

**Draft minutes of
Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA) Board Meeting**

held on 24 January 2025

at Somerset Council, Cannard's Grave Road, Shepton Mallet, BA4 5BT

Members of SRA Board:

Cllr Mike Stanton - *Chair*, Somerset Council (SC)
Tony Bradford – *Vice Chair*, Parrett IDB (IDB)
Cllr Mike Caswell, Somerset Council (SC)
Nick Cottle, Somerset Council (SC)
Andrew Gilling, Axe Brue IDB (IDB)
Rebecca Horsington, Parrett IDB (IDB)
Cllr Harry Munt, Somerset Council (SC)
Claire Newill, Natural England (NE)
Cllr Nick O'Donnell, Somerset Council (SC)
Janette Ward, Wessex Regional Flood & Coastal Committee (WRFCC - *substitute*)
Matt Wheeldon, Wessex Water (WW)
Cllr Ros Wyke, Somerset Council (SC)

In Attendance:

Rachel Burden, Environment Agency
Caroline Dunn, Somerset Rivers Authority
Sam Hitchcott, Somerset Council
Jonathan Hudston, Somerset Rivers Authority
Sean Papworth, Somerset Council
David Mitchell, Somerset Rivers Authority
John Rowlands, Somerset Rivers Authority
Iain Sturdy, Somerset Drainage Boards Consortium
Piers Hooper, Environment Agency
Ross Edwards, Environment Agency

Apologies:

Jeff Fear, Axe Brue IDB
David Jenkins, Wessex Regional Flood & Coastal Committee
Ian Withers, Environment Agency
Donna Gowler, Natural England

1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

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Somerset Rivers Authority Chair, Cllr Mike Stanton welcomed Board members and members of the public to the meeting. He also welcomed visitors from Lincolnshire County Council who were attending to observe the Board meeting and visit the Enhanced Water Injection Dredging.

The Chair highlighted that this year was the tenth anniversary of the Somerset Rivers Authority. He noted that Vice-Chair Tony Bradford was present at the first SRA Board meeting on 27 February 2015 as well as Iain Sturdy (Somerset Drainage Boards Consortium) and Rachel Burden (Environment Agency) who was the manager handling the flooding event in 2014.

The Chair welcomed Cllr Nick Cottle (Somerset Council) who replaces Cllr Simon Coles and Nick O'Donnell who replaces Cllr Dixie Darch on the SRA Board.

Apologies were received from Jeff Fear (Axe Brue Internal Drainage Board - IDB) and David Jenkins (Wessex Regional Flood & Coastal Committee) who was substituted by Janette Ward.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

SRA Vice-Chair Tony Bradford declared an interest in Item 11 as an owner of land by King's Sedgemoor Drain.

3. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING 20 SEPTEMBER 2024

The minutes were agreed as accurate.

Matters arising from 20th September meeting.

Cllr Ros Wyke queried why several SRA-funded Somerset Council projects were not completed or had been withdrawn from the programme. She asked for an update on these. David Mitchell (SRA Manager) said that this information was available and he was working towards making it available as a Power Bi report which could be shared online with Board members. Cllr Wyke expressed her concern about the underlying issues leading to projects not proceeding and requested a short explanation as to why these projects were no longer considered worth doing. Sean Papworth (Somerset Council) said that the challenge was finding an organisation with capacity to take the work forward.

Cllr Wyke requested an example of the type of report that would be produced for the Brue Modelling project. Neil Ogilvie (Somerset Council - Lead Local Flood Authority) offered to share a Minehead report. David Mitchell noted that he was waiting confirmation that this could be circulated.

4. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

Three questions were submitted via email to the SRA Board, two of the questions were responded to in person at the Board meeting and one was responded to via email after the meeting. Questions and subjects were:

Cllr William Smart (Wedmore Parish Council) addressed Item 10, River Brue Modelling. He asked how the Board, which was answerable to the taxpayers of

Somerset, could possibly accept the slow progress of the River Brue Modelling project, and another vague update thereupon.

Cllr Jim Reeves (St Cuthbert Out Parish Council) asked the Board questions regarding flood prevention of the River Sheppey adjacent to Stoppers Lane Coxley, in particular maintenance of the river bed under the bridge carrying the A39. He also asked about the proposal to provide a footbridge over the River Sheppey as part of the proposed Multiuser Path adjacent to the Old Railway track between Wells and Glastonbury.

Four questions were submitted by Cllr Richard Evans, Chairman of Godney Parish Council, who was not present at the meeting:

1. It was recognised after the 2014/2015 floods that works were needed on the Brue and money was allocated for such works. How much physical works undertaken on the Brue since the 2014/2015 floods?
2. The drainage system in the immediate area looks to work to remove flood water from surrounding land, what is the overall strategy for the Brue itself. Are we being abandoned? When will the modelling be ready to allow all parties to make proper informed decisions? Can the Board explain how they intend to make informed decision if the modelling for the Brue catchment is not available?
3. The SRA have acknowledged that dredge/desilt of the North Drain is too big a project for a grant from the Community Flood Action Fund, under what mechanism can this be assessed and these vital works be undertaken?
4. While obviously very welcome assistance to our blighted area, with grants of up to £20k only available from the Community Flood Action Fund, how can schemes be funded where the costs for obtaining permits are a significant proportion of the available funds?

