

**SOMERSET RIVERS AUTHORITY BOARD MEETING – 7 September 2018
THE SOMERSET RIVERS AUTHORITY BOARD**

Minutes of a meeting of the Board of the Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA) held at West Somerset Council's offices in Williton on Friday 7 September 2018 at 10.00am.

PRESENT

Cllr John Osman, MDC (Chairman)
Tony Bradford, Parrett IDB (Vice-Chairman)
Ray Adlam, Axe Brue IDB
Rachel Burden, EA (Substitute)
Cllr Norman Cavill, TDBC (Substitute)
Jeff Fear, Axe Brue IDB
Cllr Anne Fraser, SDC
Cllr David Hall, SCC
Matthew Heard, NE
David Jenkins, Wessex RFCC
Cllr Ric Pallister, SSDC
Cllr Anthony Trollope-Bellew, WSC
Cllr Martin Dewdney, WSC (Substitute when Cllr Trollope-Bellew had to leave early)

IN ATTENDANCE:

Doug Bamsey, SDC
Roger Burge, SDBC
Tim Burton, TDBC
Michele Cusack, SCC
Paul Deal, MDC
Rebecca Hall, SCC
Jonathan Hudston, SRA
David Mitchell, SRA
Cllr Mike Pullin, SCC
Iain Sturdy, IDB
Martin Woods, SSDC
Peter Stiles, SCC
Lindsey Tawse, SCC

APOLOGIES:

Ian Dyer, Parrett IDB
Nick Gupta, EA
Mark Jones, NE
Cllr Tom Killen, MDC
Cllr John Williams, TDBC

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Tony Bradford, Parrett IDB, declared an interest in Item 6D - Key Project Updates - Sowey/KSD enhancement Scheme by virtue of being a landowner on the River Sowey.

2. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING 8 JUNE 2018

The minutes were agreed as a true and accurate record of the meeting.

3. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

One public question was asked by Daniel Mumby, Local Democracy Reporter, to the following effect:

“Among the proposed cuts published by Somerset County Council are proposals to defer flood risk management studies and options appraisals in Chard, Glastonbury, Cheddar and Ilminster until next year and suspend delivery of flood prevention schemes in Bruton and Curry Rivel and a highway scheme in Wellington.

“Could the SRA give an assurance that they would take on/help with funding for these and other schemes?”

The Chairman replied that conversations would take place within the public sector on ways to deliver important flood defence schemes and all options would be explored. Cllr David Hall, SCC, pointed out that no decisions had yet been taken on the proposals which would first have to be considered next week by the relevant Scrutiny Committee and the Cabinet.

4. CHANGES TO SRA BOARD REPRESENTATION

The SRA Board noted:

1. That Ian Dyer would be replacing John Lang as Parrett IDB representative.
2. That Julian Taylor is no longer a member of the Parrett IDB Board and as a result would no longer be able to sit as Chairman of the SRA Scrutiny Panel. The matter will be discussed at a meeting of the IDB Board on November. It might be possible for the IDB to co-opt Julian so that he could continue in this role, but that would have to be looked into in more detail.

The Chairman undertook to forward the Board’s best wishes for a return to good health to John Lang who was in hospital.

5. KEY PROJECT UPDATES

5A. BRIDGWATER TIDAL BARRIER

The Board considered a report providing an update on development of, and consultation on, the Bridgwater Tidal Barrier scheme. Good progress is being made towards the Transport and Works Acts Order (TWAO) submission. Outline design completed. Talking to landowners, particularly downstream to address any concerns. Been successful with SCC and TDBC in the initial stages of an application to Housing Infrastructure Fund. SDC has affirmed its support to the project and funding contribution towards it. In discussions to secure a parcel of land at Express Park to enable delivery.

In response to questions and comments, the Board was informed that in order for the scheme to be approved there would be a need for environmental mitigation and perhaps environmental enhancement. It was stated that there are no plans to create a ‘second Steart’ but appropriate enhancement would be sought where possible. It was stated that it is important that landowners are aware of any proposal as their livelihoods could be affected. A lot of work is being undertaken to understand the downstream impacts and what mitigation may be required as part of a comprehensive solution.

As recommended, the SRA Board noted:

1. Work to finalise the scheme proposals and estimate.
2. Work to finalise the Outline Business Case and submission to Environment Agency/ Defra/HM Treasury.

3. The acquisition of Heron Court, Express Park.
4. Consultations with landowners to finalise proposals for the barrier, downstream defences and borrow pits to provide material to construct the defences.
5. Consultation with stakeholders and public in October 2018.
6. SDC's Housing Infrastructure Fund bid and investigations to secure additional funding.

5B. TAUNTON STRATEGIC FLOOD ALLEVIATION IMPROVEMENTS SCHEME

The Board considered a report providing an update on Phase 2 of the Taunton Strategic Flood Alleviation Improvements scheme, involving improved flood defence walls in the town, an area for storing floodwater upstream on the River Tone and local intervention options and proposals for consultation thereon.

