

## **Public Questions for the Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA) Board meeting on 8 March 2024**

### **1. From Graham Hill and Brian Masters**

Dear Chairman and Members of the Board,

During the last meeting we noted with interest that the Environment Agency had just completed modelling of the river Brue catchment area.

In 2014 Highways England and the EA carried out a flood events modelling exercise of the Ilchester Mead area with the purpose of informing the scheme design for a solution to the A303 flooding problem there. However, the modelled output from this exercise gave a very poor comparison to reality when compared to the flood event of Christmas Eve 2013. The mechanics of the flooding were incorrect and there was, in general, a large underestimation of the water flows into the Mead area. This resulted in very low confidence amongst residents that the agencies had even a basic grasp of flooding in this area.

A review of the modelling with a team of independent consultants followed in 2015 and the modelling exercise was subsequently deemed to be not fit for purpose. During that review, the Ilchester Mead residents provided the agencies with a large amount of data in the hope that it would be used to improve the modelling in the near future. We have heard nothing back since. As a result, confidence in the flood modelling of this area remains very low among residents, and renewed interest by National Highways in the A303 following recent events are a growing cause for concern.

The question is, therefore, has the flood modelling of the Ilchester Mead area been redone since 2014, either by the EA or National Highways, and can we see it in order to assist in its validation? We make this request with a view to raising the residents confidence in the agencies understanding of flooding in the Ilchester Mead area.

Yours Sincerely,

Graham Hill and Brian Masters on behalf of the residents of Ilchester Mead.

### **2. From Helen Cleaveland**

Good afternoon,

I hope to be able to attend the SRA Board meeting on 8 March to put the following question and comment to the meeting in person (and thank you for affording me the opportunity to do so).

My question relates to item 8 of your agenda for the 8 March 2024 (SRA Strategy and Flood Action Plan). As context I would like to note that I believe we are lucky to have the SRA as a coordinating body in Somerset. My comments are not by way of objection to the proposed SRA strategy but relate to an important point of record. I attended one of the [well attended] public consultation meetings on the draft SRA

strategy and, in the public feedback portion of that meeting, two topics were raised by multiple members of the public attending. There was no push back on the points raised, but neither topic seems to be expressly referred to in the final form of the strategy or consultation summary circulated for agenda item 8:

- The first topic was concern at the increasing and evident local impact of surface water runoff, both agricultural and hard surface run off. The concern was to ensure that better management of run off should fall within the strategy priorities.
- The second was concern that the catchment approach to fund allocation would, *in practice*, disadvantage the contributing ratepayers in the upper and middle catchment areas who also face increasing flooding concerns – especially in the absence of any analysis or comparison with historic fund allocation in the consultation materials, and coupled with the lack of any specific principles to explain how “balance” will be achieved in practice.

The strategy is couched in very generic terms, as were the set feedback questions used in the consultation. The only consultation responses summarised in your board papers are the set answers to those very generic questions. In reality, and based on the meeting I attended, there was a substantial amount of other specific feedback given, which is important given the very wide scope for interpretation of the generic Strategy. It may be that there is an intention to reflect the specific public consultation feedback (including the points summarised above) in the manner in which the strategy is operationally implemented. But equally there is a real risk the specific feedback, which is not expressly included in the written strategy, nor even the consultation summary tabled, will be forgotten and will not inform SRA operational decision making. Institutional memory tends to be more fragile these days and I therefore ask if you would please formally record these two widely supported points raised by the public in the consultation meeting I attended?

If I am unable to attend in person after all, please would you treat this as an email question.

With thanks,

Helen Cleaveland

### **3. From Mark Main**

Good afternoon Mr Rowlands,

Thank you for recording my comments at your last Board meeting (19th January) and your email in response. I have some queries on that response which, if appropriate, can be raised at the forthcoming Board meeting this week (which I regret I am unable to attend) and/or we could take offline from the Board meeting, though you may want to record there is an on-going dialogue.

My comments are made against the background of considerable flooding in the upper Brue catchment, only some of which was referred to in the Brue-Axe paper

published by the SRA last week. In the most recent flooding event, houses flooded in January in Lovington were re-flooded and many roads were impassable along the River Alham tributary of the Brue around Evercreech, Prestleigh, and Alhampton.

I understand from your response that the Brue model approved at the last meeting only relates to the lowland areas (though that was not very clear from the paper attached at the last meeting). But I am confused as to the status of modelling in the Brue catchment at and above Lovington. Your fourth bullet refers to "The modelling for the mid and upper catchment is already well developed." But you also state later in the response that "Should any grant funding proposal come from one of our partners to include any upstream modelling, we will let you know." This suggests one outcome may be no upstream modelling to support upstream investment and I am not clear where that leaves us. Will it not disadvantage the upland catchment when investment is prioritised?

The river Alham is a substantial waterway. I am concerned that the impact of high flows in that waterway (which joins the Brue just above Lovington) are overlooked because it is not adequately monitored. How are flood surges on the Alham monitored? Please would you let me know how we can obtain height and flow statistics for the Alham to monitor any changes against the historic record (and ideally to help monitor imminent flood risk).