The Questions and answers are attached to these minutes in Annexe A, Starting on page 16.

ITEM 5 ADMINISTRATION 2025/26 MEETING DATES

The meeting dates were agreed by members. The Chair reminded Board members that if they were unable to attend a Board meeting they should send their nominated substitute.

As recommended, the Board approved the proposed meeting dates for the financial year 2025-26.

ITEM 6 SRA COMMUNICATIONS UPDATE

Jonathan Hudston (SRA Communications Manager) said the purpose of this Item - usually called 'SRA News' - was to give people a taste of some of the many SRA-funded things occurring which tended not to feature on the rest of the agenda. He said he would cover the period since the last Board meeting on 20 September. Mr Hudston added that he would also say a few words about the last 10 years of the SRA.

Mr Hudston gave brief reports of the River Parrett dredging which was happening throughout January and going well; of natural flood management schemes at Kingston St Mary and Knole; of Trees for Water Action Fund planting sessions at the Diamond Jubilee Wood in Barton St David and at Paddington Farm at the foot of Glastonbury Tor above Splotts Moor; of inspections of Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) on new developments, including one at Castle Cary; and of a wide range of activities countywide involving the SRA's busy community engagement officers, covering subjects such as emergency planning, training in the use and interpretation of SRA-funded localised flood warning systems, and riparian responsibilities.

Mr Hudston then moved on to the origins of the SRA, around 10 years ago. Initial funding was formally agreed on 8 December 2014 between DEFRA and local authorities and Internal Drainage Boards in Somerset, the SRA came quietly into being on 31 January 2015. Mr Hudston said it was well known why the SRA was set up - the main spur was the very bad flooding in the early months of 2014 - but people spoke less about why it was set up *in the way that it was set up*. In summary, the basic reason for this was that going back over decades various post-flood initiatives had been enthusiastically launched, lasted for a while, then faltered. He cited the Parrett Catchment Project which then became the Somerset Water Management Partnership, in the early 2000s, now almost entirely forgotten, though it had lots of good ideas, and had got quite a lot of good things done.

So the idea of setting up the SRA in the way it was set up, was to learn lessons from the past and do things differently this time round. Hence (for example) covering the whole of Somerset, not just one catchment; hence ring-fenced funding enabled through a special mechanism approved by the House of Commons; hence an open, transparent, accountable partnership with its own Memorandum of Understanding and Constitution, public Board meetings, and people able to ask questions.

Mr Hudston said the SRA's main purpose was to get people and organisations working together on additional activities to reduce flooding. over the course of the SRA's existence there had been 250 extra schemes and activities approved and £42 million extra spent. Mr Hudston provided many examples of the work of the SRA that stretched across the whole county.

Mr Hudston acknowledged that not everything had gone to plan. But a lot had been achieved. The SRA had kept going for 10 years where others had previously faltered, and done many things that other places would love to be able to do. Mr Hudston said it was up to all of us to keep making the most of the unique opportunities - and they are unique - that the SRA offers Somerset.

The SRA Chair Cllr Mike Stanton thanked Mr Hudston "for the usual tour de force". For more information about what the SRA had done and intended to do, he recommended the SRA's annual reports, and the SRA Strategy 2024-34 that are available on the SRA website.

The Chair said that working together was an important aspect of what the SRA did, the only place that all its constituent organisations came together in a public forum. This was why the SRA sometimes ended up being asked the kind of questions it was asked, and then had to say, 'well, it is somebody else who is responsible'. But he hoped this process helped people to get to a point where things could be better understood and progress made.

ITEM 7 FINANCE REPORT AND ENHANCED PROGRAMME PERFORMANCE MONITORING.

ITEM 7a 2024-24 Annual Finance Update

Sam Hitchcott, SRA Finance Manager, introduced the paper. She explained that at the start of the year the total available funds were £6,932k, and of this amount £3,853k was carried forward from 2023-24, and £3,079k was raised in the 2024-25 precept. Ms Hitchcott said that at the end of Quarter 2, 5% of funds were forecast to be spent on administration and staffing of the SRA, 2% on core work and development, 5% would be held in contingency and 88% allocated to specific projects and activities within the Enhanced Programme. She said that expenditure during Quarter 2 of 2024-25 was £303,000.

Points raised:

- The Chair asked whether Ms Hitchcott was happy that the level of contingency was sufficient. She replied that she was happy and contingency had increased.

There were no further questions.

As recommended, the Board noted the financial performance as at the end of Quarter 2 of 2024-25.

The Board also approved the re-allocation of funds to contingency as per Part Two.

The Board noted that the Parrett Internal Drainage Board had agreed to re-allocate £100,000 from the original Brock's Pill Rhyne grant allocation for use in the 2025-26 Enhanced Programme Budget, and agreed that the £100,000 would be re-allocated back to that project in 2026-27 financial year.

