just received this letter, unfortunately after the deadline for this meeting, so this will be included on the next SRA Board meeting's agenda. Cllr Mackenzie was given reassurance that whilst flash flooding is not included in the Flood Action Plan's objectives, the SRA still fund projects which tackle this important issue.

### **5. BOARD INTERIM ARRANGEMENTS**

The Senior Manager, Sarah Diacono, explained that this item was a follow up from the previous Board meeting at which the SRA Management Group were charged with looking at a number of options re interim Board arrangements and the pros and cons of each. It is important to note that these arrangements are only in respect of the period before precepting. Management group had now completed this work and the paper outlined the conclusion and made the following recommendations:

Recommendation 1: That elections for Chair and Vice-Chair should take place every two years at the Board meeting closest to that anniversary.

Recommendation 2: That the 2017-18 MoU and Constitution should be amended to reflect this.

Recommendation 3: That the Chair and Vice-Chair should continue to be drawn from the Board members.

Recommendation 4: That Board and Management Group joint Information Sharing sessions should be scheduled as and when required, but prior to the Management Group preceding the Board meeting at which any associated decision is made.

There was some discussion under recommendation 3 as to whether it would be appropriate to specify that the chair and vice-chair should be drawn from the local authority representatives on the Board and that the chair and vice-chair should not represent the same organisation. It was agreed that neither were necessary.

Peter Maltby and Cllr Nick Weeks, who raised some of these issues at the last meeting, felt that the paper was well written and showed that the matters had been well considered and gave their support to the recommendations.

All of the recommendations were approved by the Board.

#### **6A. BRIDGWATER TIDAL BARRIER**

Rachel Burden presented the paper and explained that the scheme is progressing well. There is an upward pressure on costs but this is expected for a scheme of this complexity and the cost benefit does stack up. Currently the business case is being updated and work is starting on the Transport Works Act Order (TWAO).

It was asked if there was a timescale yet, Rachel Burden explained that the construction will take 2-3 years and the project should be complete by 2025, a one year delay.

Some concern was expressed about works at Hinkley occurring at the same time as the Barrier and causing issues. Rachel explained that works at Hinkley should be complete by the time construction on the Barrier starts.

As recommended the Board noted the progress.

#### **6B. TAUNTON STRATEGIC FLOOD ALLEVIATION IMPROVEMENT SCHEME**

Cllr Norman Cavill presented the paper and explained that investigations are still ongoing. Monitoring equipment has been set up for 12 months to give an indication of ground water levels. It was explained that there is no one single simple option. There will be a composition of components and the right balance between cost and effectiveness needed to be sought.

As recommended the Board noted the progress.

#### **6C. DREDGING STRATEGY**

Iain Sturdy presented the paper. He explained that further maintenance dredging on a 4.75km stretch of the Parrett is due to start at the beginning of December using the water injection method. This is a substantial upscale from last year's work and

monitoring is in place to ensure that lessons continue to be learnt which will inform the Dredging Strategy.

The completion date of the Dredging Strategy has been extended but so have the test periods for alternative methods in order to ensure that the most cost effective and least environmentally intrusive methods of dredging are found.

There has been a delay on the Brue work as the Brue hydraulic model needs to be developed to form an evidence base to look at impacts of various works under consideration. A paper is currently being prepared to demonstrate how the Brue hydraulic model can be improved.

A high level plan has been developed for dredging upstream of Burrowbridge to Oath. The SRA Board have already committed to support a cost effective and legally compliant scheme. It is hoped that the work can be done in the next dredging window – Sept/Oct next year. The IDB will need to bring in additional technical resources to implement the plan. It is hoped that if this project goes ahead it may alleviate some of the concerns over the Sowy project. A paper will be brought to the Board next summer once a fully costed, legally compliant scheme proposal has been drawn up.

It was asked when machines are likely to be on the ground in the Brue area. Iain Sturdy replied that this should occur this year when the Brue tree works start. A proposal is being put together for desilting works to be done next year. There are other bits of work that are currently ongoing in the Brue catchment, for example works to improve maintenance access at Decoy Rhyne.

As recommended the Board noted the progress.

#### **6D. SOWY/ KSD**

Peter Maltby expressed an interest under this item so will not take part in any discussion or decision.

Rachel Burden presented the paper with the help of Graham Quarrier. They explained that a contractor has been lined up for the desilting work. Preliminary work is due to begin next year. Currently the EA are looking into costs and tendering. The environmental mitigation plan has been finalised and is currently being reviewed by stakeholders. The zone of impact and land owner engagement plan is currently being agreed with partners. Since the paper was written further meetings have taken place and positive steps forward have been made. At the present time construction is likely to start in 2019. The risks which are highlighted in the paper will hopefully be reduced by working with partners but there is currently an increasing pressure on costs.

