

**Minutes of  
Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA) Board Meeting**

held on 12 September 2025

at Taunton Town Council Offices, The Tone Room, Deane House, Belvedere  
Road, Taunton, TA1 1HE.

**Members of SRA Board:**

**Cllr Mike Stanton** - *Chair*, Somerset Council  
**Tony Bradford** - *Vice-Chair*, Parrett Internal Drainage Board (IDB)  
**Cllr Steve Ashton**, Somerset Council  
**Ian Collins**, Wessex Regional Flood & Coastal Committee  
**Vicky Farwig**, Wessex Water (*substitute*)  
**Andrew Gilling**, Axe Brue IDB  
**Rebecca Horsington**, Parrett IDB  
**Cllr Liz Leyshon**, Somerset Council (*substitute*)  
**Claire Newill**, Natural England  
**Cllr Nick O'Donnell**, Somerset Council  
**Trevor Whitcombe**, Axe Brue IDB  
**Ian Withers**, Environment Agency  
**Cllr Ros Wyke**, Somerset Council

**In attendance:**

**Ross Edwards**, Environment Agency  
**Adrian Govier**, Environment Agency  
**Sam Hitchcott**, Somerset Council  
**Piers Hooper**, Environment Agency  
**David Mitchell**, Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA)  
**Iain Sturdy**, Somerset Drainage Boards Consortium  
**Andy Wallis**, AW Water Engineering  
**Jennie Channing**, SRA, Minute taker

**Apologies:**

**Cllr Mike Caswell**, Somerset Council  
**James Divall**, Somerset Council  
**Caroline Dunn**, SRA  
**Jonathan Hudston**, SRA  
**Cllr Claire Sully**, Somerset Council  
**Matt Wheeldon**, Wessex Water

**ITEM 1 INTRODUCTIONS AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Somerset Rivers Authority Chair (SRA) Cllr Mike Stanton opened the meeting and welcomed Board members and members of the public to the meeting. He welcomed Ian Collins, who is the new chair of Wessex Regional Flood and Coastal Committee (WRFCC) and replaces David Jenkins on the SRA Board.

Apologies were received from Matt Wheeldon (Wessex Water), who was substituted by Vicky Farwig, Cllr Claire Sully (Somerset Council), who was substituted by Cllr Liz Leyshon and officers James Divall (Somerset Council), Caroline Dunn (SRA), Jonathan Hudston (SRA) and Donna Gowler (Natural England).

The Chair acknowledged the recent passing of Cllr Nick Cottle, who had joined the Board in January 2025, bringing his knowledge of the Brue catchment to this role. The Chair described Cllr Cottle as quiet in meetings but a passionate and active contributor on matters in one-to-one situations, and particularly humorous in his

frequent WhatsApp communications. His funeral was attended by several Board members and was described as a grand, civic occasion reflecting his long-standing service as a Glastonbury Councillor and Mayor.

Cllr Liz Leyshon said that she had attended Cllr Cottle's funeral. She said that he was a town councillor for 25 years, became the Mayor of Glastonbury in 2004, he was a Mendip District Councillor, Somerset (County) Councillor and he was Chair of Planning for Somerset East. Cllr Cottle had deep family roots around Glastonbury. Cllr Leyshon explained that he had recently been on a holiday to Canada and had sadly passed shortly after. She described his funeral as grand with a full civic parade, and it felt very fitting.

## **ITEM 2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

The Chair declared that he is a member of the Axe Brue and Parrett Internal Drainage Boards. He said that he is also a Director of the Association of Drainage Authorities (ADA) and a representative on the South West Association of Drainage Boards (SWADA).

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

## **ITEM 3 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING 6 JUNE 2025**

The minutes from the previous meeting held on 6 June 2025 were agreed as accurate.

It was noted the Chair had not signed digital copies of the minutes in recent times after they were confirmed as accurate by the Board. The Chair confirmed that this oversight would be rectified following the meeting and he requested the Board's permission to sign the approved minutes retrospectively, which was granted without objection.

