

SRA BOARD MEETING - 21 OCTOBER 2015

THE SRA BOARD

Minutes of a Meeting of the Board of the Somerset Rivers Authority held at the offices of Taunton Deane Borough Council on Wednesday 21st October, 2015 at 9.30am.

PRESENT

Cllr J Osman (in the Chair)
Tony Bradford, Parrett IDB, ViceChairman
Ray Adlam, Axe Brue IDB
Jeff Fear, Axe Brue IDB
Cllr Anne Fraser, SDC
Nick Gupta, EA
Matthew Heard, Natural England
David Jenkins, Wessex RFCC
Peter Maltby, Parrett IDB
Cllr Ric Pallister, SSDC
Cllr Harvey Siggs, MDC
Cllr John Williams, TDBC
Cllr Anthony Trollope-Bellew, WSC

Officers in Attendance:

Doug Bamsey, SDC Emma Beardsley, SCC Rachel Burden, EA Brendan Cleere, TDBC Dave Crowson, EA Sarah Diacono, SRA Kathryn Holdsworth, Defra Nick Stevens, SDBC Iain Sturdy, SDBC Steve Webster, SCC

Apologies for absence: None

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST – agenda item 1

Members of the Board declared the following personal interests:

Cllr A Fraser declared her membership of the Wessex Regional Flood & Coastal Committee and the Parrett Internal Drainage Board.

2. MINUTES OF MEETINGS OF THE SRA BOARD HELD ON 23rd SEPTEMBER 2015 - agenda item 2

Cllr Trollope-Bellew raised West Somerset's concerns about Sedgemoor not paying the precept (paragraph 4, page 2); Cllr Hall said that he had sent apologies but these were not recorded. The minutes of the Board Meeting held on 23rd September 2015 were otherwise signed as correct.

3. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME – agenda item 3

Questions had been received from Adrian Dunbar, Heather Stuart-Monteith and there was a late submission of a letter from Rhona Light. Mr Dunbar was present; he outlined what he saw as the drawbacks of the single-minded approach to flood protection (ie dredging) taken by pressure groups such as FLAG. For the protection of Moorland, Chadmead and



Fordgate, Mr Dunbar favoured the building of a large single bund for a one-off payment, which he estimated at £7million, with extremely minor maintenance costs. Mr Dunbar thoughts that the benefits of a bund had not been properly explained to villagers. It would not be a 6ft high pile of dirt just yards from people's kitchen windows. In response, Sarah Diacono emphasised that the SRA – implementing the Flood Action Plan, which had 78 actions across seven different workstreams – did not take a single-minded approach. She said that the SRA needed to find out what local communities wanted and straighten out misunderstandings, hence the recommendations for proper and appropriate consultation appearing on item 10 later on the agenda. Cllr Osman thanked Mr Dunbar for his contribution.

4. FINANCIAL REPORT - PROGRESS UPDATE - agenda item 4

Emma Beardsley introduced the report, noting that the SRA continued to forecast a full spend against its interim funding, but any slippage this financial year would be rolled forward to the next. In response to a query from Peter Maltby, Emma Beardsley and Sarah Diacono explained how money from Heart of South West LEP would appear in the accounts. Mr Maltby stressed the desirability of a full picture; Emma Beardsley said this would be developed as claims started to come through. Cllr Williams concurred with Mr Maltby that it would be helpful to know what had been promised by the LEP and Cllr Osman agreed that more information should be provided on all funding on the relevant spreadsheet next time.

5. Q2 ENHANCED MAINTENANCE PROGRAMME – PROGRESS UPDATE – agenda item 5

lain Sturdy said that several pieces of work were starting this quarter and he drew attention to proposed dredging on the Parrett (item 9). A change to the programme was the addition of the Wick Lane culvert scheme at Brent Knoll, costing £20,000, and benefitting highway access and properties. Even with the inclusion of this scheme, the EMP was showing a running total of £110,000 lower expenditure, owing to reduced costs on other items. Ray Adlam complained that the EMP spreadsheets provided via email were almost impossible to read; he asked for decent-sized hard copies to be sent out. Cllr Osman said it was important to keep costs to a minimum but that hard copies of spreadsheets should be distributed in future.

