

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

held on 6 June 2025

at Somerset Council Offices, Bridgwater House, Bridgwater, TA6 3AR

Members of SRA Board:

Cllr Mike Stanton - *Chair*, Somerset Council
Tony Bradford – *Vice Chair*, Parrett Internal Drainage Board (IDB)
Cllr Steve Ashton, Somerset Council
Cllr Mike Caswell, Somerset Council
Cllr Ben Ferguson, Somerset Council (*substitute*)
Andrew Gilling, Axe Brue IDB
Piers Hooper, Environment Agency (*substitute*)
Rebecca Horsington, Parrett IDB
David Jenkins, Wessex Regional Flood & Coastal Committee
Claire Newill, Natural England
Cllr Nick O'Donnell, Somerset Council
Vicky Farwig, Wessex Water (*substitute*)
Trevor Whitcombe, Axe Brue IDB
Cllr Ros Wyke, Somerset Council

In Attendance:

Nicola Dawson, Somerset Council
Bel Deering, Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA)
James Divall, Somerset Council
Caroline Dunn, Somerset Rivers Authority
Ross Edwards, Environment Agency
Alex Farris, Exmoor National Park Authority
Amanda Gallacher, Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group SouthWest (FWAG SW)
Sam Hitchcott, Somerset Council
Jonathan Hudston, SRA
Alasdair Maxwell, Environment Agency
Steve Mewes, Somerset Wildlife Trust
David Mitchell, SRA
Iain Sturdy, Somerset Drainage Boards Consortium
Hugo van Dorssen, FWAG SW
Andy Wallis, A W Water Engineering

Apologies:

Matt Wheeldon, Wessex Water
Cllr Nick Cottle, Somerset Council
Donna Gowler, Natural England
Neil Ogilvie, Somerset Council

ITEM 1 WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

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Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA) Chair Cllr Mike Stanton welcomed Board members and members of the public to the meeting at Bridgwater House, Bridgwater.

He welcomed Cllr Steve Ashton who joined the SRA Board replacing Cllr Harry Munt.

Apologies were received from Matt Wheeldon (Wessex Water), who was substituted by Vicky Farwig, Cllr Nick Cottle (Somerset Council), who was substituted by Cllr Ben Ferguson, and officer Neil Ogilvie (Somerset Council).

The Chair spoke about the recent passing away of Jeff Fear (Axe Brue IDB) who had been a member of the Somerset Rivers Authority Board since it began in 2015. He said that Mr Fear had chaired the Axe Brue Internal Drainage Board for many years, which was not an easy task, and had to face difficult challenges which he dealt with very well.

SRA Vice-Chair Tony Bradford said that there was not enough time to sum up what Jeff Fear had brought to the water and drainage industry. He was a leading light in the amalgamation of the Axe Brue Internal Drainage Board, a founding member of the Somerset Rivers Authority and Vice-Chair of the Somerset Drainage Boards Consortium since its inception. Mr Bradford described Mr Fear as always being helpful and very supportive. He could not speak highly enough of him, and the amount of time he gave to the Drainage Boards and Somerset Rivers Authority. He never missed a meeting and was a dedicated member of both organisations. His knowledge and experience of drainage on the Somerset Levels was second to none. Mr Bradford ended by saying that Mr Fear was a wonderful man who would be missed dearly.

David Jenkins (Wessex Regional Flood and Coastal Committee) said that he had known Jeff Fear since the inception of the SRA Board and had always found him a gentleman and courteous to others: even if he strongly disagreed with a point being made, he would forthrightly express his views but always in a courteous way. Mr Jenkins said that, in his experience, Mr Fear had two great strengths as a Board member, he never spoke unless he had something worthwhile to say, and anything he did say was always to the point and worth listening to. Mr Jenkins said he would be greatly missed.

Andrew Gilling (Axe Brue IDB) said he had known Mr Fear for many years. His first meeting with him was when Mr Gilling joined the Highbridge Young Farmers Club of which Mr Fear was also a member. Mr Gilling said that Mr Fear had played an influential part in his life, and he was very proud to have known him.

ITEM 2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Tony Bradford declared an interest in anything that was related to the King's Sedgemoor Drain as he owned land on both sides of it.

The Chair said that he had been appointed Somerset Council's representative on the Wessex Regional Flood & Coastal Committee.