Under matters arising, David Mitchell provided updates on several points from the June meeting:

1. A concern had been raised regarding the under-representation of partnership working in one of the project and performance report metrics. Caroline Dunn reviewed the metric, and it was subsequently removed due to its inaccuracy. Further consideration will be given to how best to represent partnership projects and working, going forward.
2. David Mitchell had previously committed to providing a Power BI report under the performance monitoring section. This would be addressed later in the agenda under the finance and project performance item.
3. Mr Mitchell also referred to a pending discussion regarding interest accrued on SRA funds held by Somerset Council, which would be raised under the finance agenda item.

4. Cllr Wyke had requested more information on the development of the main grants programme. Mr Mitchell acknowledged that a meeting had not yet been arranged and committed to a meeting with Ros Wyke as soon as possible after the Board meeting.

No further matters were raised by Board members.

#### **ITEM 4 CHAIR'S UPDATE**

The Chair reported on his recent attendance at the Association of Drainage Authorities (ADA) Board meeting on 1 July 2025. He shared insights from the meeting, including discussions on how ADA may raise more income through changes to subscriptions, an Environment Agency update on funding and a potential rebranding of the Association of Drainage Authorities (ADA) due to a possible merger with the Association of Sustainable Drainage Authorities (ASA).

Mr Bradford raised his concerns about the amalgamation of ADA and ASA as he felt that ADA is a membership body between for the benefit of Internal Drainage Boards (IDBs) engaging with Government. He thought the amalgamation might take attention away from ADA's core objectives. He confirmed that this would be discussed at a future IDB meeting.

#### **4A MOTION IN RELATION TO REDUCTION IN MAIN RIVER MAINTENANCE.**

The Chair stressed that he was proposing this recommendation with the support of Vice-Chair Tony Bradford. The aim was to support the case for more funding for the Environment Agency and not to criticise local staff and their efforts.

The Chair shared that he attended the recent South West Association of Drainage Authorities (SWADA) meeting, in his role as a council-appointed member of the Internal Drainage Boards, where reductions in maintenance levels to Main Rivers by the Environment Agency was discussed. Environment Agency staff were also in attendance and whilst they faced some tough questioning, they were very engaged. The Chair set the context for the recommendation, explaining that riparian owners along some stretches of main rivers had been receiving letters from the Environment Agency informing them that the Environment Agency would no longer be undertaking maintenance on those stretches of river and the landowner would be responsible for this in the future. This was causing concern among landowners and communities concerned about flooding and these concerns were communicated at the meeting. The Chair explained that he would like the Board to support his recommendation as it would aid in making the case to Government that the Environment Agency is underfunded. If the Board supported the recommendation the Chair would then write to the Under Secretary of State, Emma Hardy, to add to the pressure for increased funding for the Environment Agency in the future.

The Chair opened the discussion up to members of the Board.

Cllr Ros Wyke said that she had attended a recent Parish Council meeting where members of the community had commented strongly about the letter that they had

received from the Environment Agency. She said the community had a degree of understanding as to why maintenance had been withdrawn, however the element of the letter which infuriated communities was that, although the responsibility for maintenance was now on the landowner, they had to get permissions from the Environment Agency before maintenance work could begin.

Piers Hooper, Environment Agency, said it was important to highlight that the Environment Agency spent millions of pounds across Somerset on the maintenance of hundreds of assets. He explained that the notices received by landowners represented the reality that the work was unlikely to be funded again in future because, using the EA's assessment methodology, the areas that received letters represented the lowest cost benefit work. Mr Hooper said the Environment Agency could continue to bid for the work; however, it was unlikely to be approved under the current financial arrangements. The Environment Agency was prepared to offer further consultation on the sites that received letters and would like to offer the Internal Drainage Board and Natural England the option to formally respond to the consultation. The consultation would be extended for a further six months.