ITEM 7b Quarter 2 2024-25 Enhanced Programme Performance Monitoring Report.

Caroline Dunn (SRA Project and Performance Officer) introduced the paper. She explained that this report covered Quarter 2 which was July 2024 to September 2024. She explained that this was only the second report of this type and improvements were still being made to find the balance on how much information was included in the paper. Ms Dunn thanked project managers within the partnership for providing the information. She explained that Table A showed an overview of how projects were progressing compared to the milestone dates set at the start. She reported that not all projects have milestones, as some are ongoing activities that report on outputs such as community meetings, council meetings attended etc. Ms Dunn said that the majority of projects within table A had been completed as planned or were on track. She noted that some of the projects are behind by 2-3 years, these were the more concerning ones.

She explained that part 2 of the paper reported on the specific outputs that different projects had delivered in the last quarter. She noted that a scheme is reported as completed, from an SRA perspective, when the final grant claim had been received.

Ms Dunn explained that where there were no outputs under a workstream for this quarter, there would be no reference to the workstream in the outputs table.

The Chair thanked Ms Dunn for her work.

Points raised:

- Cllr Ros Wyke felt that all outputs under each workstream should be reported on for transparency even if none were delivered that quarter. She requested an amendment to the recommendation to not only note the report but recognise that there was further work being done to improve the reporting process and level of detail provided. Cllr Wyke would like an update at the next meeting.
- The Chair agreed that Workstream One, even though there were no outputs delivered from it, should be reported on as it is such a significant part of the spend of the programme (54%).

There were no further questions.

As recommended, the Board noted the overall delivery status of the schemes and activities within the current Enhanced Programme and recognised the ongoing work to improve the performance monitoring information made available to the Board and the public.

8. PROPOSED 2025-26 ENHANCED PROGRAMME AND BUDGET

David Mitchell (SRA Manager) shared a presentation with the Board. He reminded the Board that at this stage they were being asked to *provisionally* approve the 2025-26 Enhanced Programme because it could not be approved until after Somerset Council budget setting, when council tax funding would be confirmed. Mr Mitchell said the appendix for his paper included detailed descriptions of each project proposed for funding.

Mr Mitchell estimated there would be £3,8999,887 available of funding available to the SRA in 2025-26. This was made up of 'shadow' precept which is estimated around £3.1m, use of contingency funds of £767k, and £10,000 from each of the Internal Drainage Boards. He provided an overview of how the funds would be allocated across the various workstreams. He said that for Workstream 1, Dredging and River Management £1.74m was proposed to be allocated which is 54% of the

available funds. Workstream 2, Land Management including NFM, would have £429,00, 13% of the budget, W3 Urban Water Management £365,000, 11% of the budget, W4 Resilient Infrastructure £300,000, 19% of the budget, W5 Building Local resilience £175,000 6% of the budget, and the Community Flood Action Fund (CFAF) would have £200,000 which is 6% of the budget.

Points raised:

- Cllr Ros Wyke asked if the budget had been approved or would this be revisited at a future meeting.
Mr Mitchell said that this was the provisional approval of the budget for next year. The Board would receive a report at the March meeting for final consideration and approval.
- Andrew Gilling (Axe Brue IDB) raised concerns around gully cleansing activities, noting that there was major standing water on parts of the A370 and A38. He said a high volume of traffic used that road including cyclists and asked if there was a chance of actions in the programme addressing this issue? Ms Dunn said that she would confirm via email to Mr Gilling the location of gullies that would receive an extra round of cleaning with SRA funds as this might help to address the issue.
- Claire Newill (Natural England) said that it was good to see that the Enhanced Programme proposed countywide action which aligned with the direction of the new strategy. She noted that the £3m is not going as far as it would have 10 years ago. Ms Newill wondered whether the Board thought there was some work that could be done over the course of the next year, with the help of Technical Group and Management Group, to maximise the benefit of how SRA funds are spent and explore options for securing extra funding for SRA projects.
- The Chair responded to say that he and Mr Mitchell were working with Somerset Council's finance department around the issue of being stuck with the 2016 'precept' levels. However, he was not expecting quick progress on this given the challenges the council is currently facing.

There were no further questions.

9. NATIONAL RAINWATER MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

Matt Wheeldon (Wessex Water) explained that the Chair had invited him to share the Rainwater Management Strategy he had drafted with the Board, as it overlapped

with what was discussed at SRA Board meetings. He noted that the purpose of the paper he had written was to share information, communicate with and influence the policy makers. The strategy has been shared with Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, MGCLG (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government), the Department of Transport and various other Government departments

He reported that rain was a plentiful natural resource in the UK, yet ubiquitously wasted and undervalued. He said that there was no national strategy setting out an effective way of capturing and reusing this precious resource where it lands on impermeable areas such as property roofs and highway. Mr Wheeldon explained that the need for a National Rainwater Management strategy had never been more critical, with climate change leading to a warmer atmosphere, increasing probabilities of weather extremes such as summer droughts and heavy thunderstorms and wetter winters with more flooding.