ITEM A ASSOCIATION OF DRAINAGE AUTHORITIES (ADA) BOARD OF DIRECTORS ELECTIONS

Cllr Mike Stanton left the room while this item was discussed.

David Mitchell, Somerset Rivers Authority Senior Manager, explained that the Association of Drainage Authorities (ADA) was holding an election for a vacancy for a Local Authority representative to sit on its Board of Directors. The SRA Chair, Cllr Mike Stanton, had submitted an Expression of Interest for this position.

Mr Mitchell said that as the SRA is an ADA Member, it could vote in this election.

Mr Mitchell clarified that Cllr Stanton could stand for election as he is a councillor. The ADA position is to represent the views of local authorities. Mr Mitchell asked Board members if they agreed to use the SRA vote to support Cllr Stanton's bid to be elected to the ADA Board. Mr Mitchell said that the vote had to be submitted by 12pm that day.

David Jenkins (Wessex Regional Flood & Coastal Committee) said that he himself had been an ADA Board member. He suggested that having a Somerset representative on the ADA Board would ensure that water management issues in Somerset are well represented at ADA Board meetings.

Rebecca Horsington (Parrett IDB) echoed Mr Jenkins' words. She said she currently sat on the ADA Board and it would be valuable to have another representative from the South West.

SRA Board members supported Councillor Mike Stanton's bid to be elected to the Association of Drainage Authorities' Board as a Local Authority Representative by

instructing the SRA Senior Manager to submit a vote for him by 12pm on Friday 6 June. There was one vote against supporting the recommendation.

ITEM 3 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING 7 MARCH 2025

Andrew Gilling said that he had attended the SRA Board meeting on 7 March, but he was down as having sent his apologies.

The minutes were agreed as accurate, subject to Mr Gilling's attendance being corrected.

ITEM 4 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

One question was submitted via email to the SRA Board, by Wedmore parish councillor Bill Smart, referring to agenda item 11.

Cllr Bill Smart's question was responded to in person at the Board Meeting, as Cllr Smart was present.

For the question and the answer, see Appendix A to these minutes, page 18.

ITEM 5 COMMUNITY FLOOD ACTION FUND (CFAF) UPDATE

David Mitchell told the Board about the first round of applications to the new SRA Community Flood Action Fund (CFAF). Mr Mitchell said the CFAF review panel had met on 1 April 2025, and approved seven applications, with a total value of approximately £77,000. This left around £123,000 of the £200,000 that the SRA Board had previously agreed to set aside for CFAF.

Mr Mitchell said the closing date for the second round of CFAF applications had been 27 May, and five applications had been received with a total value of around £61,000. The next CFAF review panel meeting was scheduled for 1 July 2025.

The Chair said that he thought CFAF was one of the most important initiatives that the SRA had undertaken.

ITEM 6 SRA ANNUAL REPORT 2024-25

Jonathan Hudston, SRA Communications Manager, presented the Board with the draft SRA Annual Report 2024-25. He explained that SRA annual reports had been produced for the last 10 years and aimed to capture all SRA activities, achievements and challenges for the year in a concise, accessible format. He noted that he had condensed a large volume of supporting documents and data into 48 pages. Mr Hudston said that the timetable for completing the report had been tight and thanked all for taking part and providing information to him within a short timeframe. He noted that the report included a foreword by the Chair which reflected on the tenth anniversary of the SRA, its origins and the importance of managing water close to where it lands. Mr Hudston emphasised that every word in SRA annual reports was scrutinised for accuracy and clarity, with the aim of satisfying both lay readers and experts.

Points raised:

- David Jenkins congratulated all involved in putting the annual report together. He suggested that a list of SRA Board members should be included for public accountability. Mr Hudston said that he had prepared a page in which Board members were named, but he would like the Board's view on whether the list called for should include Board members who were in office over the course of the year, or only those who were in office at the time of publication. It was agreed that the list should include all Board members who were in office during the year.

As recommended, the SRA Board reviewed and provided comments on the Somerset Rivers Authority Annual Report 2024-25.

The Board also approved the publication of the Somerset Rivers Authority Annual Report 2024-25 with the proviso that the names of all Board Members who were on the Board during the 2024-15 financial year should be added to the Annual Report before its formal publication.