The Chair asked if it would not be better to submit a bid and see what happened rather than assume it would not be funded and not apply at all? Mr Hooper said that there was an annual bid which historically had only funded between 40-60% of what was requested. He said the locations that had received letters are those which had the lowest cost benefit, therefore a full programme would need to be funded in order for maintenance in those areas to take place.

Mr Bradford acknowledged that the withdrawal of maintenance was a sad announcement, however not a sudden decision. He expressed his frustration that in his opinion, the Environment Agency spent money on works that had no flood risk benefit and he emphasised his view that works should be prioritised based on those that had the greatest flood risk benefit.

Rebecca Horsington, Parrett Internal Drainage Board, questioned whether it would be better to bid for everything and see what was approved rather than assume it would not be funded.

Iain Sturdy, Somerset Drainage Boards Consortium, said that he understood the response from the local Environment Agency team around funding issues and the process whereby high cost benefit gets funded and lower does not. He said that the Board needed to help the local Environment Agency teams to make a better case nationally for more funding.

Claire Newill, Natural England, confirmed that Natural England was actively working with the Environment Agency to assess the environmental impacts of reduced maintenance on designated sites and she emphasised the need for balanced approaches – neither excessive nor absent maintenance.

The Chair summarised the issue as one of national funding constraints being felt locally and he reiterated the importance of continuing to bid for funding and elevating the issue politically. The majority of the Board agreed that the current situation was

unacceptable and that greater consultation must precede any withdrawal of maintenance services.

The Chair concluded by highlighting the importance of partnership working and wondered what the potential might be for Internal Drainage Boards to take on maintenance responsibilities currently managed by the Environment Agency in the future, subject to funding and resource availability.

The Chair proposed the following recommendation.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

The SRA Board called on the Environment Agency to reverse its recent letters to landowners announcing the withdrawal of Environment Agency maintenance of watercourses, particularly main rivers, in Somerset and request reinstatement of full maintenance. The reinstatement of maintenance to remain until:

- They have completed a formal impact assessment
- Statutory consultation obligations are fulfilled
- A joint working group with the Internal Drainage Boards has agreed a sustainable forward plan.

The recommendation was proposed by the Chair and seconded by Mr Bradford. The recommendation was supported by a majority of the Board.

### **ITEM 5 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no questions submitted by the public prior to the meeting.

Cllr Bill Smart, Wedmore Parish Council, attended the meeting and said that he was pleased to see that there was progress being made on the River Brue and that work was moving forward.

### **ITEM 6 FINANCE REPORT AND ENHANCED PROGRAMME PERFORMANCE MONITORING**

#### **ITEM 6a FINANCE REPORT**

Sam Hitchcott, SRA Finance Manager, introduced her paper. She presented the financial position as at the end of Quarter 1. She noted that at the start of the year, the total available funds were £7.265 million. This comprised £4.132 million carried forward from 2024–25 and £3.133 million which was raised in the 2025–26 precept.

Ms Hitchcott said that at the end of Quarter 1, 4% of funds were spent on the administration and staffing of the SRA, 1% on SRA core work and development, 8% was held in contingency and 86% was allocated to specific projects and activities within the Enhanced Programme.

She noted that, if all financial movements were approved by the Board, the contingency would increase by £240,300 from £592,000 to £832,000, which would be 11% of SRA funds.

Ms Hitchcott said that Chart B on page 4 of the paper showed a spend profile comparison which included a shortfall on what had been claimed compared to what was forecast to be claimed. She believed that this could be due to delays in claims, rather than lack of delivery. She also noted that there was a £200k re-allocation to contingency due to the Penarth Road project securing funding from a third party so no longer needing SRA funding.

Mr Mitchell said that he had noted under matters arising, that a new paragraph 2.7.1 had been added to the finance report which referred to Somerset Council ringfenced funding and the interest accrued to the SRA Board. He noted that this information had not been provided previously

Points raised:

- The Chair noted that the SRA's source of funding was council tax with a small amount ringfenced for use by the SRA which produced just over £3million a year. He said the constraint with this was that the funding was based on the 2016 Council tax base. If it was based on the current Council tax base, there would be almost double the amount of funds available to the SRA. He noted this would need to be looked at in the future.
- Cllr Leyshon responded to the Chair to say that there was a significant piece of work that needed to be done before the rate was changed and she confirmed that Somerset Council Executive was aware of this as an issue.