He explained that a national rainwater strategy would help the nation move from a centralised approach – where most properties were entirely reliant on third parties to provide their water and drainage services, to enabling a more decentralised approach – one which was less reliant on third party provision and encouraged more property level independence and self-sufficiency – thereby flattening maximum demand peaks for water supply and supply peaks for drainage. Mr Wheeldon summarised by saying that until policymakers recognised the systemic nature of issues caused by too little or too much rain, investment would be delivered in silos and would be unlikely to meet the needs of society and the environment with a changing climate. A national rainwater management strategy would provide a framework from which legislative, regulatory and economic barriers could be addressed.

There were no points raised.

10. RIVER BRUE MODELLING UPDATE

Sean Papworth (Somerset Council) reported that this item would provide an update on the progress on the River Brue Modelling and share anticipated timelines for completion. He took his paper as read and highlighted key points. He said that in June 2024, Somerset Council committed to leading on the project and was currently bringing partners together to advance this. Mr Papworth explained that the project itself was split between two modelling initiatives which were: specific downstream

conveyance improvements and taking a whole catchment approach. He referred Board Members to the paper for more detail on each element. Mr Papworth reported that the project launched in January with a kick-off meeting with consultants. He said that the expected completion date for the modelling was August 2025. Mr Papworth said that throughout the modelling phase, a stakeholder group of SRA partner organisations would be set up to review model outputs as they became available. He said that some of the outputs might show there were no, or only limited benefits from some of the proposed interventions whilst others might prove to be more beneficial. He confirmed that there was progress happening and he would provide the Board with updates on progress as it was happening.

Points raised:

- The Chair thanked Mr Papworth for his update and progressing this after long delays.
- Rebecca Horsington (Parrett Internal Drainage Board) asked whether the reference to expected benefits included farmland as well as housing. John Rowlands (Somerset Rivers Authority) said the original EA modelling was concerned with benefits associated with protecting properties and infrastructure. He reported that it was well established that in areas like the River Brue catchment there was not the density of properties and infrastructure to make a strong case for national funding for works. He explained that the options to be modelled through the SRA work could reflect more local priorities. The focus of the project at the moment was to get the modelling moving and get to a position where it would be known what benefits were possible from different scenarios and also what negative impacts there might be.
- The Chair asked how practical it would be to implement the options suggested. Mr Papworth responded to say that the push on the project was to get the modelling completed first. The Chair asked if in August a series of business cases would be produced? Mr Papworth confirmed that it would not be full business cases but technical notes on the modelling work done that could then be used to prepare business cases if that was required.
- Iain Sturdy (Somerset Drainage Boards Consortium) said that there needed to be clear language used when describing this work. He explained the modelling alone would not evidence the economic benefits of modelled scenarios or result in action. Nor would it give indications of environmental mitigations that might be required as a result of interventions. He expected the

model to give information on predicted effects of changes to system but there would be other work required to progress modelled scenarios into actions.

- Cllr Ros Wyke said that this modelling is long awaited and asked if the River Sheppey was included? Mr Papworth said the River Sheppey was included.

11. RIVER SOWY – KING’S SEDGEMOOR DRAIN (KSD) ENHANCEMENT SCHEME

Iain Sturdy (Somerset Drainage Boards Consortium) summarised his paper. He said that in November 2023 the Parrett Internal Drainage Board had £100,000 of funding allocated by the SRA Board to investigate the most cost-effective way to complete Phase 1 of the River Sowey – KSD Enhancements Scheme. He said that this included 1.8km of bank raising on King’s Sedgemoor Drain and improvements to two outfall structures: Chedzoy Tilting Weir and Back Ditch Outfall Structure.

The Internal Drainage Board was reviewing aspects of the bank- raising to ascertain what work still needed to be done, identify current project constraints and investigating ways of removing those or dealing with them in a way that reduces risks, time and cost. Mr Sturdy said that once all information had been assessed, the Parrett IDB would then either prepare a plan for completing bank-raising works or report to the Board that such a plan was not judged to be achievable at reasonable cost, with the support of all SRA partners and regulators.

Mr Sturdy explained that the Parrett IDB was committed to delivering the outfall works and these were progressing well. He expected to be going out to tender for these pieces of work very soon. Mr Sturdy reminded the Board that they had previously approved funding for the outfall works.

The Chair thanked Mr Sturdy for sharing such a positive report.

As recommended, the board noted the progress on the Project Completion plan for the King’s Sedgemoor Drain (KSD) Bank Raising works.

The Board also noted the full allocation of funds to the Parrett Internal Drainage Board (IDB) to the sum of £250,000 should be retained to deliver the outfall works in March/April 2025 as some prices and contracts were yet to be agreed.

12. STRATEGIC RISK REGISTER

Mr Mitchell explained that the Strategic Risk Log was presented to the SRA Board at least once a year and captured projects that had the most pertinent risks at the time. He said that risks were monitored and reported through the Technical Group and project managers and where necessary were escalated to Management Group. Mr Mitchell said that the SRA Management Group retained a strategic risk log that captured risks that were seen to pose a strategic risk to the SRA partnership, risks were then escalated to the SRA Board where necessary. There were currently no risks that required escalation to the Board.