It was noted that if the dredging between Burrowbridge and Oath began before this work then it may alleviate many of the landowners concerns.

As recommended the Board noted the progress.

## **7. HALF YEAR PROGRESS REPORT**

Jonathan Hudston presented the paper which was taken as read. The report follows the End of Year Report format but is focused on progress. Progress has been good considering we are only half way through the financial year and lots of preparation works for upcoming projects are underway. An effort has been made to include more information about the location of works.

The SRA plan to distribute this report to: Somerset MPs, County Cllrs, District Cllrs, IDB members, Parish Councils and Stakeholders. In addition the report will be published on our website and social media accounts.

A question was asked relating to the appropriateness of funding highway works. It was explained that these actions meet the aims of the Flood Action Plan, i.e. assist communities by ensuring access is maintained during flooding. The works are all additional, things that would not normally be funded by Somerset County Council. The work has a real benefit and helps with flash flooding incidents. This sort of work is very important to people living in the higher catchment areas and without it obtaining funding for the SRA may become more challenging in these areas. It is important to note that a significant amount of the budget is spent on Dredging and River Management, at least 75%. Some felt that the report could better explain this so it was agreed that Cllr John Osman would write an executive summary which can be sent out as a cover letter with the report which will make this point clearer.

Cllr John Osman concluded by praising the report as comprehensive with good examples of the hard work we have been doing in partnership.

The report was approved for publication along with an executive summary cover letter from the SRA chairman, Cllr John Osman.

## **8. 2Q FINANCE REPORT**

Emma Beardsley presented the paper which was taken as read. She explained that SRA delivery partners are still lagging behind with their claims. She asked if partners could please ensure that they get their claims submitted in time so that a more accurate picture of actual spend can be presented.

Table B itemises 12 completed actions which have come under budget and 4 items with a small overspend. It is recommended that these are balanced out and the remaining funds, £103,150.62, are moved over into the contingency fund.

As recommended the Board noted the progress and approved the re-allocation of the surplus funds to contingency.

## **9. FUNDING REQUEST: FLOOD ALERT SYSTEMS**

David Peake presented the paper and explained that this had previously been approved by the Board in March 2016 when a free trial was on offer. Unfortunately this offer has now passed.

The system works by automatically lighting up warning signs on the road and contacting the communication centre when water levels reach a predetermined level. This would create a much faster response than is currently possible.

There is a choice to install this in 1, 2 or 3 sites. These have been chosen where there is a high risk of highway flooding and where other works have not taken place/ nor are scheduled to take place.

It was asked when the opportunity to take part in the trial passed. David Peake explained that by the time funding was confirmed the chance had passed to take part in the trial, but in any event the trial was only for one site and did not include funds for on-going maintenance costs.

The point was made that this will help during flash flooding events.

It was asked if this was something that the EA already does. The EA clarified that whilst they do some monitoring it is not geared towards monitoring flooding on roads.

One member raised the point that some of the current flood gates are in a poor state of repair. The Board asked that specifics should be passed onto the highways team so that they can deal with this issue.

It was asked if additional automated warning signs could be considered, subject to technical and financial feasibility, on the side roads at A359 Main Street, Mudford.

As recommended the Board approved the proposal. They asked for a report to come back to the Board detailing figures of the usage of the system and performance once it had been installed.

## **10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

No points were raised by any Board members.

John Osman thanked the public for attending and invited them to speak briefly.

Cllr Roy Mackenzie highlighted that one of the main jobs of Cllrs is to educate people and that it is key that Somerset Cllrs educate the public about the SRA. He stated that he found the SRA Scrutiny bus tour very useful and that the SRA team have provided him with a list of SRA works in Mendip so that he can show the members of the public in the Mendip area what the SRA is doing in their area.

Cllr Alan Wedderkopp expressed concern that a flooding risk from the Blackdown hills in Taunton is not being investigated. Graham Quarrier provided reassurance that this is being included in the Taunton Strategic Flood Alleviation Improvement Scheme investigations. TDBC and EA were asked to consult with Cllr Wedderkopp regarding this outside of the meeting.

Cllr Liz Leyshon asked if Highways had asked Dorset for any feedback on the Flood Alert System which they have trialled. David Peake was asked to look into this and communicate with Cllr Leyshon.

Mark Robbins from the RSPB expressed concern that the environment seems to be considered as an inconvenience and threat. Cllr John Osman replied by stating that Matthew Heard, NE, does a good job making the Board aware of environmental considerations and that the Board appreciates how important it is to protect the special characteristics of Somerset.

Graham Hill, a Meads resident, highlighted that in Ilchester EA gauge levels give a good indication of which roads may flood about 9 hours in advance and the local population pass the message on to farmers to move livestock.

**The meeting concluded at 11.24.**

**Chair Signature:**

**Date:**