

SRA BOARD MEETING – 13th MARCH 2017

THE SRA BOARD

Minutes of a meeting of the Board of the Somerset Rivers Authority held in the Council Chamber at Mendip District Council on Monday 13th March, 2017 at 10am.

PRESENT

Cllr John Osman, SCC (Chair)
Cllr Anne Fraser, SDC
Cllr Ric Pallister, SSDC
Cllr Anthony Trollope-Bellew, WSC
Cllr Tom Killen, MDC
Nick Gupta, EA
Matthew Heard, NE
Peter Maltby, Parrett IDB
Jeff Fear, Axe Brue IDB
Ray Adlam, Axe Brue IDB
David Jenkins, WRFCC
Rebecca Horsington, Parrett IDB
(Substitute)

William Barnard, Parrett IDB
(Substitute)

In attendance:

Sarah Diacono, SRA
Emma Beardsley, SCC
Cllr David Hall, SCC
Rachel Burden, EA
Bren Hodkinson, EA
Stuart Finney, MDC
Iain Sturdy, IDB

Apologies:

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

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Peter Maltby and Rebecca Horsington declared an interest for item 8.

2. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING FEBRUARY 8, 2017 – item 2

Minutes approved with a minor change on page 6, supplementary documents to be changed to Supplementary Planning Documents.

Cllr Trollope-Bellew raised concerns that by funding a rivers authority locally, funding may be lost from the government in the future.

3. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME – item 3

Paul Cottington was not in attendance so it was agreed that a written response would be sent.

The RSPB and Somerset Wildlife Trust presented their question to the board. They wished to know how the SRA will develop a more strategic approach to flood risk

management which considers individual FRM projects and their operation in the context of the wetland system both in the short term and in the context of adaptation to climate change.

Cllr Osman stated that he believed the SRA had taken a strategic approach. He went on to explain that the 20 year flood action plan needs to be considered but that everyone involved had the best interests of Somerset in mind and that he would welcome a dialogue with the RSPB and Somerset Wildlife trust in order to consider their concerns. A written response will also be provided.

Note: Public questions to the Board, with their written answers, can be read as Appendices to these Minutes.

4. PRECEPTING LEGISLATION – item 4

Note: William Barnard (a second substitute for Tony Bradford) arrived just before Item 4; Cllr Anthony Trollope-Bellew arrived during the discussion of Item 4.

Cllr Osman stated that he had recently had a meeting with the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government in which it was made clear that the government remains committed to the SRA becoming a precepting body. However, there is still an issue with finding the time to bring the proposal forward. One possibility to overcome this may be to pass legislation through a Private Members Bill.

- It was asked if there was a timescale for this to be completed, Cllr Osman replied that without further enquiries a timescale could not be given.
- Cllr Fraser asked how this would impact on the funding for 2018/19. Cllr Osman answered that the funding would be raised in the same way as it had been for the last two years which may impact on districts and that the board needed to be realistic with regards to this matter. Cllr Fraser wanted it to be noted that she felt this was a serious issue for councils.
- There were some concerns that Private Member Bills are rarely successful and that other options need to be considered, such as a Private Bill, however Cllr Osman felt that with government backing there was a chance that this was the way forward and that this was the route that the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government had suggested. He also stated that he was happy to explore other options.

The Board:

1. Asked for a progress update to be given at the next Board meeting.

5. REVIEW SRA 2017/18 BUDGET– item 5

Note: Cllr Ric Pallister arrived during Item 5.

Emma Beardsley presented a paper for the 2017/18 budget. She presented the 'Shadow' precept plus IDB contribution budget and indicative carry forward budget from previously approved funding streams. The local partners' funding for 2017/18 had now been confirmed at £2,843,261 which will be spent on the Enhanced Programme plus SRA staff and overheads. It is estimated that around £607,200 will be carried forward for works completed in 2017/18 and £3,568,050 will be carried forward and spent on the Growth Deal fund. The total budget is estimated at £6,868,511 excluding the provision for Sowby/KSD and/or Pioneer Dredging that had been agreed by the Board at the February 8th meeting.

- Cllr Osman praised the budget as probably the easiest to understand he had seen over many years in local government, and thanked all SRA partners for the contributions they had made to fund lots of good work across the county.
- Ray Adlam reported a complaint from the MP for Bridgwater with regards to the funding of the Taunton Strategic Flood Alleviation Improvements Scheme and the concern that Taunton should have funded this project themselves. Cllr Osman had also received this complaint and asked that the next update regarding the project should address this point in detail.
- It was noted that some homes in Wells had been flooded in the recent storm Doris and that it needed to be investigated who owns the infrastructure. This may need to be considered in next year's budget.
- The point was raised that contributing towards the budget was the price of living in Somerset even if your particular area is less affected by flood events.
- Concerns were raised that by funding a rivers authority locally, funding may be lost from the government in the future.