Mr Mitchell shared his draft Power Bi report to the Board which allowed Board members to further analyse financial information. He confirmed that this reporting method would be developed and he hoped to offer additional improvements for the next meeting.

As recommended, the Board noted the financial performance as at the end of Quarter 1 of 2025-26.

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

## **PART B: QUARTER 1 2025-26 ENHANCED PROGRAMME PERFORMANCE MONITORING**

Mr Mitchell introduced the paper. He said that it was in a similar format to the previous quarter's report. He drew the Board's attention to the outputs section of the report which showed that there had been a lot of work done in Quarter 1 and he encouraged the Board to look through the report to see the various outputs.

Mr Mitchell said that he would work to get the details into the Power Bi report for the next meeting so that Board members could more easily see the locations and a bit more information about each project.

There were no questions.



## **RECOMMENDATION**

As recommended, the Board noted the overall delivery status of the schemes and activities within the current SRA Enhanced Programme for Quarter 1 2025-26.

### **ITEM 7 COMMUNITY FLOOD ACTION FUND (CFAF) UPDATE**

Mr Mitchell introduced the item by summarising the current status of the Community Flood Action Fund (CFAF), which was launched in December 2024 following Board approval of a £200,000 allocation. The Fund was designed to support locally-led flood projects with grants ranging from £3,000 to £20,000. The application process was intentionally streamlined to encourage community participation and enable quick delivery of the projects and the benefits.

He explained that since the fund was launched, there had been 26 applications submitted with 12 grants being awarded totalling £138,419. Most applications came from town and parish councils. Mr Mitchell said that the most common project types were localised watercourse and drainage maintenance.

Mr Mitchell noted that the second round of applications closed on 26 May 2025 with the review panel meeting on 1 July 2025. He highlighted that there were six applications received and five of these were funded to a total value of £61,070.

Mr Mitchell said that the deadline for the third round of applications was 26 August and there were six eligible applications received, with a total value of £68,000. He said that these would be considered by the review panel on 30 September. He explained that when CFAF was initially developed, it was proposed that once the £200,000 allocation was exhausted the scheme should close for the year. If all applications from round 3 ended up being funded, the full £200,000 would be allocated.

Mr Mitchell asked the Board whether they wanted to take the approach of closing after the £200,000 had been allocated or whether there should be a top-up so that there could be a fourth round of applications in 2025-26. He fed back to the Board that the Management Group's consensus was that there should be a review of CFAF in year one before committing to funding in future years. Mr Mitchell said that if the top-up of £80,000 was approved, this would allow all applications (if approved) for round 3 to be funded and leave approximately £70,000 for a fourth round in 2025-26.

Points raised:

- The Chair stated that this had been a good initiative, and he thought the Board should approve the additional £80,000.
- Cllr Leyshon suggested that when a further round was announced, there should be information shared about the success of the previous applications. Mr Mitchell responded to say that he wanted details of all successful applications to be published on the SRA website.
- Mr Bradford asked whether there was a timescale in which a successful applicant had to wait to apply again? Mr Mitchell replied to say that each

applicant could submit one application per quarter. Mr Mitchell also clarified that CFAF would only fund maintenance works once and it would be the responsibility of the applicant to plan for future maintenance.

- Cllr Wyke said that she supported the fund top-up. She commented that some parishes were more proactive than others so would be better placed to take advantage of CFAF.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

As recommended, the Board noted the update on applications submitted to the Community Flood Action Fund.

The Board also considered whether the Community Flood Action Fund should close for the year once the initial £200,000 funding allocation had been allocated. The Board decided against this.

The Board approved the top-up funding of £80,000 to allow a fourth round of Community Flood Action Fund applications during 2025-26.