It was explained that the scheme was always part of a strategy and proposed as a mixture of upstream works and schemes around Taunton itself. With regards upstream feasibility for a large-scale attenuation around Bradford on Tone as much as possible at this stage. Estimated cost would be £50 – 60m so time is required to put in place this funding. TDBC now focusing in more detail on some of the smaller scale interventions around Taunton which can be delivered in the short term. It is anticipated that consultation will be undertaken towards the end of the year.

In response to queries and comments on impacts of the scheme, the Board was informed that the scheme would be carefully modelled to avoid flooding being displaced downstream. The EA team are undertaking work to understand the correct sequence in which interventions should be undertaken.

Tim Burton, TDBC, wished to place on record how well the partnership between the EA and Taunton Deane Borough Council has been operating.

As recommended, the SRA Board noted the contents of the report and progress made on the Taunton Strategic Flood Alleviation Improvements Scheme for Phase 2 and considered this as an appropriate basis for continued joint project working.

5C. DREDGING STRATEGY AND PLANS

(Ray Adlam, Axe-Brue IDB declared a personal interest in this item by virtue of living close to the River Brue).

The Board considered a report providing an update on progress with the preparation of the Dredging Strategy (Parrett, Tone and Brue) including: the High Level Programme for the Strategy, preparations for this year's Maintenance Dredging and contract strategy and opportunities and constraints in the Brue Catchment.

Preparation for this year's maintenance dredging on the Parrett is going ahead well. Looking to let the contract as a multi-year contract; working with partners to enable this to happen. Monitoring is showing that, on average, between Burrowbridge and Northmoor there is an annual decrease in capacity of the river of between 10 and 20%

each year. This represents an ongoing challenge to maintain the level of flood risk reduction delivered by the previous pioneer dredging.

A question was asked about the volume of material removed during the maintenance dredging and whether it was more or less what had been anticipated when planning the works. Monitoring data is showing that there will be an ongoing need to remove a similar volume each year – approximately 20 to 30,000 cubic metres each year. Water injection dredging is proving to be an effective and cost-effective approach.

The view was expressed that such maintenance dredging like this should be part of the 'day job' to maintain the river profile. As it is now business as usual it is not necessary to report on this regularly as we do with key project updates. The point was made that the original 8km dredge needs to be maintained and as such there should not be a need to debate whether this type of work should be funded in future.

The Chairman instructed that Board members should be invited to view the next water injection dredging.

Brue update. Good progress had been made working with stakeholders to get support for a strategy to address issues across the Brue catchment but this has not helped move the de-silting element on the lower Brue forward. Due to the staff resource required on other projects, only limited progress has been possible on the Brue.

Disappointment was expressed by the Board at the limited progress on the River Brue. The Board requested that definite progress was made on the Brue by the time of the next Board meeting.

Officers acknowledged the commitment to improved conveyance works on the lower Brue, accepted the need for better progress on dredging the Brue and agreed to update the Board at its next meeting.

The Chairman reiterated the Board's request to see more progress on the River Brue.

As recommended, the SRA Board noted:

1. The revisions to the High Level Programme.
2. Preparations for 2018 maintenance dredging on the Parrett, and development of longer-term contract and environmental permitting strategies.
3. The outcome of the Brue Catchment workshop but the delay in progress due to priorities in the Parrett Catchment.

5Ci. OATH TO BURROWBRIDGE PIONEER DREDGING

The Board considered a report on the delay of the intended programme and a proposed urgent technical briefing.

As recommended, the SRA Board noted:

1. That due to the complex and sensitive nature of this project more time was required to manage risks and ensure the project can be legally compliant and affordable and that this meant that work on the ground would not be possible this Autumn.

2. That a detailed technical briefing would be arranged for members in the week beginning Monday 24 September 2018.

5D. SOWY/KING'S SEDGEMOOR DRAIN (KSD) ENHANCEMENT SCHEME

The Board considered a report providing an update on the Sowy/KSD enhancement scheme that responded to the Board's request to set out the approach to spending the remaining Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) funds on the next stage of a scheme.

To achieve best value, the scheme would be designed to minimise movement of excavated material up and down the river and avoid taking excavated material off site. This would limit the capacity that could be achieved in the first stage which was likely to include:

- mitigation works to upgrade key small control structures to maintain water levels in adjacent moors when the full scheme was in place in accordance with the requirements of environmental designations and Habitat Regulations;
- restoring low spots in banks on the KSD and on the Sowy upstream of the A372 Beer Wall with excavated material;
- widening the lower Sowy (1 - 2 metres) and using the material to raise / repair banks.

The report covered background and context, latest status, consenting, first stage benefits and risks.

The Board discussed whether the available LEP funds should be used to support continued work to develop the first stage of the scheme as recommended, or, alternatively, to support the funding of a comprehensive 'end-to-end' scheme for the whole length of the Sowy but with a reduced width rather than piecemeal improvements to sections of the river. This would be on the basis that this is a better use of funds and that funding might not be available in the future to come back and do more.

The Board was reminded that it is necessary to deliver this project with the available LEP funds and within the timeframe set down by the LEP. Based upon current estimates there is not enough funding to widen the entire length. The proposed way forward was considered to constitute the best use of funds to achieve maximum flood risk benefit in the circumstances.