ITEM 7 FINANCE REPORT AND ENHANCED PROGRAMME PERFORMANCE MONITORING

ITEM 7A QUARTER 4 2024-25 FINANCE REPORT

Sam Hitchcott, SRA Finance Manager, introduced her paper. She explained that at the start of the 2024-25 year, total available funds had been £6,932,000, and of this amount £3,853,000 had been carried forward from 2023-24, and £3,079,000 was raised in the 2024-25 precept.

Ms Hitchcott said that at the end of Quarter 4, 5% of funds were forecast to be spent on administration and staffing of the SRA, 1% on core work and development, 12% would be held in contingency and 82% was allocated to specific projects and activities within the Enhanced Programme. Ms Hitchcott said that expenditure during Quarter 4 of 2024-25 was £1,222,000.

Ms Hitchcott said that spending in 2024-25 had turned out to significantly less than had been forecast at the beginning of the financial year. Reasons included projects taking longer than expected to deliver, and additional time needing to be allowed for consents and permissions to be in place.

David Mitchell emphasised the point made by Ms Hitchcott by referring to section 1A in the spend profile summary and the discrepancy between what had been forecast to be claimed and what was actually claimed during the year. The difference was approximately £2.1m. He requested more accuracy from partners when submitting forecasts for the year, even if that meant being less optimistic about what would be achieved.

Points raised:

- David Jenkins commended Ms Hitchcott and colleagues for reducing the complexity of SRA finance reports and making them clearer. He referred to figures in 7a which showed that 5% of funds were spent on SRA administration and staffing. He said the Board should continue to focus on keeping this figure at 5% and ensure it does not rise. He noted that if the SRA became a precepting authority, then the figure would likely increase. He suggested that this figure should be monitored.

- The SRA Chair said the problem causing the percentage to increase was that the SRA's income was not keeping in line with inflation, therefore admin and staff costs would inevitably go up year on year a proportion of the funding.
- Cllr Ros Wyke said that it was important to recognise that the SRA's income is quite precarious, as it has to be confirmed on an annual basis and this situation is unlikely to change. She said the SRA needs to be mindful that the residents of Somerset are contributing to the SRA directly through council tax, so it is important to monitor closely what funds are spent on. The Chair thanked Cllr Wyke and noted that this was a frequently raised issue.

As recommended, the SRA Board noted the SRA's financial performance as at the end of Quarter 4 of 2024-25.

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

ITEM 7b FINANCE UPDATE: 2025-26 FINANCE SUMMARY

Sam Hitchcott said the paper set out the financial position of the SRA as at 1 April 2025. For 2025-26, £3,112,900 has been raised through council tax for the Somerset Rivers Authority's 'shadow precept'. £20,000 is contributed by the Parrett & Axe Brue Internal Drainage Boards. So, £3,132,900 is the total income from new funds for 2025-26. The new funds get added to the SRA's contingency (£983,100) and to SRA funds carried forward from 2024-25 into 2025-26 (£3,149,000). The 'carry forward' funds are allocated to projects that are underway.

This means that 'all funds' - for use by the SRA in 2025-26 and beyond totals £7,265,000.

Points raised:

- Cllr Ros Wyke said that in previous meetings she had always requested more information about the SRA's finances: she had noticed that there was an improvement every time, and she thanked Ms Hitchcott for this.

As recommended, the SRA Board noted the financial position of the SRA as at 1 April 2025.

ITEM 7c QUARTER 3 24-25 ENHANCED PROGRAMME PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT

Caroline Dunn, SRA Project and Performance Officer, presented her paper. She said it gave an overview of 2024-25 Quarter 4 figures as well as reporting for the whole financial year. She reminded members that every SRA-funded project had four milestones, and Section 1 of her paper summarised projects' progress and delivery against those original time scales.

Ms Dunn said Section 2 of the report was about completed schemes. Nineteen schemes were completed.

She noted that at the time of report publication, there was some data unavailable so that needs to be updated after the meeting.

Ms Dunn explained that as this Quarter's report was the final report about the year 2024-25, Section 3 included some metrics that have to be reported annually, notably the total number of schemes and activities funded year-on-year. Table E provided an overview of the number of schemes and activities that the SRA had delivered since its inception, including the funding source used.

Ms Dunn thanked budget holders and project managers for providing information.