The Board:

1. Noted the contents of the attached Budget for 2017/18 summary report, and unanimously approved the 2017/18 'Shadow' precept plus IDB contribution budget.

6. SRA 2017/18 ENHANCED PROGRAMME – item 6

At the previous Board meeting the members were presented with, and approved, the programme of works subject to funding which has now been confirmed. It was asked that the members formally approve the enhanced programme.

- Matthew Heard highlighted that there was no proposal on Strategic Futures and Sarah Diacono explained that this was because no proposal had been put forward.
- The point was raised that highways should be responsible for the funding of drain jetting, gully emptying and road sweeping and not the SRA as the public believe that they are paying for flood alleviation projects not roads. Cllr Osman explained that the SRA funded works such as these which went beyond the highways remit and that the maintenance of roads was important to alleviate the inconvenience of flooding on local roads. It was noted that this was an important project for the people of West Somerset.

The Board:

1. Formally approved the 2017/18 Enhanced Programme.

7. SRA 2017/18 CALENDAR OF MEETINGS– item 7

Sarah Diacono listed the proposed Board meetings for 2017/18 and confirmed the location of the final two Board meetings. She also reported the date of the next SRA Scrutiny Panel meeting as July 3rd to be held at County Hall, Taunton.

- It was noted that no meetings had taken place in West Somerset for a long time. It was suggested that the July meeting could be held at West Somerset instead of SCC in order to account for this.
- It was also noted that no meetings had taken place at Taunton Deane for some time and that when arranging the next set of meetings this should be remedied.

The Board:

1. Approved the 2017/18 Schedule of Meetings, subject to July's meeting being moved to West Somerset Council's offices, if that proved possible.

9. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Item 9 was taken before Item 8 so that Peter Maltby and Rebecca Horsington, whose declaration of interests meant that both would have to leave the room for Item 8, would not have to wait outside for Item 8 to be concluded before returning for Item 9, but could participate in Item 9, then leave the meeting.

Points raised during the discussion:

- The Shurton and Burton query raised at February's SRA Board meeting would be put to EDF at a meeting coming up in March.

- Supplementary Planning Documents would be considered at the SRA's next Technical Group meeting, as part of discussions about urban water management, then taken forward to Management Group.

8. FLOOD ACTION PLAN SPECIFIC UPDATE – SOWY/KSD – item 8

At this point Peter Maltby and Rebecca Horsington left the room as they had declared an interest.

Bren Hodkinson presented an update on the FAP Sowby/KSD. The scheme is now legally compliant under the Habitats Regulations Assessment provided certain mitigations are put in place. These mitigations will be challenging and include capital infrastructure, water level management and a long term monitoring strategy. Workshops have been conducted with the RSPB, NE, Somerset Wildlife Trust and the Parrett IDB (who were able to attend the first workshop). The challenges now need to be reviewed in detail by the Management Group in order to determine how best to make further progress. This means that there will be a further delay before going out to tender.

Points raised during the discussion included:

- It was asked if landowners negatively affected by the scheme would be entitled to compensation. The EA replied that this was a possibility if landowners faced any demonstrable loss due to the project but there were only a handful of landowners who were at limited risk. The issues of retaining water, landowners already in receipt of DEFRA funding and other landowners in similar areas who do not receive compensation at present expecting it in the future, were discussed.
- The project team were aware of the dangers of creating precedents. Compensation should only be considered in future if it could be proved that an issue with flooding had definitely resulted from an operational decision.
- Cllr Osman reiterated that Board was committed to this project but that further consultation was needed. He also stressed the importance of having all partners' support at the outset to make the process easier down the line.
- It was suggested that perhaps the SRA should consider including in its programme dealing with the section of the Parrett from Oath Lock to the Tone confluence.
- Concerns were raised that the diversion of water may affect natural desiltation and that this needs to be investigated. It was further suggested that this was more about how the new system would be used as opposed to the decision to invest in the new infrastructure.
- Concerns were raised that the report only highlighted the impacts of the scheme on the environment and not on landowners. The EA said that the impact on landowners would be explored at Management Group.

- It was stated that landowners need to know the detail from the outset so that they can plan for the future.
- The importance of the IDB attending future workshops and discussions was highlighted.
- The SRA should consider getting involved and shaping the debate about agri-environment schemes after 2019 – the kind of schemes that IDB members had been talking about – Neil Parish’s EFRA committee was interested in this.

The Board:

1. Noted the progress of the project with regard to being legally compliant under the Habitats Regulations Assessment.
2. Noted that all partners will need to support the mitigation measures proposed.
3. Reiterated its support for continuing the Sowey project.

The meeting finished at 11.06am.

Chair Signature:

Date: