

ITEM 11

Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA) Board Paper

River Parrett Water Injection Dredging (WID) with Enhanced Shoulder Works – 2025-26 Tender Update and top-up funding request

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA) Board is asked:

1. To approve an uplift in the grant allocation for this project in the 2025-26 financial year from £650,000 to £775,000.
2. To indicate their willingness in principle to continue funding Water Injection Dredging (WID) work on the River Parrett for the duration of a new 5-year contract.

Purpose of the item

To update the Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA) Board on the outcomes of the re-tendering of the Water Injection Dredging (WID) contract, including mechanically mobilising upper bank siltation following the successful trials in 2023-24 and 2024-25.

Background and context

Water Injection Dredging has been established as an effective and environmentally sensitive method of maintaining sediment mobility and thereby flow capacity within the River Parrett since trials began in 2016 under HR Wallingford oversight. It continues to offer significant cost and ecological advantages over traditional dredging methods.

In addition, it is evident that persistent vegetation on the banks traps tidal silt and reinforces upper bank deposits, which WID alone struggles to mobilise effectively. An enhanced dredging approach – combining WID with mechanical mobilisation of upper bank material – was successfully trialled again in 2024-25, building on the initial success of the 2023-24 campaign.

The previous 5-year WID contract with Van Oord, originally awarded in 2018, was extended through 2023-24 and 2024-25. A new tender process has now been undertaken for a further five-year initial term commencing winter 2025-26, incorporating both WID and mechanical upper bank material mobilisation.

Tender process

- Tenders were sought via the Southwest Tendering Portal, with initial expressions of interest invited.
- Full tender documentation was issued to interested parties.
- Tenders were received and opened on the due date.
- Assessment was undertaken using the published weighted criteria by IDB officers.
- Following assessment, a recommendation was made to the Internal Drainage Board (IDB) Chief Executive Officer (CEO) to propose Van Oord as the preferred contractor.
- The Internal Drainage Board CEO will recommend to the Parrett IDB that it should be the Contracting Authority for this work.

Next steps

A resolution will be proposed to the next Parrett IDB Finance and Works committee meeting on 21 October 2025 to award the new 5-year contract to Van Oord, who submitted the most advantageous tender and have demonstrated proven capability through previous campaigns.

However, for the Parrett IDB to commit to a 5-year contract, its members will need assurance that adequate funding for the contract work and its project management costs will be provided by the SRA for each year of the contract. The SRA Board are asked to indicate their willingness in principle to continue funding WID work on the River Parrett for the 5-year duration of the contract.

The contract is structured for annual renewal, indexed to the Consumer Price Index (CPI). Each year's dredging campaign will be instructed annually, i.e. no financial commitment beyond each year's instruction. However, future years' work will depend on continued grant funding from the SRA which will be applied for each year. At the end of the five-year term, the contract may be renegotiated, but there is no obligation to do so if terms are deemed unfavourable.

It is understood that all that can be provided is in principle support as any decision taken by the current Board cannot bind a future Board and also recognising that SRA funding is confirmed on an annual basis as part of council tax setting by Somerset Council.

Top-up funding request

A grant from the SRA for 2025-26 work is in place, however costs were estimated at the time of application, September 2024, and recent review has indicated a need to increase that grant from £650,000 to £775,000 to undertake this year's work. This cost increase reflects:

- Increased operating costs as captured in the tender returns

- Expanded scope of works including mechanical mobilisation of silt
- Additional client-side project management and technical support costs

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Date: 4 September 2025

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