Points raised:

- Claire Newill (Natural England) commented that Table G underestimated the amount of partnership working that actually went in to all SRA projects. There might not always be formal partnerships but many projects involved SRA partners helping each other. Ms Dunn noted the feedback and said that she would elaborate on this and explain this differently for the next paper.
- Cllr Ros Wyke said that she would find it useful to see more detail on projects from each of the partner agencies so that the Board was able to see each partner's overall contribution. Mr Mitchell said that the use of Power Bi for reporting purposes would allow Board Members to access more detailed information. Mr Mitchell said he was aiming to make this available by the next Board meeting.

As recommended, the SRA Board noted the overall delivery status of the schemes and activities within the current SRA Enhanced Programme for Quarter 4 2024-25 and the whole year 2024-25.

ITEM 8 GRANT AMENDMENT AND TOP-UP FUNDING REQUESTS

ITEM 8A UPPER BARLE RESTORATION

Alex Farris (Exmoor National Park Authority - ENPA) presented his paper to the Board. He said that at the SRA Board meeting on 7 March 2025, as part of the SRA's 2025-26 Enhanced Programme, members had allocated ENPA £105,000 for the development phase of an Upper Barle restoration project. Mr Farris said that after this SRA grant had been awarded, ENPA had also received an offer of funding for the project development phase from the Water Restoration Grant. He said this raised the possibility that SRA funding could instead be put towards project delivery rather than the development phase. Mr Farris caveated this by saying that project delivery costs were currently unknown, however they were expected to be substantial, so £105,000 would not cover everything, but it would be a big help.

Mr Farris therefore asked if the SRA's grant to ENPA could be postponed until after the feasibility phase of the Upper Barle restoration project had been completed and used for the delivery phase.

Caroline Dunn said that if Mr Farris's request was approved, the sum of £105,000 previously allocated would be returned to contingency and ringfenced for use next year.

Points raised:

- Iain Sturdy (Somerset Drainage Boards Consortium) said that he was pleased to see a Natural Flood Management project at scale. He asked if the flood risk benefits had been quantified in any way and if so, how had this been done. He also asked if this would require future maintenance.
- Mr Farris said there were no figures in terms of volume of water, however ENPA did have figures for numbers of residents at risk and which properties would benefit. With regards to maintenance and project longevity, this was a nature-based solution which tried to reintroduce natural processes, with more vegetation like willow as it is currently an open grass plain. He said that he was hoping that this would be a wet woodland which would help to slow the

flow. He said that ENPA was not looking at a section in isolation, but the whole catchment.

As recommended, the Board approved the change in the use of SRA funding from the development phase to the delivery phase of the project.

The Board also approved the request to defer the approved grant funding from the 2025-26 budget to the 2026-27 budget.

ITEM 8B ACT TO ADAPT TOP-UP REQUEST

Steve Mewes (Somerset Wildlife Trust - SWT) said that Somerset Wildlife Trust was requesting top-up funding for the Act to Adapt programme, which was empowering communities to take action on climate change and flooding.

He said the programme was community-led with Somerset Wildlife Trust facilitating the initial planning process. Seven communities had completed - or were completing - action plans, with strong local engagement. The project was closely linked to the SRA's strategy for resilience and adaptation and was being delivered collaboratively with SRA community engagement officers.

Ms Dunn noted that the total SRA grant funding allocated to date had been £133,000 with £103,000 claimed and a balance of £30,000 remaining. As things stood, the project would not be able to continue beyond August.

Points raised:

- Rebecca Horsington (Parrett IDB) asked how the Board would know if it was getting value for money as a considerable sum was being asked for? She wondered if there was any way of quantifying the benefits of this type of project. Mr Mewes replied that SWT was monitoring actions resulting from action plans and keeping track to make sure that works were being done on the ground.
- Cllr Ros Wyke said there was a lack of understanding – and a lot of misunderstanding – about riparian responsibilities. She thought parishes would appreciate more information. The Chair noted that Paul Elliston, SRA Community Engagement Officer had prepared a detailed presentation about riparian ownership and responsibilities and there was information on the SRA website.