It was clarified that the request was to maximise the amount of funding available to the EA now so that they could widen as much of the channel as possible when on site rather than coming back to it at a later date.

The Board's position, as previously agreed, was re-stated but with the recognition that the long-term aim should be to ultimately deliver the full Sowy scheme over several years.

As recommended, the SRA Board agreed:

1. To support the spend of the remaining Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) budget on the first stage of the Sowy/King's Sedgemoor Drain enhancement scheme by 2021.
2. To support the continued work to develop the first stage of the Sowy/King's Sedgemoor Drain enhancement scheme

5E. STRATEGIC APPROACH TO MITIGATION

The Board considered a report providing an update on the development of a strategic approach to mitigation for the environmental impact of SRA works. The aim is to streamline the process for securing necessary permissions to deliver projects whilst taking account of environmental impacts. The lack of certainty around exactly what works projects will include is hampering the ability of the project team to finalise a strategic approach to mitigation. Until more definite information is available, it is very difficult for the NE team to put forward recommendations for suitable mitigations. At some stage it is likely that areas for significant enhancement will be required to compensate for the impact of works.

It was suggested that a key action should be to revisit Water Level Management Plans with the IDBs to enable the necessary mitigation to be delivered with support of the IDBs. Necessary structures to do this are mostly in place already.

Concern was raised by some Board Members that projects should not be held up by the need to agree mitigations. It was stated that the issue in question here is about agreeing operational control.

As recommended, the SRA Board noted:

1. The progress made on the development of a Strategic Approach to Mitigation including the timescales for delivery.
2. That timescales would need to adjust to align with the pace of associated projects.
3. Reference to costs associated with developing and implementing detailed mitigation.

6. Q1 2018/19 FINANCE REPORT

The Board considered a report providing an update on the SRA's financial position, as at the end of Quarter 1 of 2018/19.

The report indicated that the SRA had processed delivery partner claims totalling £1,611,000 and that £943,000 of 'approved' Local Partner funding had been set aside for future use as part of project planning to deliver the Sowy/KSD scheme and/or further pioneer dredging. It also referred to committed spend and a proposal for the re-allocation of budget underspend to contingency.

It was acknowledged that the financial position was not as up to date as it could be. This is in part due to issues with how frequently the SRA Partners claim from the SRA for funds to be reimbursed. Some partners claim frequently whilst others only claim once

per year. The Board requested that officers investigate and come forward with proposals to improve the frequency of claims.

A question was raised in relation to the project 'pumping station repairs' and whether this was the most effective use of SRA funding. The SRA Senior Manager agreed to provide further detail on these works to clarify why it was an appropriate use of SRA funds.

As recommended, the SRA Board:

1. Noted the financial performance as at the end of Quarter 1 of 2018/19.
2. Approved the reallocation of £222,390.41 remaining budget from completed actions to contingency.

7. RE-ALLOCATION OF FUNDS

The Board considered a report proposing the re-allocation of contingency funds to:

1. deliver a scheme to improve surface water management in Monksilver that could be progressed this financial year, and
2. a proposal to further support the capital grants scheme programme delivered by FWAG SW.

The Board discussed whether the funds should be used as recommended or alternatively put towards River Sowy improvements, with the following points being raised:

- evidence was requested to support the case for the cumulative/tangible benefits of natural flood management schemes
- the benefit of FWAG SW's programme in raising public awareness of the SRA's aims and objectives was recognised.
- did Board members have sufficient information to be able to properly assess the relative merits of each proposal?
- the funding involved in this request not being enough to address the funding issues for the Sowy in any significant way.
- if the funds involved were allocated to the Sowy they would be held for 12 months rather than being used to deliver schemes this financial year.

Discussion concluded with the Board voting (by 6 votes to 4) in favour of the recommendations and therefore agreeing to support both proposals.

As recommended, the SRA Board:

1. Noted the total value of contingency funds as a result of 2017/18 underspends: £393,033.25.
2. Approved the re-allocation of £170,000 of funds to take forward the Monksilver scheme for project development in 2018/19 and delivery in the 2019/20 financial year.

3. Approved the re-allocation of £85,000 of funds to support an increase in the number of capital grants schemes to be delivered in 2018/19 by the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group SouthWest (FWAG SW).

8. PRECEPTING LEGISLATION

The Chairman said that no progress had been made with the Private Members' Bill (Rivers Authorities and Land Drainage Bill) and that he and the Vice-Chairman had written to the Secretary of State at the Department of Environment, Food & Rural Affairs to request a meeting with an SRA-led delegation of interested parties, without having yet received a reply.

The Chairman indicated that he was following up the matter with the Minister and Somerset MPs and asked Board members to continue to advocate the Board's case.

9. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

It was agreed that the agenda for the next Board meeting should include an update on work to refresh the 20 Year Flood Action Plan by considering what has been achieved, what has still to be completed and whether any changes are required to the original aims and objectives.

The meeting concluded at 11.29am.