

## ITEM 8b

### **Somerset Rivers Authority Board Paper**

### **Act to Adapt – Climate Resilience and Community Support: top-up funding request**

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

The Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA) Board is asked to:

- Approve a top-up funding request of £40,000 for the continued support of the Act to Adapt project to enhance community resilience.

#### **Purpose of the item**

To request additional funding to enable the Climate Adaptation Officer role to continue working on the Act to Adapt programme, run by Somerset Wildlife Trust, until March 2026, ensuring ongoing support for community resilience against climate-driven flood risks, in line with the Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA) strategy to build resilience and encourage adaptation.

#### **Background and context**

The original funding of £75,000 for the previously named Adapting Somerset was agreed at the SRA Board Meeting on 8 March 2024 for the 2024-25 Enhanced Programme. This funding has been instrumental in delivering climate adaptation awareness and support to communities across Somerset. With this investment, we have completed Climate Adaptation Plans for five communities (Glastonbury, The Polden Hills, Minehead, Burnham-on-Sea and Highbridge and the Under Hamdon Parishes) and have three more in progress (Wells, Frome, and Spaxton).

In Glastonbury, these plans have led to community actions such as the installation of semi-permeable membrane pathways that reduce surface water runoff by allowing rainwater to penetrate into the ground rather than contributing to flooding. The Red Brick Building project is establishing effective wildlife corridors through strategic meadow seeding, creating natural infrastructure that both supports biodiversity and improves water absorption capacity. At Bridies Farm, workshops have equipped community members with practical adaptation skills in creating rain gardens, harvesting rainwater, and building green roofs using upcycled materials.

In the Polden Hills, Shapwick Parish Council are improving flood resilience by planting trees and wildflowers, while Catcott Primary School has created a climate-resilient garden with a diverse mixture of trees, shrubs, vegetables, and herbs that helps manage water flow during heavy rainfall events.

Meanwhile, Burnham-on-Sea and Highbridge have developed a comprehensive tree strategy and implemented sustainable planting initiatives that increase urban tree

canopy and improve natural water management as central components of their Climate Action Plan 2025.

Given the current gaps in knowledge and understanding about climate-driven flood risks, many communities respond reactively to flood events. This reactive approach often leads to greater damage and higher recovery costs. To prevent similar impacts in other communities, proactive adaptation planning is essential. This aligns with the SRA's core principles of working with communities, building resilience, and encouraging adaptation.

Excellent engagement work has already been done in some vulnerable communities by the Environment Agency and Somerset Council, increasing local resilience through activities like establishing flood warden schemes. Through Adapting the Levels, 'Adaptation Pathways' were co-created for Wedmore and Langport: to our knowledge, the first adaptation plans for communities in Somerset. Additionally, the Act to Adapt team produced the Climate Adaptation Toolkit, which was sent to all parish/town councils in Somerset, with some targeted work in communities done in 2023-24 thanks to SRA funding. This toolkit has proven valuable not simply as an information source, but as a catalyst for communities to reach out proactively seeking climate adaptation advice. Several communities have specifically requested to be part of the Act to Adapt process after receiving the toolkit, demonstrating its effectiveness in stimulating local climate action and adaptation planning. We are also working toward creating resources to allow communities to create Climate Adaptation plans with less contact time needed.

There is increasing demand for this type of support, with communities contacting the Act to Adapt project team to enquire about how they can create their own adaptation plans and whether the project team is available to support them in this process. This interest is likely to increase with recent extreme weather events in the UK and around the world resulting in heightened public concern about the climate emergency and a greater desire to take action.

Currently, time and resources are the limiting factors; further funding support will enable engagement with more communities, resulting in more climate adaptation plans being developed and actions implemented.

### **Latest status**

Thanks to funding from the SRA the Act to Adapt team have undertaken the following:

Completed Adaptation Action Plans:

- Glastonbury - 2024
- The Polden Hills (our first area / multi-community based plan) - 2024
- Minehead and Burnham/Highbridge (under separate funding) – 2024-25
- Under Hamdon Parishes – May 2025

Plans due to officially launch in the near future:

- Wells – 14 June 2025
- Spaxton – June-July 2025

Communities starting the process:

- Frome – 13 May - over 120 people booked to attend this event

More details on the plans and the process we use to engage with communities can be found here: <https://www.somersetwildlife.org/act-to-adapt>

These efforts have significantly contributed to increasing community resilience and adaptation to climate change, as evidenced by our engagement metrics which show a total of 1,107 people actively engaged across all communities. Through workshops, in-person consultations, online surveys, and launch events, we have raised awareness and action at the community level. While projects are still in early implementation stages (with the first plan only launching in August last year), this level of community involvement represents a fundamental shift in awareness and capacity that underpins resilience. The community-led initiatives that have emerged from these plans—from sustainable planting and tree strategies to rainwater management solutions—demonstrate how this grassroots approach is helping communities take ownership of their adaptation journey, in line with the SRA's objectives to reduce flood risks and impacts, maintain access during floods, and protect the economy and environment.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

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**Date:** 8 May 2025

**Author:** Steve Mewes, Local Nature Partnership Coordinator and Advocacy Manager