- Iain Sturdy said there needed to be education about riparian ownership and responsibility. One particular issue was with work undertaken in the past by public bodies: when that work was no longer done or done less often, it fell back to riparian owners. There needed to be proactive communication with landowners to inform them when work was stopping so they could understand that they should now be doing that work.
- Claire Newill said that it was important to keep in touch with communities so they could be guided to information and guidance about owning a watercourse and how to maintain it.
- Bel Deering, SRA Community Engagement Officer, said that an important part of the SRA community engagement role was trying to empower and educate people in communities. There were many aspects to riparian rights and responsibilities: she and her colleague Paul Elliston tended to get asked about immediate and practical things that could be done following a flood. Through Act to Adapt, Somerset Wildlife Trust offered a fantastic opportunity for communities to think about longer-term solutions, not just short-term moves following flooding. Ms Deering said that she would welcome and encourage Board members to attend community groups.

As recommended, the Board approved the top-up funding request of £40,000 for the continued support of the Act to Adapt project to enhance community resilience.

ITEM 8C EQUIPMENT AND TRAINING TOP-UP REQUEST

Nicola Dawson (Somerset Council) presented a request for a top-up for the Somerset Prepared Small Projects Fund. This provides small grants to communities for equipment and training to help them prepare for, and respond to, flooding. Ms Dawson explained that the fund predates the SRA and is distinct from the Community Flood Action Fund (CFAF): it focuses on items like Personal Protective Equipment, signage, and practical tools rather than community-wide works.

Ms Dawson said that CFAF's success had led to more applications to the Small Projects Fund for items not eligible under CFAF.

David Mitchell said there would be value in maintaining separation between the long-established Somerset Prepared Fund and CFAF. The Somerset Prepared Fund had an existing, efficient process for equipment/training requests and the expertise to assess requests, while CFAF focused on different types of solutions to flood risk.

Points raised:

- SRA Vice-Chair Tony Bradford asked about the criteria for grants. He was concerned that some applicants might request equipment they would never use. Ms Dawson said that applications were reviewed by a panel (including the Environment Agency, emergency services, and charity representatives). She noted that communities had to contribute 20% match funding: this helped to ensure local commitment and relevance.
- Mr Mitchell noted that, after this and the Act to Adapt top-up, the SRA's contingency would remain healthy at £586,000.

As recommended, the Board approved funding for £60,000 to top-up the small grants fund operated by Somerset Prepared.

ITEM 9 RIVER SOWY-KING'S SEDGEMOOR DRAIN ENHANCEMENTS SCHEME

Iain Sturdy introduced his paper. He explained that the Parrett Internal Drainage Board (IDB) had now concluded the design and technical matters of the KSD bank-raising project, however there were some procedural matters awaiting final sign-off. Tenders for doing the bank-raising had been received and were within budget. Consequently, the IDB finance and works committee had agreed to recommend to the full Parrett Drainage Board that the IDB should undertake to continue leading this project. Ground conditions were good, contractors were ready to get on site as soon as possible, therefore if the full IDB Board and the SRA Board were in favour, around 12 weeks of work could start soon, for a cost within the existing budget of £915,000.

Points raised:

- The Chair noted that both he and his Vice-Chair Tony Bradford sit on the Parrett Drainage Board and they did not anticipate any issues with the recommendation getting approved. He said that Caroline Murray of Calm Engineering and her team had done superb work in planning and preparing the project.
- Rebecca Horsington (Parrett IDB) said she was really pleased that this work was finally going to get completed.
- Cllr Ros Wyke asked if the completion of this work was all that would be needed in this area or would further works be required. Iain Sturdy said this would complete Phase 1 of the project, which would allow a managed flow of water through the system in a controlled way, up to the design capacity.

- Cllr Wyke asked whether the totality of Phase 1 equalled £5 million. Mr Mitchell replied that the actual spend on the Sowey-KSD Enhancements Scheme (Phase 1) had been around £9 million. He noted that this project had been in gestation since the early days of the Somerset Rivers Authority and had been a challenging project for the various organisations that had taken it on.
- Cllr Wyke asked whether there had been cost benefit analysis work done. Mr Sturdy said that he did not believe that a full benefit cost analysis according to HM Treasury rules had ever been undertaken. He added that there was a piece of work completed after the 2013-14 floods that quantified the damages for this single event to Somerset as more than £140m. This project was seen as fundamental for reducing such damages in possible future events.

As recommended, the Board confirmed the Parrett IDB as the delivery partner for KSD bank raising.