Mr Mitchell said that there was one risk that was recommended for deletion from the risk log which was STRAT06.

There were no questions.

As recommended, the Board reviewed the current risk log.

The Board did not recommend or amend any of the strategic risk log.

13. BRIDGWATER TIDAL BARRIER

Dr Rachel Burden (Environment Agency) highlighted key points from her paper. She said that there was a huge amount of activity happening around the Bridgwater Tidal Barrier site. She explained that in the last month, 834 precast concrete piles had been installed ready for the piling platform substructure for the barrier. She noted that there was lots of work going on engaging with communities and particularly parish councils including Chilton Trinity. She said that there had been a lot of interest around the project, mainly about the construction activities and the piling noise.

Dr Burden reported that the Full Business Case had now been approved by HM Treasury, which made the scheme eligible for FDGIA (Government Flood Defence Grant-in-aid). The project would also require partnership funding which the Environment Agency was continuing to look for. So far £50m of partnership funding had been successfully secured. The approval of the Full Business Case had given the green light for construction to continue. She noted that there was a lot of information about the scheme and progress on a dedicated part of the Somerset Council website and quarterly newsletters were published.

Dr Burden said that the Environment Agency would like to update the Board on this project once a year going forward rather than quarterly as was currently the case. She also discussed the possibility of a co-ordinated site visit to the Bridgwater Tidal Barrier as there was now more to see and there was a viewing platform in place for visitors.

The Chair thanked Dr Burden and said he was happy with the Environment Agency updating the Board annually.

Points raised:

- Mr Bradford said that he was pleased that HM Treasury had approved the Full Business Case. He raised a concern that there would not be contingency if the project went over budget and noted that there should be funds in reserve. He asked whether there was contingency in place with the Treasury top up funds or would this need to be additional?
Dr Burden responded to say that within the overall scheme, as it stands there was a contingency and this was being constantly monitored. She said that there was enough funds within the budget to deliver the project however like with any construction project, there was always a risk that issues might be found on site as works commenced.
- Andrew Gilling (Axe Brue IDB) said that when he was first elected to Sedgemoor District Council in 2002, Bridgwater Tidal Barrier was being discussed back then. At that time, the cost estimate was approximately £12 million in total.

As recommended, the Board approved the request for the Environment Agency to provide an update to the Board annually instead of quarterly.

14 COMMUNITY FLOOD ACTION FUND

Mr Mitchell explained that this was a new fund for small grants and the closing date for first round of submission was 25 February. He said that there had only been two submissions to date, however he was expecting many more applications before the deadline. He said he was aware of lots of conversations taking place within communities about the fund and whether to submit applications. He said that there would be an update at the next Board meeting on 7 March.

Points raised:

- The Chair raised the point he said had also been raised by others, that for some types of actions the process to get permission might be so complex or expensive it did not fit within the confines of the Community Flood Action Fun (CFAF).
- Mr Bradford said the launch of CFAF was likely to generate more questions to the Board as people looked for advice on applications. Would it be possible to direct those questions to the Technical Group instead or guide them in the right direction? Questions came to the Board as people often hit a brick wall when contacting different organisations. Mr Bradford also made a more general point about whether some public questions to the Board could be bettered answered by others to avoid the need to come to the Board and to get an answer more quickly?
- Piers Hooper (Environment Agency) agreed with Mr Bradford's point and noted that the Agency did not have the resources to support individual applications. Coordinating queries through the Technical Group could be helpful.
- The Chair asked if it was intended to give applicants feedback throughout the process? Mr Mitchell said that some limited feedback would be provided.
- Mr Mitchell said that the aim of CFAF was to encourage proposals that were relatively simple and could be done without the need for extensive expert help. He welcomed the suggestion of Technical Group providing guidance and advice for applications but cautioned that would require staff time from the partner organisations. Mr Hooper confirmed he supported the need to be able to filter queries and ensure that applicants did not spend time developing ideas that might not be able to proceed.
- The Chair stated that part of managing this process would be to be able to provide clear and quick 'no' answers to people to avoid wasted effort. Mr Mitchell explained that there was time built into the process for his team to review applications and go back to applicants with queries or explain that what was proposed would not be eligible for CFAF. However, his team did not have the technical knowledge of partner organisations so could not advise on technical matters.
- The Chair added that a lot of goodwill would be required from partners if support were to be given. The SRA needed to be realistic and if it was better to say no, say no.

- Claire Newill (Natural England) said consideration was needed for projects that came forward from a community that wanted to take action but needed a bit of support. She asked how that could be joined up, for example, with community officers or NFM Officers or with projects that were already happening and had resource and could help them. Ms Newill said she would like to see that support where possible.
- Mr Mitchell responded to say he was very supportive of this aspiration but was hesitant to raise expectations of support if that offer could not be resourced. The application process was as light touch as it could be, it might just be best to submit an application and get feedback on it.
- Mr Papworth reiterated the point about CFAF being for simple projects that decisions could be taken on quickly. He suggested that as the CFAF developed there would be a bank of case studies that other applicants could learn from to aid their applications.