## **ITEM 8 RIVER BRUE MODELLING**

The Chair introduced the item and said that there had been some in-depth debates about the River Brue at past meetings.

Andy Wallis, AW Water Engineering, presented an update on the River Brue modelling project, which was commissioned to improve the understanding of flood risks in the lowland Brue catchment. He highlighted that it had been a hugely complex piece of work with a great deal of effort and time being invested into producing an in-depth detailed study. He explained that modelling work, which was undertaken by consultants WSP and overseen by himself, had now been completed and final outputs of the hydraulic modelling produced. Mr Wallis explained that there were several key watercourses in the catchment area. The detailed study of these was essential in order to plan and inform future works. Presentation available here: [SRA-meeting-12-09-25-River-Brue-modelling-slides-notes.pdf](#)

Mr Mitchell highlighted that as a partnership the SRA had been investigating what could be done on the River Brue for several years with much debate about what was possible and desirable. This phase of modelling work had been completed in approximately nine months. Mr Mitchell acknowledged that some would be frustrated that this was modelling and not works on the ground, but this type of evidence was required if works were to take place in the future. He noted that the biggest challenge with work being completed in the future was whether there was an organisation with the resources and capacity to take the work completed so far and develop it into a project for delivery.

Mr Wallis explained that the next steps for this piece of work were to look beyond just the hydrological / flood risk benefits and consider other factors such as environmental, engineering and economic factors to get a more rounded picture of the various options and their deliverability. These findings were going to be



presented to the SRA Board at the Board's December meeting. Mr Wallis emphasised that considering flooding issues strategically in combination with other opportunities offered the greatest likelihood of securing funding to address flooding concerns in the lower Brue.

Points raised:

- The Chair summarised Mr Wallis' presentation as some low-cost, short-term bank raising possible, medium-term removal of pinch points in rivers, and longer-term much bigger interventions such as major infrastructure upgrades (for example, Highbridge Clyce). Mr Wallis explained that Highbridge Clyce works would only make sense as part of a future asset upgrade, not solely on current fluvial flood risk grounds.
- Mr Sturdy highlighted that this was a good piece of work. He felt that it supported the case for actions that have been wanted for a while, addressing low spots, lower Brue conveyance, putting the system back to how it was. The real prize was looking at how the Cripps and Huntspill Rivers were operated as these offered the biggest benefit. He said that he was happy with the outcomes so far.
- Mr Sturdy challenged the finding that conveyance improvements in the North Drain would have little flood risk impact, suggesting this might be because it was tested as a stand-alone item rather than in combination.
- Mr Sturdy added that he hoped that now people knew there were hydraulic benefits to proposals, things would not get stuck on the issue of costs and economic benefits.
- Mr Bradford echoed Mr Sturdy's thoughts. He said that this had been on the agenda for nine years and there was yet to be any work completed. He felt that much of this work was just proving what was already known. He noted that residents on the Brue had been putting up with flooding for years and wanted action. Mr Bradford highlighted that there needed to be funding and an organisation to undertake the work identified. He wanted to get on and do something.
- Trevor Whitcombe explained that he grew up along the Brue and years ago it took 24 hours for the water to travel down to his farm, it was now taking 12 hours. This shorter timescale had implications for farmers, giving them less time to take action if required. Mr Whitcombe raised concern that there was talk of flooding land, but no one was talking to landowners about this.
- Mr Mitchell reassured Mr Whitcombe that the project being discussed was the modelling and that no work or 'flooding land' was being proposed at this time. He was glad to hear that Board members and partners thought this was a good piece of work. Mr Mitchell reminded the Board that the next stage would also consider costs, engineering and environmental matters. He said that it was the organisations who formed the SRA partnership that were best placed to move this work forward.
- Mr Hooper said he understood Mr Bradford's frustration but there needed to be evidence and an economic assessment before works could happen. Mr

Hooper noted that in anticipation of the outcomes of this work the Environment Agency had submitted a £250k bid for funds for next year. He noted the pressure on the national capital programme for next year, so he could not make any guarantees, but he would look at the viability of Environment Agency teams turning this study into works on the ground.