6. Q2 COMMON WORKS PROGRAMME – PROGRESS UPDATE – agenda item 6

Steve Webster highlighted changes, including EA schemes at Highbridge Clyse, Washford River and Minehead to Blue Anchor, still going ahead but packaged differently. Work at Stanmore Pumping station had been completed within other works. River Tone French weir remedials were now



out to tender, likewise Cannington flood defence scheme, while the upgrade works at Bruton reservoir were now largely complete. At Beer Wall, the EA had started Phase 3 and improvements works at Saltmoor Pumping Station were now largely complete. Three new EA schemes had been added to the CWP: repairs to the River Penzoy sluice at Westonzoyland, Elsons Clyse outfall repair and Lympsham pumping station weedscreen.

IDB: work completed at Brents Rhyne and Black Ditch and Perrymoor reservoir bank. Long Load floodbank had been withdrawn as it cannot be progressed in the form that had been expected.

SCC: two more schemes completed, at Beer Wall and Ruishton. County highway drainage schemes: 32 schemes completed in Q2, 10 deferred due to budget constraints but being considered for 16/17, and the remaining 22 are on course for completion in the remainder of this year.

Wirral Park pumping station (Mendip) should not be listed on the CWP; it is an EMP scheme.

No Wessex Water schemes shown because the update has not been through their internal processes. Henceforth, Wessex Water's progress will probably be reported a quarter behind.

Peter Maltby gueried whether the Sowy improvement scheme should be described as being solely in Sedgemoor, when several kilometres of the Sowy are in South Somerset. Cllr Osman said this should be amended to reflect the river's border-crossing status. Ray Adlam queried the inclusion of so many SCC highways schemes. He thought that money intended for rivers should be spent on rivers. Sarah Diacono said that the CWP was a collection of schemes funded by Flood Risk Management Authorities and not by the SRA, and so was different to the EMP. Doug Bamsey asked about a £300.000 shortfall in the long-promised Cannington flood alleviation scheme; Rachel Burden said this scheme was out to tender, that a bid was in to the SRA's 5 Year Plan to cover the shortfall, and that construction was due to start in the Spring. Cllr Osman called for a very brief update on this scheme at the next SRA Board meeting. Sarah Diacono confirmed that the EA had put in a bid for the shortfall and that it had been clearly indicated as an EA priority. She said that work on the 5 Year Plan would come to the Board once it had gone through the Management Group. Cllr Osman asked for CWP spreadsheets to be sent out in A3 hard copies, as per the EMP.

7. UPPER TONE STRATEGIC FLOOD ALLEVIATION SCHEME UPDATE – agenda item 7

Brendan Cleere showed nine slides illustrating this scheme, which had not before been fully presented to the Board but was an important component



of the Flood Action Plan. He explained the scheme's background, work done so far in partnership with the EA, and next steps.

Points highlighted: Brendan Cleere stressed this scheme was complementary to many others, particularly the Bridgwater Barrier. Major flooding in Taunton in the 1960s prompted a remodelling of the River Tone through the town. Taunton did not flood in 2013/14 but came very close to flooding in 2000 and 2012 and climate change will put Taunton at risk of flooding in the near future unless something is done. Any future scheme is not just about the Tone; its catchment and numerous tributaries must be taken into account. Already, a scheme at Long Run meadow has been implemented, which has done a lot to protect Taunton and last year a Phase 1 Options Study was completed. Central to that was the idea of a super-pond at Bradford on Tone. A strategy has to be in place by 2026. If nothing is done, there is a significant risk to properties and Taunton's growth ambitions will be curtailed. There is now a project team up and running between Taunton Deane Borough Council and the EA to make the scheme development-ready (Phase 2) and Phase 3 is to build it by 2021. Brendan Cleere concluded by saying that the SRA's support would be really appreciated.

Points made during discussion:

Cllr Osman asked if any help was needed from the SRA and what money was being bid for from the LEP Growth Deal. Dave Crowson said £9million was being sought and the LEP had identified this as a Priority 1 scheme. Partnership funding had been secured for an 18-month / 2 year study to get an "oven-ready" scheme. Ric Pallister asked whether – since the SRA was never going to be able to fund this scheme (or the Bridgwater Barrier) – it was entirely dependent on external funding. Dave Crowson broke down the figures to include £9million from the LEP, £5.3million in grant-in-aid and the balance would come through Taunton Deane from sources such as new home developments. Cllr Williams reassured Cllr Pallister that LEP had been totally supportive, but he was getting out his begging bowl to other organisations and was "reasonably confident". Harvey Siggs asked if there was a Plan B if Growth Deal funding did not come through. As a LEP member he was not expecting Growth Deal 3 to be as generous and there was heavy over-bidding.