I am concerned about the response on run-off in your third bullet. The local impact of run-off is very clearly visible locally but appears not to matter as it does not impact lowland areas. Surely local impact matters? Run off can be managed but the response suggests it is not a priority to manage it because lowland areas are not impacted. But large developments on formerly rural sites do have a significant local run-off impact which we believe merit a high standard of surface water management. If there are studies showing that local flooding impacts from run-off are not significant, I am happy to review them but, in the meantime, we have to believe the evidence of our own eyes and would welcome confirmation that surface water management on new areas of run-off remains a priority.

Lastly, you were clear that the SRA is not an FRMA. How then are concerns such as these relayed to the EA or the Drainage Boards as part of their deliberations and (hopefully urgent, funded) modelling/planning? Or is that up to me as an individual?

Best wishes,

Mark Main

4. From Michael Churches

Dear SRA Board

Having suffered many years of land flooded and trying to farm on the Somerset Levels, it has come to a stage now that if no plans are put in place for the long term

future, then all the years spent farming ( 6 generations ) alongside the abundance of wildlife we also share will be lost for good .

Simple answer and solution is:

Slow the flow down upstream around Bruton and Shepton Mallet, increase the capacity in the rivers and build up the banks by desilting the Division Rhyne, the Sheppey, and North Drain and desilting and clearing debris from the river Brue from Highbridge back to Glastonbury.

Question is:

Why are you wasting money having impact assessments and habit reports when the wildlife is wiped out under three feet of water, a collaborative approach from all parties funding a small amount to fund this and put it back on the maintenance program. When is the work going to start? There are no obstructions on the division Rhyne and our road has been closed for 17 weeks since the beginning of November 2023.

Regards  
Michael Churches  
GODNEY  
WELLS  
SOMERSET

## **5. From Neil Clist**

### **Reference Flood incidents affecting Inaura School Outdoor learning facility.**

Dear Sir / Madam,

I am the Health & Safety Officer & Premises Manager for Inaura school, we are a small school working 1 to 1 with students with SEND MH needs.

We have a site on Lewis drove, Lower Godney, Wells, Somerset, BA51PT.

As part of my role and the school leadership teams desire for answers to the following questions.

Inaura school leadership team ask:

- 1) What has changed to raise our sites flood risk to such an extent we have now flooded for a 4<sup>th</sup> time since November 2022?
- 2) Do the SRA have any information to the causes of these flood incidents?
- 3) What your immediate actions have been and your future plans to mitigate flood risks for this area?

Each incident where we have suffered floods the water level has increased dramatically and despite having classrooms on raised platforms the water has in the latest flood incident been high enough to enter classrooms.

I have been asked to attend your next meeting to see if there will be any information to the causes of these flood incidents and your immediate actions and future plans to mitigate flood risks for this area.

I look forward to hearing your strategies to tackle the issues faced by local homeowners, businesses, farms, and our school site. I hope the plans and actions will be sufficient that Inaura school do not have to relocate from a site I believe is remarkable in it affect for our student body.

I have also included our Head teacher Ian Norton's impact statement which was issued to the Godney parish council at their meeting to discuss the flood events affecting the area.

Sincerely,

Neil Clist  
Health & Safety Officer  
(Neboosh General Certificate in Occupational Health & Safety)  
Inaura the Inclusion Charity  
Registered Charity 1092152  
Registered School 933/6000

Address:

**Inaura School**  
Moorview House  
Riverside  
Burrowbridge  
Somerset TA7 0RB

## **6. From Simon Shimmin**

Good afternoon,

My name is Simon Shimmin and I am the chairman of North Wootton Parish Council.

Yesterday evening during the public session at a Parish Council meeting we had a discussion about flooding in the village. This follows increasingly serious flooding of roads and domestic properties in the village, particularly following Storm Henk on 4<sup>th</sup> January and again in on Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> February. Whilst several houses were flooded on both these days, we did not quite reach the threshold of 10 flooded homes to trigger an automatic review of the reason for the flooding, but we think that is what is needed. Road blockages due to flood water affecting all the routes in and out of the village are a regular problem in the village. There is understandable public concern about what is happening as evidenced by the presence of around 50 villagers at yesterday's meeting.

We were grateful that a number of the authorities involved in the issue, including Bel Deering from SRA and Iain Sturdy from the IDB, responded to my invitation to send representatives to our meeting night. Bel had visited the village the previous Friday to see for herself what has been happening and we were provided with a good deal of helpful information. We are now considering what to do next.

Specifically, Bel and Iain suggested that I attempt to raise the issue in the public session at Friday's SRA Board Meeting, though the published deadline for requesting to speak has passed.

I should therefore be grateful if you would accept this late request to speak to request a proper study of the causes of flooding in North Wootton and proposals for measures to reduce the risks which are no longer tolerable.

As I will need to cancel other arrangements to attend on Friday, I should be grateful for quick advice on whether or not I may attend.

Thank you in anticipation.

Simon Shimmin  
Chairman, North Wootton Parish Council