- Cllr Wyke thanked Mr Wallis and Mr Mitchell for the presentation, stating she would have liked to have had the whole meeting to discuss it. She noted that she had recently visited the upgrade at Dunball Sluice and was astounded to hear that there was someone on call 24/7 to lower the gate. Cllr Wyke asked, if we had the expertise to do this, could we do similar at Highbridge Clyce? With regards to the information in the presentation that natural flood management in the upper catchment would have little influence on flooding in the lower catchment, Cllr Wyke said this was not the perception of those that lived closer to the upper catchment; their view was that more water is coming down. Cllr Wyke asked if there was data to show whether this was the case?
- Cllr Leyshon raised an issue in relation to Clyse Hole, she acknowledged this was a local matter and requested to speak to someone about it outside the meeting. Mr Hooper offered to contact her about it.

There were no further questions.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

As recommended, the Board reviewed and commented on modelling outputs, progress and next steps.

## **ITEM 9A RIVER SOWY – KING’S SEDGEMOOR DRAIN (KSD) ENHANCEMENTS SCHEME**

Mr Sturdy provided the board with an update on the final stage of Phase 1 of the River Sowey – King’s Sedgemoor Drain (KSD) Enhancements Scheme, a key project from the 2014 Somerset Flood Action Plan. He noted substantial completion of the outfalls and the bank raising.

He explained that the works included bank raising along 1.8km of the KSD and Improvements to two outfall structures, Chedzoy Tilting Weir and Back Ditch Outfall. Mr Sturdy noted that, as with any project, there have been challenges but thanks to all involved, the project had been kept on track. He said that the works were due to be completed in the first week of October, which was still within programme and budget.

The Chair thanked Mr Sturdy, the Parrett Internal Drainage Board and Calm Engineering for completing the project on time and within budget, he said it was a tremendous success.

There were no questions raised.

As recommended, the Board noted the substantial completion of King’s Sedgemoor Drain (KSD) outfalls – Back Ditch and Chedzoy Tilting Weir.

## **ITEM 9b RIVER SOWY – KING’S SEDGEMOOR DRAIN (KSD) ENHANCEMENTS SCHEME PRESENTATION**

Mr Mitchell thanked Mr Sturdy and his team for his work completing the 1.8km of bank raising. He explained that the 1.8km was the final part of a much bigger programme of interventions across the wider system.

Mr Mitchell and Adrian Govier, Environment Agency, gave a presentation looking at the programme of interventions across the Sowy – KSD system. The presentation can be found here: [ITEM-9b-SRA-Board-Sowy-KSD-presentation-12-September-2025.pdf](#)

Mr Mitchell concluded by saying that the Sowy - KSD system had seen a 25% increase in the amount of water it could handle whilst keeping that water ‘in bank’. With over £13 million invested from the SRA, Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership and the Environment Agency, these improvements, whilst not preventing all flooding, would allow for more flexible operation of the system and effective flood management.

Points raised:

- Mr Bradford welcomed the work that had been done on the Sowy - KSD and noted that the success of the Sowy scheme depended on keeping the River Parrett clear. He raised concerns about trees growing in the Parrett that needed to be removed.
- Cllr Wyke congratulated all that had been involved in the work, she questioned whether a post-project cost-benefit analysis would be conducted to compare the original business case with actual outcomes, suggesting it was important to assess the effectiveness of the investment. She suggested that the Board should allocate funding for such an analysis and highlighted the value of this factual information for future projects. Mr Mitchell responded that a review comparing the original business case and achieved benefits would be prepared for the December meeting.

## **ITEM 10 SRA PARTNERSHIP TEAM**

The Board considered a proposal to convert the two SRA-funded Community Engagement Officer roles from fixed-term contracts to permanent positions. The item was introduced by David Mitchell, who outlined the rationale and implications of the transition.