Dave Crowson said the scheme was a conglomeration of projects, including the super pond, the updating of flood defences through Taunton and perhaps the re-aligning of the Tone. It would be a flexible package of works that could come forward as and when it reflects development; it would not be a deal-breaker if the LEP money did not come up-front. Cllr Williams said that TDBC was not looking for this scheme to be in place until 2026, so there were several cycles to go through.



Cllr Osman asked for Brendan Cleere to give a brief update in February, particularly as regards funding.

Tony Bradford asked whether it would not be better to put half of the super pond capacity downstream of Taunton, between Taunton and the Moors, to stop water getting down quicker to the Moors. Dave Crowson said no: the upstream super pond was one of a number of schemes that were in effect "washing the face" of Taunton. He compared the situation to peak traffic flow, where you had to lock off the top peak. Most flow could get through Taunton; the problem was the top peak from climate change. He compared the super pond to a park and ride scheme, holding traffic upstream.

8. BRIDGWATER BARRIER UPDATE – agenda item 8

Doug Bamsey said tenders were out for consultants; it was hoped to appoint before Christmas. The scheme had been discussed at Sedgemoor's scrutiny committee; positively, but it was important to manage expectations. The scheme had a strong policy basis, which helped to justify bids for funding and contributions from developers. It was a crucial part of the Local Plan being developed for the period up to 2032. There was a Growth Deal submission for £5million – marked as a Priority 1 – but also a Plan B.

A meeting between different parties, including the EA, John Osman from the SRA, and the IDB, had looked particularly at how the barrier might be used to manage silt. Tenderers had been made well aware of the importance of the silt issue.

Doug Bamsey said the scheme could be delivered by 2024, but it was important not to be distracted, as it was going to be a demanding schedule.

No questions were asked.

9. PIONEER DREDGE – agenda item 9

Sarah Diacono summarised the report that had been distributed to members. Points highlighted: a decision on whether to approve new dredging downstream of Northmoor pumping station had been deferred at September's SRA Board meeting, pending tender returns for maintenance dredging, to see if there was potential for savings. Subsequent discussions at the management group had identified a number of procurement, environmental and other issues which would need to be resolved before being able to get a firm price for any alternative solution. There were timing issues: the earliest date for on-site mobilisation of the pioneer dredge was mid-February if a decision was taken today, so the Board needed to take into account the risks of any further delay, given the lack of any firm, established alternative price. There was a risk of neither pioneer nor maintenance dredge being delivered this winter if efforts to tie the two



dredges together continued, and a further risk might arise from the previously mooted third option of conducting more consultation with communities; the strong risk here was of the EA's preferred contractor no longer being available, so in fact only two options were now being put forward to the Board. The new dredging proposed would deliver community reassurance and some hydrological benefits. Sarah Diacono stressed that in both options it was very important that the SRA should investigate at full speed alternative methods for the future - and the SRA's technical group was putting together a dredging strategy. In summary, the points of difference in the two options were: Go ahead – or defer until next year after the SRA had done its investigation into alternative methodologies.

lain Sturdy elaborated further on the technical challenges of joining the two dredges, particularly as regards procurement and timing. He gave as one example the fact that the EA's contract for pioneer dredging relied on the contractor doing design work. It would be difficult for the IDB and its maintenance-dredging contractor to suddenly have to restart this work.

Cllr Osman said it was right to have investigated other possibilities, even though they had turned out not to be feasible, and he thanked the IDB for looking into the issues.

Local SCC member Richard Brown said there was a clear desire from the community for dredging. He couldn't see the cost of £2.14 million being less in a year's time. He thought the £2 million cost of this scheme represented a good cost benefit analysis against the £147 million cost of the damage caused to Somerset by the flooding of 2013/14. The SRA faced a real risk in bidding for future funds if it did not spend money it already had on what it was intended to be spent on. There was also a public confidence issue – not going ahead now would create a sense of worry in the public who don't know what is going to happen this winter. He urged members to support the unblocking of this artery.