15 ANY OTHER BUSINESS (AOB)

There was no other business raised.

The Chair thanked everyone for their attendance including the public for their questions.

APPENDIX A

Question 1

This question addresses the subject of item 10 on this meeting's agenda, River Brue Modelling. Whilst welcoming the activity described, the paper is disappointing in its aspirations, its background and its lack of urgency. The title alone is misleading as it is about modelling when the project is about channel capacity improvement work with modelling merely being a stage in the process. The suggestion that this issue has been ongoing for 'several' years is mendacious when it is now entering its 11th year and this highlights the SRA corporate attitude to the matter. Even in this paper the computer modelling is forecast to take a further 8 months. It is not until 2026/7 that any ground work may commence and that is described as an ideal scenario.

It seems incredible that any public body can entertain with equanimity such a lethargic approach. The Board is simply asked to 'note' the report. My question is; how can the Board which is answerable to the tax payers of Somerset possibly accept yet another vague update. I would ask why it cannot instead note it's considerable dissatisfaction with the painfully slow progress of the project and require the matter be dealt with in a more expeditious manner with shorter achievable deadlines.

The questioner recognises that the principal culprit in this sorry situation is in fact the Environment Agency who, despite having a stated priority to increase the resilience of people, property and businesses to the risks of flooding, decline to undertake channel capacity maintenance of the Brue.

Whilst appreciating that the SRA is only an enabling organisation, and has no capacity to undertake any of the actual work it funds, it still seems incomprehensible that a decade on it has not enabled any 'on the ground' (or perhaps 'in the river') work to be done on this project, whilst spending a large part of the monies awarded. There is little doubt that those working on the project are individually doing their best in difficult circumstances but corporately the performance of the SRA seems to leave much to be desired.

William Smart
Wedmore Parish Council
21 January 2025

RESPONSE

The Chair thanked Mr Smart for his question and said he understood his dissatisfaction with the project's progress. He explained that the work was complicated and the consequences of getting it wrong were serious because places get flooded. The Chair invited John Rowlands (SRA Technical Advisor) to provide a response. Mr Rowlands said it was challenging to deliver works on the Somerset Levels and Moors. He said that any action has a reaction and the SRA Board had to acknowledge that there were numerous challenges to ensure that works would not prove detrimental elsewhere. He reported that things were moving forward and we are better off now than we were 10 years ago even though this project had not yet resulted in works on the ground.

Mr Bradford said that for a number of years he had sat on the SRA Board and at times felt quite embarrassed at the amount of work undertaken on the River Parrett whilst the SRA had not been able to do similar on the River Brue.

Cllr Wyke said that it was important that rivers are not considered in isolation. For example, whatever happens on the Brue would have a huge effect on the Sheppey and she thought people should be thinking about the whole Brue catchment rather than just the River Brue.

Mr Papworth apologised that the title of the paper was not in keeping with where the project was moving. He reported that in the next eight months, the project team would play an active role in shaping the works so that solutions could be brought forward. He said he understood the frustration from local communities on this matter.