The Board also allocated up to £915,000 of previously set aside funds to the Parrett Internal Drainage Board to complete the KSD bank raising work.

ITEM 10 NATURAL FLOOD MANAGEMENT PRESENTATION

Alasdair Maxwell (Environment Agency) and Hugo van Dorssen (Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group SouthWest) gave presentations about Natural Flood Management.

Mr Maxwell, Environment Agency Wessex Area NFM specialist, presented first, sharing general information on national policy and highlighting its increasing prominence in Government strategy and funding. He noted that there had been several national funding rounds to support NFM projects, including a £15 million programme in 2023: the Two Valleys Slow the Flow project in West Somerset had been funded through this. Mr Maxwell outlined how the evidence base showing the effectiveness of NFM was growing. He said the Environment Agency published an evidence directory drawing on extensive research to assess the impact of NFM projects. He emphasised that while NFM can be effective, especially for smaller, short-term events, there were still gaps in the evidence base.

Mr Maxwell said that local case studies (for example, in Cannington) had shown a 30% reduction in peak flows, although results were not always replicable. He added that recent ministerial statements had indicated support for more NFM funding, and

that the Government was currently consulting on the approach to funding of flood risk management projects.

Points raised:

- Rebecca Horsington asked whether measures that were installed at the Holnicote estate had been washed away during the recent flood event. Mr Maxwell said he was unsure about what might or might not have happened at this specific location.
- Iain Sturdy emphasised that NFM measures were most effective for smaller events and that large scale interventions and space were needed for significant downstream impacts.
- Tony Bradford suggested that 'water retention in the uplands' was a more accurate term than Natural Flood Management. He stressed the importance of maintenance, citing the example of an NFM project in Pickering that he heard had failed due to a lack of maintenance.

Hugo Van Dorssen, SRA-funded FWAG SW Community NFM advisor, presented next on the work that FWAG SW undertake in Somerset. He said that he and his fellow SRA-funded FWAG SW Community NFM advisor Tom Shopland worked together with communities across Somerset who were affected by flooding. As a pair, they provided technical advice, helped to organise community action groups, and facilitated mapping of local issues and solutions. Mr Van Dorssen said that Natural Flood Management was a very broad category: the key point was that soils across Somerset offered most potential for reducing flooding and he believed that Somerset's soils were "knackered". If flooding issues were going to be fixed, there needed to be investments into soil.

As an example, Mr Van Dorssen said that in Kingston St Mary, FWAG SW had worked with the parish council and local landowners to identify flooding issues, assess soils and implement NFM features such as attenuation ponds and river re-wiggling. He noted that organising communities could be a slow process, and some areas required more in-depth technical investigation. Mr Van Dorssen emphasised the value of matching SRA funds with private finance to maximise the impact of works.

Points raised:

- Ross Edwards (Environment Agency) noted the lack of NFM projects on the Mendip Hills and suggested more focus there. Mr Van Dorssen welcomed the suggestion for priority areas.
- Claire Newill said that the SRA Board should bear in mind that NFM delivered multiple benefits that offered the opportunity to look at alternative funding or match funding.
- Vicky Farwig (Wessex Water) highlighted the local integrated solutions project delivered by Wessex Water that brought partners together for complex catchment strategies. She noted that the SRA part-funded this project.

ITEM 11 RIVER BRUE MODELLING

Andy Wallis (A W Water Engineering), Technical Project Manager for this project, provided an update on the River Brue Modelling. He said that WSP had been appointed in January 2025 to carry out modelling work, which had required testing many different scenarios: a time-consuming process taking several days for each run of the model. He said the main focus was on reducing flood risk, while considering other factors such as economics, engineering, the environment and carbon emissions. A project steering group met every two months and was helping to move the project forward. A presentation to be given at September's SRA Board meeting would include more detailed model outputs.

Points raised:

- Rebecca Horsington said she understood that modelling was important but she wondered why no actual work had been done. David Mitchell replied that this project had been with the SRA for a long time and there had been challenges, one being that no partner organisation had been in a position to take work forward. Iain Sturdy said the reason there had been no support for moving things forward was because the benefits had not been proved. Completing modelling to demonstrate benefits and disbenefits would therefore help.
- Bill Smart (invited to speak as a member of the public and Wedmore parish councillor) asked if it would be correct to say that the major area for a quick win would be in the downstream area (from Westhay westwards), as this was where banks overtopped and flooded the Levels. Mr Wallis said this was

correct: two key issues therefore being explored were the volume of water coming in and the speed at which it came out.