Local SCC member and SRA substitute Board member David Hall said that dredging was not the complete solution, but it was part of it, and one that is effective in the perception of the public. Not going ahead would at best be seen as taking a gamble, and he would not want the SRA to be seen as taking a gamble with people's livelihoods and properties just for the sake of financial efficiency. He urged the Board to go ahead as quickly as possible.

Cllr Williams said all recognised that dredging brought benefits, but today's decision was being presented as one of either dredging or no solution. He referred to the report about this dredge which had been considered by the Board at September's meeting, which noted that pumping could reduce water levels by up to 700 mm, compared to the prediction of up to 50-80mm from this dredge. There was therefore an alternative which could prudently look after taxpayer funds as well as the Levels and Moors.



Cllr Osman said pumping could still be done and that dredging would be additional to the pumping.

Tony Bradford asked if the costs incurred so far for planning this dredge would have to be re-incurred if it was delayed.

Cllr Osman said there would be some procurement costs; Rachel Burden said the scheme would have to re-tendered and there would be some more costs, though not massive.

Cllr Pallister said he could not take his mind away from 50-80mm – dredging was courting popularity but misleading the public. "On a cost benefit analysis it fails spectacularly". He said it was "pulling the wool over people's eyes" to stick a dredger on a bank "so they think we're making a difference".

Anne Fraser said the SRA was caught between a rock and a hard place: "damned if we do, damned if we don't". She wanted one reassurance: could the SRA carry on work on the Sowy because that will evacuate water more quickly? She said it was a matter of head versus heart – and her heart was going to win – but the SRA needed to explain its thinking to the widest possible audience. This was not a decision to be taken lightly: people had to be aware that if money's spent in one place, it can't be spent somewhere else.

Jeff Fear said the Sowy was built as a relief channel, it had been improved, and he would stick with that at the present time.

Cllr Osman said there was £8.5 million of Growth Deal money to carry on with Sowy work.

Ray Adlam said it was over-reliance on cost-benefit analysis that had caused problems in the past. £2.14million was an extortionate price, but the work had to be done at some point, so he would vote to get on with it, with the proviso that perhaps a working group should be set up to look at costs in detail and ascertain how work could be done better and more cheaply in future. Otherwise, it would be unsustainable. Cllr Osman agreed.

Cllr Pallister asked if the work had to be done at some point – "in which case we might as well get on with it". He didn't feel that the technical advice given indicated that it was essential.

Cllr Osman said that Rachel Burden's presentation [at September's Board meeting] had indicated this was the next section which would have the most benefit; Rachel Burden confirmed it had been shown as the highest priority.



Cllr Pallister asked again if the work had to be done.

Cllr Osman: "We could go back to the old system where we didn't do anything and I would strongly plead that we didn't do that."

Anthony Trollope-Bellew asked what were the chances, if the scheme went out to tender again, of getting a cheaper tender back? "Or is this 750m so difficult it will always cost that? If so, let's get on with it."

Cllr Osman said that no one had a crystal ball. He had been to inspect the site; it would involve road closures and different equipment being brought in to that used on the previous 8km dredge.

Nick Stevens said that it could come in less, but there was also a risk that it could become more expensive. There was no guarantee it could be cheaper.

Nick Gupta said that different dredging techniques were the more likely route to reduced costs and that the EA had been to all of its contractors and that was the market price. He supported the Technical Group's work to develop a dredging strategy for the future, which he felt needed to take into account alternative methodologies.

Tony Bradford said it would be difficult for the SRA to continue if it could not decide what to do with the money it had. It would also be very embarrassing for Somerset and the SRA to go and ask for more money if there was still money in the pot. He regretted that decisions were having to be made at the 11th hour – it would be better to have alternatives in place earlier.

Peter Maltby worried about the short length of dredging being done for the money allocated. He asked if the client risk money could be used to extend the dredge in February or March – then it would be a more acceptable deal. He feared making a rod for everyone's back in future by setting a standard for what the SRA was prepared to pay for dredging.