Question 2

Dear Sir/Madam

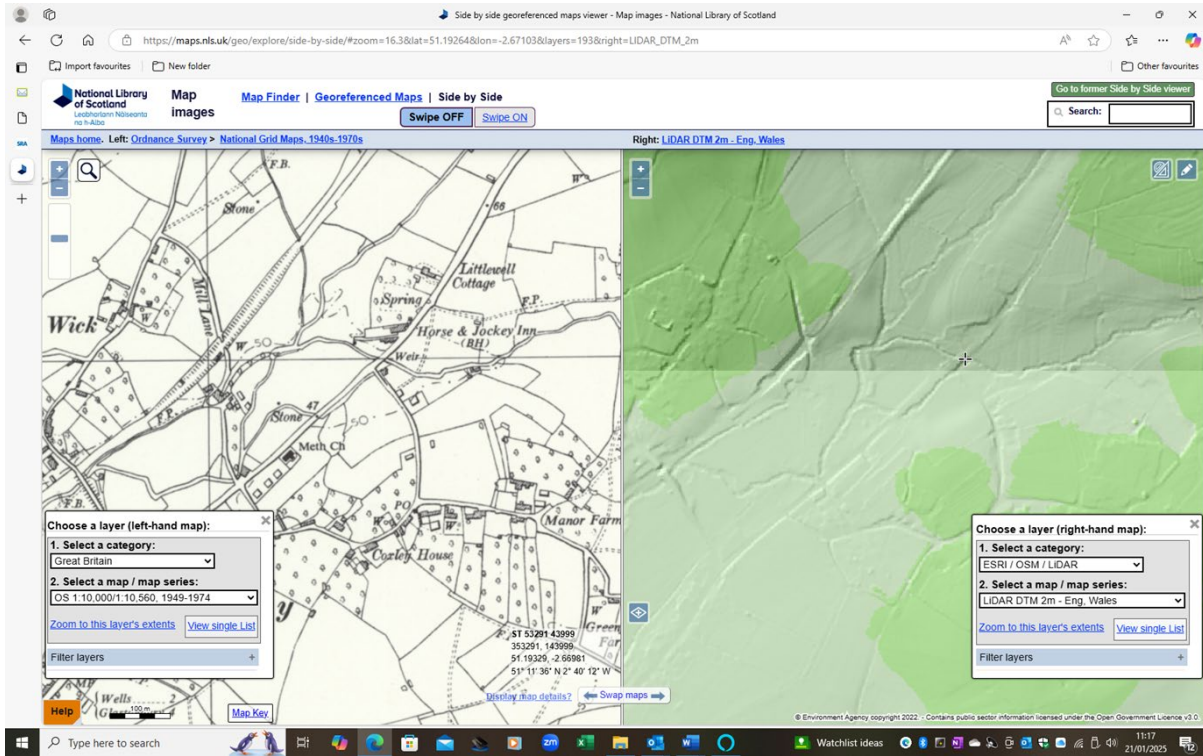
I wish to speak on two matters

1. Flood prevention of the River Sheppey adjacent to Stoppers Lane Coxley in particular maintenance of the river bed under the bridge carrying the A39 at Grid ST 5329 4400.
 - a. The problem is that the River Sheppey splits at this point. Part goes parallel to the road going south west for a couple of hundred yards before

it goes under the Glastonbury Road at Grid ST 5317 4390. The other portion should go under the road at this point. See attached Side by Side Document showing a 1:10,000 OS map and associated Lidar scan. This waterway is also clearly shown on maps predating the first war.

- b. When the river is in flood there is not enough capacity in the primary route to cope with the water. This secondary route should relieve the pressure at this point. The attached photos show the level of silt under the bridge in normal conditions and the fact that the bridge under Stoppers Lane a few meters downstream is not capable of taking the flow in times of flood causing a back up and flooding properties at the western end of Stoppers Lane.
 - c. The waterway under that bridge has been there at least 150 years but what is uncertain is who has the responsibility to clear the silt under the bridge?
 - d. This subject has been raised at Wells and Rural LCN meetings and with Dr Bel Deering, Community Engagement Officer – Somerset Rivers Authority
2. Proposal to provide a footbridge over the River Sheppey at Grid ST 5295 4379 as part of the proposed Multi User Path adjacent to the Old Railway track between Wells and Glastonbury.
- a. There are proposals and money provided by the (ex-) Mendip District Council to provide a footbridge between St Cuthbert Out Parish Council (SCO) owned Coxley playing field and land owned by Coxley Community Land Trust (CCLT).
 - b. The initial aim is to provide a Multi User Path between Burcott Lane and Mill Lane via
 - i. a field owned by the Blue School (and hopefully leased to SCO)
 - ii. CCLT land
 - iii. SCO owned Coxley Recreation ground
 - iv. There would be a footbridge between the CCLT land Coxley Recreation Ground.
 - c. Would SRA have any concerns about such a bridge?

Regards
Jim





RESPONSE via email 07.02.2025

Mr Reeves

Apologies for delay in responding.

As discussed at the SRA Board meeting on 24th January 2025, I have been in contact with Somerset Council's Structures team who have supplied me with the following answer.

1c - who has the responsibility to clear the silt under the bridge?

Somerset Council (Highways) are responsible for clearing silt beneath this bridge. However, Somerset Council (SC) will not consider removing silt beneath the bridge until riparian owner's clear silt on both sides of the structure to ensure that there is no restriction to flow. SC have in the past cleared silt just beneath their structures without the upstream and downstream channels being cleared and in the first major water flow most of the silt returned giving very short-term benefit.

Any silt removal works whether done by SC or riparian owners would need to be approved and consented to by the SC Flood team.

2b - would SRA have any concerns about such a bridge?

As explained at the Board meeting a verbal response was given highlighting that the SRA is not a Flood Risk Management Authority and cannot comment on the bridge proposal. This would come under the remit of the Environment Agency if the watercourse is designated as "main river" or SC Flood Team if "non main river"

I will copy Wells and Rural LCN meetings and Dr Bel Deering for information.

Regards

John Rowlands

Question 3

Dear Sir/Madam

Godney Parish Council wishes to ask the following questions of the Board (under item 4 of the agenda) at the meeting on 24th January:

1. It was recognised after the 2014/2015 floods that works were needed on the Brue and money was allocated for such works. How much physical works undertaken on the Brue since the 2014/2015 floods?
2. It is clear from our understanding of the drainage system in our immediate area that while we can look at works to help remove flood water from land surrounding the North Drain, Sheppey and Division Rhyne, without works to take this water onwards it would be of little benefit. What is the overall strategy for the Brue itself? Are we to be abandoned? When will the modelling be ready to allow all parties to make properly informed decisions? Can the Board explain how they intend to make informed decisions if the modelling for the Brue catchment is not available?
3. While it is recognised that the modelling of the Brue and the Brue catchment as a whole is not available, the importance of removing water away from Godney via the North Drain, as one of the three main rivers, would appear to be clear. However, as the SRA have acknowledged that deveg/desilt of the North Drain is too big a project for a grant from the Community Flood Action Fund, under what mechanism can this can be assessed and these vital works be undertaken?
4. While obviously very welcome assistance to our blighted area, with grants of up to £20k only available from the Community Flood Action Fund, how can schemes be funded where the costs for obtaining permits are a significant proportion of the available funds? To obtain the necessary permits, we are being requested by the EA to undertake significant ecological and topographical surveys of Decoy Rhyne, which is in a desperate state due to lack of maintenance and is causing significant flooding of both land and properties. Are we to apply for two grants; one just to obtain an appropriate permit and a second to undertake the actual work?