In 2018, two roles were created and since then had been funded through annual grant applications. However, this funding model had led to concerns about job security and risks to staff retention. The proposal aimed to address these concerns by integrating the roles into the SRA Partnership Team.

Mr Mitchell explained that the roles were currently hosted within the SRA Partnership Team, reporting to him as SRA Senior Manager. He said that the other team

members were on permanent Somerset Council contracts, and the proposal would bring consistency to employment contracts across the team.

Mr Mitchell noted that financially, the change would not increase costs to the SRA as the staff were already SRA funded. However, this would increase the amount of funds that were 'pre-allocated' to staffing costs each year, i.e. the amount ringfenced from the SRA precept for staff and overheads.

The Board noted that Somerset Council, as the Host Authority and employer, would need to approve the change in contract type. While the financial risk to Somerset Council was minimal, the Council required assurance of the SRA Board's long-term commitment to funding the roles.

Points raised:

- The Chair highlighted what a tremendous job the Community Engagement Officers do. He noted that they might be less visible to the Board but were very visible in the communities they worked with.
- Ms Newill noted that she had received lots of good feedback however it would be good to see more visibility of the work they do presented to the Board.

### **RECOMMENDATION:**

As recommended, the Board approved converting SRA Community Engagement Officer Roles from fixed term contact roles to permanent contracts.

### **ITEM 11 TOP-UPS OR OTHER FUNDING REQUESTS**

Mr Sturdy introduced his paper about top-up funding for Water Injection Dredging (WID). He explained that WID had been used since 2016 as a cost-effective and more environmentally sensitive method to maintain sediment mobility and flow capacity in the River Parrett. He said that recent trials in 2023–24 and 2024–25 demonstrated that combining WID with mechanical mobilisation of upper bank siltation significantly improved effectiveness, especially where vegetation trapped tidal silt.

Mr Sturdy noted that the previous five-year contract with Van Oord (2018–2023) was extended through 2024–25. A new tender process had been completed for a further five-year term starting winter 2025–26, incorporating both WID and mechanical mobilisation. He said Van Oord was recommended as the preferred contractor following a competitive assessment.

He noted that the Parrett Internal Drainage Board (IDB) would consider awarding the contract at its Finance and Works Committee meeting on 21 October 2025, contingent on assurance of continued SRA funding. The IDB required the SRA Board's 'in principle' commitment to fund the work annually over the five-year term.

Mr Sturdy said that the contract would be structured for annual renewal, indexed to the Consumer Price Index (CPI), with no financial commitment beyond each year's instruction.

Mr Sturdy explained that the original grant of £650,000 for 2025–26 was based on estimates from September 2024. A recent review had identified the need to increase the allocation to £775,000, which was due to higher operating costs reflected in tender returns, expanded scope including mechanical mobilisation, and additional project management and technical support costs.

The Chair noted that the Board needed to agree that the Board's 'in principle' intention was to complete Water Injection Dredging for the next five years to keep the River Parrett flowing.

Points raised:

- Mr Bradford said that by completing this work it had a positive impact on the mental health of the residents at risk of flooding from the River Parrett. They were continuously nervous about heavy rainfall causing flooding. However, when they saw work being completed on the river, it allayed their fears.
- Cllr Wyke said that she supported the WID going forward and thought the five-year contract was a good idea. She said she felt uncomfortable about the procurement having an open figure for the next five years and asked if the IDB had received advice on the best form of contract in terms of procurement as construction prices had increased? Mr Sturdy confirmed that the contract was a standard New Engineering Contract (NEC) version. He noted that there were a series of standard rates within the contract and escalation costs were linked to CPI costs. He said that there was lots of flexibility within the contract to change where they worked. He noted that the IDB were confident that they had control over the contract to allow for future changes.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

As recommended, the Board approved an uplift in the grant allocation for this project in the 2025-26 financial year from £650,000 to £775,000.

The Board also indicated 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.

### **Item 11: Any Other Business**

There was no business raised.

**Meeting closed at 13:00**