Harvey Siggs said that residents needed to know that pumping could take out a lot of water if it became necessary and asked: Can we afford the pumping costs? He said it would be just as embarrassing to go to the Secretary of State if there was a huge uproar at spending £2.1million on a 750 metre dredge. Cllr Siggs did not accept that a standard was being set for the future, as the SRA was going to be better placed to challenge the market for alternative solutions.

Nick Gupta said the EA had made a significant investment in temporary pumping – and pumping would happen if trigger points were met



Cllr Pallister asked if the Sowy / KSD was fully funded for the work that needed doing. Nick Gupta said there was £7.5 million for the scheme which stands, and some improvements had already occurred.

Cllr Fraser said it was imperative not to go back to a stop-start situation; that the SRA needed a long-term programme for dredging and maintenance plus a long-term plan for finance; and that people should not think the SRA was a soft touch.

She asked: if the dredge was not starting until February, where was the reassurance for this winter? She concluded: "We don't ever want to find ourselves in this situation again."

Nick Gupta said the Board should be incredibly proud of everything that had been achieved in a very short of time. "We are in a much better place."

Cllr Williams agreed that the SRA needed a long term plan for dredging – not a knee jerk plan that was uneconomic, could impact on the future cost of works and was delivering not a great amount of benefit. He said the SRA needed to use the money it had to greatest advantage, and with pumping improved, he could not support this very high-priced dredging. It was very, very important that the SRA should be able to go to minsters and say that money was being used wisely and sensibly to deliver the maximum value per pound.

Cllr Osman summed up by saying it was a difficult decision. He wished more kilometres could be dredged for less money, however, this was the next priority location, he would strongly suggest that it would have to be dredged at some point, and he doubted it would be cheaper.

Cllr Osman said the SRA needed a long-term dredging strategy and a working group including some Board members to develop this. He had already asked County Council staff to look into different delivery options and he would like to bring a paper to the Board at some point in the future.

He said he had spoken with the SoS this morning; she had said she was "very interested" in the decision the Board would make.

The Board voted 7-4 in favour of **Option 1**. Go ahead with the 750m dredge downstream of Northmoor Pumping Station as planned, at a cost of £2.14m (incl. of £200k of client held risk), recognising the limited additional physical benefits that these works provide in terms of flood risk reduction on Northmoor. As this option would require bringing forward some of the 2016/17 LEP funds earmarked for dredging, this option includes investigating more cost-effective dredging techniques and sites before deciding on the dredging programme beyond this financial year.



Cllr Osman said he wanted to help accelerate the implementation; he would make sure that County Council resources would bend over backwards to support this.

10. RING BANK CONSULTATION – agenda item10

Sarah Diacono introduced the report. She explained that exploring ring banks as an option for extra protection was one of the long-term actions in the Flood Action Plan. Last year, the EA – acting for what was still then the FAP and not the SRA – had identified 12 potential locations. Chadmead, Moorland and Fordgate were judged to be the most viable. The EA – acting on behalf of the now-formed SRA – carried out a consultation exercise in June and July to gauge community support for the principle of ring banks. The results, plus a copy of the same paper prepared for the Board, were sent out to all consultees about a week previously. Since then, a number of comments had come back. Sarah Diacono outlined the response rates and results in Fordgate, Chadmead and Moorland – and noted the fact that there had also been many, many comments then about details – including concerns about what would be the impact on people living outside of the area. When the figures were discussed by the SRA's management group, the group thought that given the high response rate in Fordgate, and clear majority against the principle of ring banks, no further work should be done in Fordgate at this time, though it was still important to respond to people who had written in with comments. The picture in Moorland and Chadmead was much less clear. The management group believed that in order to progress either way the SRA was duty bound to explore further the issues that had been raised, via a two-stage piece of work: firstly, to understand concerns, particularly in view of a point made in a letter from Rhona Light, that at the time of this summer's consultation the reassuring results of river modelling had not been shared, with its demonstrations of the effectiveness of the 8km dredge of the Parrett and Tone; secondly, to see if a consensus could be established in favour of building a ring bank or not. The SRA had no axe to grind – the priority was to build consensus either way and provide reassurance and clarity. Hence the two-stage approach now recommended to the Board, with the second stage – which would only be contemplated if a consensus was found in favour of ring banks – being to consider investing further in matters such as design.