Unfortunately, I am unable to attend in person on the day, due to work commitments, but there will be a number of members of the Council's Flood Working Group, Friends of Godney, will be in attendance.

Kind regards

Richard Evans

RESPONSE via email sent 06.02.2025

Richard

Further to my email of 30th January. Apologies for the delay.

We sought responses from the Environment Agency (EA) and the Axe/Brue Internal Drainage Board. To date we have only received a response from the EA and these are appended to your questions. I have indicated in bold where the response is from the EA and where it is from me (SRA).

1. It was recognised after the 2014/2015 floods that works were needed on the Brue and money was allocated for such works. How much physical works undertaken on the Brue since the 2014/2015 floods?

Environment Agency: Risk management authorities have undertaken planned maintenance activity throughout the catchment with the limited funding they have available. With respect to dredging, the Environment Agency cannot secure funding for widespread dredging due to the sparse population in this landscape. You can find the Environment Agency's position on dredging [here](#). To maintain good conveyance the Environment Agency carries out an annual programme of routine maintenance which includes weed and grass cutting. We focus our resources on the highest flood risk areas. We want to do as much as we can to reduce flood risk, but as usual, won't be able to do everything we'd like to, or that customers and partners may expect us to. We do 120km of machine channel clearance every year across Somerset and inspect and operate several hundred assets 24/7. We invest around £3-4m each year in conditioning assets as well as c£5m year operating and maintaining them, and responding to incidents, which, protects many thousands of homes and business across the county. In the Brue catchment in recent years locations the EA has undertaken works include at Gold Corner PS, North Drain PS, Bruton Flood Storage, Hackness Sluice, Highbridge Clyce, the Cripps River, Glastonbury Millstream, and the Sheppey in Shepton Mallet.

2. It is clear from our understanding of the drainage system in our immediate area that while we can look at works to help remove flood water from land surrounding the North Drain, Sheppey and Division Rhyne, without works to take this water onwards it would be of little benefit. What is the overall strategy for the Brue itself? Are we to be abandoned? When will the modelling

be ready to allow all parties to make properly informed decisions? Can the Board explain how they intend to make informed decisions if the modelling for the Brue catchment is not available?

Environment Agency: The different modelling scenarios are expected to be run this summer, this information will inform decisions on what work is most beneficial in high flow conditions on the river Brue. Armed with this information risk management authorities will make informed decisions and prioritise actions appropriately. The SRA will consider any bids for funding based on their merits.

SRA: The SRA is a partnership of organisations with the expertise and statutory powers to assess and manage flood risk. The SRA Board takes decisions based upon the advice and recommendations of these partner organisations. Applications to the SRA for funding are assessed by officers from the partner organisations based upon the information provided; modelling is not always required to inform decisions. However, in some instances where there is uncertainty about the balance between the benefits of an action and the negative impacts, modelling is an important tool to inform decisions. The SRA has funded modelling of the River Brue to better understand what is and is not possible.

3. While it is recognised that the modelling of the Brue and the Brue catchment as a whole is not available, the importance of removing water away from Godney via the North Drain, as one of the three main rivers, would appear to be clear. However, as the SRA have acknowledged that deveg/desilt of the North Drain is too big a project for a grant from the Community Flood Action Fund, under what mechanism can this can be assessed and these vital works be undertaken?

Environment Agency: The Environment Agency has discretionary powers to carry out work on main rivers. In some locations, using permissive powers, the Environment Agency has previously carried out routine maintenance and vegetation management on behalf of the riparian owner. Ultimately the responsibility of the maintenance of main rivers and ordinary watercourses falls to the watercourse owner. All riparian landowners have a right to protect their property from flooding and erosion. Please use the following link for further information: [Owning a watercourse - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

4. While obviously very welcome assistance to our blighted area, with grants of up to £20k only available from the Community Flood Action Fund, how can

schemes be funded where the costs for obtaining permits are a significant proportion of the available funds? To obtain the necessary permits, we are being requested by the EA to undertake significant ecological and topographical surveys of Decoy Rhyne, which is in a desperate state due to lack of maintenance and is causing significant flooding of both land and properties. Are we to apply for two grants; one just to obtain an appropriate permit and a second to undertake the actual work?

Environment Agency: EA have recently written with adjusted guidance via the flood risk activity permit process to help streamline surveys.

Regards
David
David Mitchell