The Chair thanked Mr Wallis for his presentation and for answering questions from the Board and members of the public.

As recommended, the SRA Board noted the progress and next steps on the River Brue modelling project.

ITEM 12 MATTERS ARISING FROM LAST MEETING

The Chair explained that this item had not been on the agenda before. It had been added to ensure that matters from previous meeting were addressed. He said there were going to be five items from David Mitchell and one from Tony Bradford.

Mr Mitchell duly went through his five matters arising:

1. Reporting on the outcomes of the first Community Flood Action Fund review panel: this had been completed.
2. Reporting on the estimated interest accrued on the SRA funds held by Somerset Council: it was planned to indicate the amount for Quarter 1 of 2025-26 at the next SRA Board meeting in September.
3. Working with the Environment Agency to explore the feasibility of more regular weed cutting to assess the difference that made to the amount of time and money spent on water injection dredging. Mr Mitchell said that he regarded this as an action for the Internal Drainage Boards and the Environment Agency, who were going to have a separate conversation about this subject.
4. Power Bi report update. Mr Mitchell said this was not yet ready but would be for September.
5. Cllr Ros Wyke's request for more details about the development of the SRA's Enhanced Programme and how projects were identified. Mr Mitchell said that this was a big piece of work that he would take on board as part of the development of the 2025-26 Enhanced programme.
6. Tony Bradford asked whether it would be possible for the SRA to have set aside funds from contingency that could be used for critical river maintenance during the year. He asked if this could be added to the next Board agenda. The Chair said that this could be added to the next Board agenda, but a lot of

thought would need to be given to the question of whether such an advance limitation could be placed upon what SRA money could be used for in future.

ITEM 13 ANY OTHER BUSINESS (AOB)

David Jenkins (Wessex Regional Flood & Coastal Committee - WRFCC) discussed two points arising from the last WRFCC meeting. Firstly, maintenance and how much was spent on it: Mr Jenkins said he had attended a meeting where both the responsible minister and the chair of the Environment Agency, Alan Lovell, made particular reference to concerns about maintenance funding and the representations they had received from regional flood and coastal committees and others. Both said they took the point and in funding allocations from now on the balance would shift. Alan Lovell said that every £1 spent on maintenance would achieve twice as much benefit as every £1 spent on new projects.

Mr Jenkins went on to praise a presentation he saw at Flood and Coast that was given by Catriona Gill from Wessex Water and Kerry King from Somerset Council. They showcased a project part-funded by the SRA which encouraged officers to collaborate to achieve outcomes on schemes which were greater than the sum of schemes' separate parts. Mr Jenkins thought the duo presented extremely well and were a credit to themselves and a very good showcase for Somerset. He suggested that their presentation could be given at a future SRA Board meeting.

Appendix A

Question from Councillor Bill Smart

Subject: River Brue Modelling – ITEM 11

Will this report provide clarity as to when the modelling process and all other 'desk work' will be complete and a clear target date for dredging of the lower Brue to commence. If not, what are current plans in this respect?

Can a process be put in place to give local community representatives a more frequent update on progress rather than the current 3-month opportunities at SRA quarterly meetings?

What part of the ring fenced original £279k remains and will any of it be available to contribute towards dredging costs? As the Brue is a main river and only the Environment Agency can carry out works, is the EA now in a position to do this if funds are available?

Councillor William Smart
Question on behalf of Wedmore Parish Council

Response by David Mitchell

Mr Mitchell said that the hydraulic modelling is scheduled to report outputs in September with a follow-up report in December which will cover environmental and economic factors. He said that there was no target date for the dredging as the modelling is intended to identify the best options before any action is agreed. The request for more frequent updates is challenging due to the technical nature of ongoing work, but a meeting with local stakeholders could be arranged, especially once the modelling outputs became available.

Mr Mitchell said that approximately £120,000 remains from the original £279,000 and, after the current commission, approximately £110,000 will remain. He explained that other organisations besides the Environment Agency can undertake main river works if they have the proper permissions. No action will be taken until the preferred option, funding and delivery partner have all been agreed.