Anne Fraser supported the idea of further consultation with the whole community, regardless of what Fordgate had said at the moment. She asked if actual plans had been presented, and said she would like to see them herself if they had been, particularly for what she called the "long village" of Moorland. Also: what would be the cost? And the actual location of possible ring banks?



Rachel Burden said the proposals presented to people had been basic. The idea had been to gauge appetite – to discover how people felt about the idea of ring banks – and only then to get into the level of more detail.

Tony Bradford said that ring banks should not be used as an excuse to let water spread across the Moors; water should be kept in rivers.

Peter Maltby supported the recommendations. He said the timing of the circulation of the SRA's paper to consultees was unfortunate as it coincided with the Athelney spillway being refurbished, and a lot of residents in the Northmoor area thought the spillway was being lowered because the SRA was looking at ring banks. He wanted people to be made aware that the spillway was not being lowered, it was being strengthened.

Cllr Osman agreed that it was important that information was sent out to the communities as soon as possible to correct this misunderstanding.

Nick Gupta said consensus was vital; going through people's back gardens was very difficult.

Cllr Pallister supported the recommendations and said that although Thorney, as a ribbon village, was very different, it could still be valuable to take people there to see what a ring bank looked like. A ring bank was a last line of defence of property. If people understood more, they were more likely to buy in.

Cllr Fraser asked who would lead the work. Cllr Osman said either Sedgemoor or Somerset.

Chadmead resident Malcolm Goodland said that if ring banks did go ahead, no commercial land should be involved. He thought the situation in Fordgate could change. He said that people in Chadmead were "in full support" of the idea but he asked for some of the detail presented to be fine-tuned. "All we want is to get back to a normal life". Mr Goodland spoke of the psychological effects of the flooding. He said his grandchildren still spoke about being evacuated and recalled how, when he was away, one of his grandsons woke up every night crying, saying 'Mum I want to go home'. Mr Goodland told the Board: "It's you people here today who are going to help secure the youngsters of the future... so I would appreciate the support of this committee."

After Cllr Osman summed up, the Board voted unanimously in favour of the recommendations as presented.

1. Note the summary of results of the public consultation of residents and landowners at Moorland, Chadmead and Fordgate on the principle of ring banks at these communities as outlined in this paper.



2. Consider the recommendations of the SRA Management Group That no further investigation is carried out on the Fordgate ring bank at this time and a summary of both the consultation responses and this decision should be sent to the residents and landowners by the EA on behalf of the SRA.

That a two stage approach is adopted for Chadmead and Moorland: Stage 1 - The SRA to commission further work with the communities with a view to developing a greater degree of consensus. This would involve addressing as many of the concerns and issues as possible, prior to investment in appraisal and design. It would require some community officer and technical support. The SRA Board to agree who would be best placed to lead this work.

Stage 2 - Depending on the outcome of this work and the scale of the issues and concerns that remain, the SRA would then consider whether to invest in further appraisal and design work (circa £200k).

Cllr Osman asked the Board to let himself and Anne Fraser discuss who would be the lead delivery partner.

Cllr Pallister asked that if Fordgate did change its mind, it should not be shut out. "They might feel with wider consultation, they want to revisit it."

11. LEADERS STATUS REPORT - BY EXCEPTION - agenda item 11

No questions asked.

12. AOB – agenda item 12

Kathryn Holdsworth had raised a question about whether the Board had any appetite at its next meeting for a report about preparations for the winter including flood risk management, community resilience and other relevant issues. However, as the next meeting was due to be in January, she withdrew the request.

John Osman said this was a really worthwhile topic; he wanted everyone to respond appropriately. It was decided that Kathryn would write to Sarah Diacono specifying what information she required; Sarah would let Board members know and collate their individual responses so as to feed back one combined response to Kathryn.

Tony Bradford urged people – in so far as this was possible for a public body – to be "a little bit more confidential" about how much money was in the pot, as he was worried about the effects on tenders. "If you know what's in the pot, you're going to milk it for all it's worth." Peter Maltby thought this was a good point. Cllr Williams countered, as someone whose company priced for jobs, that it didn't matter what you knew, you



quoted for a job according to how much it cost. "If you're not more competitive than the person next door, you don't get the work."

| The meeting finished at 11.38am. | |
|----------------------------------|--|
| Chair Signature: | |
| | |
| | |
| Date: | |