

Draft minutes of Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA) Board Meeting

Held on 5 December 2025

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

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
Andrew Gilling, Axe Brue IDB
Claire Newill, Natural England
Cllr Nick O'Donnell, Somerset Council
Cllr Claire Sully, Somerset Council
Matt Wheeldon, Wessex Water
Cllr Ros Wyke, Somerset Council

In Attendance:

Jennie Channing, Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA)
James Divall, Somerset Council
Caroline Dunn, SRA
Ross Edwards, Environment Agency
Sam Hitchcott, Somerset Council
Piers Hooper, Environment Agency
David Mitchell, SRA
Iain Sturdy, Somerset Drainage Boards Consortium
Andy Wallis, AW Water Engineering

Apologies:

Anthony Betty, Parrett IDB
Cllr Mike Caswell, Somerset Council
Ian Withers, Environment Agency
Donna Gowler, Natural England

ITEM 1 INTRODUCTIONS AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Somerset Rivers Authority Chair (SRA) Cllr Mike Stanton welcomed Board members and members of the public to the meeting held at Somerset Council Offices in Shepton Mallet. He welcomed Wendy Welland, who will represent the Axe Brue Internal Drainage Board (IDB).

Apologies were received from Board members Cllr Mike Caswell (Somerset Council), Anthony Betty (Parrett IDB), Ian Withers (Environment Agency) and officer Donna Gowler (Natural England)

ITEM 2: DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chair declared that he is a member of both Parrett and Axe Brue Internal Drainage Boards and a director of the national Association of Drainage Authorities.

Cllr Ros Wyke (Somerset Council) declared that she was the Chair of Somerset Council's Planning East committee which has relevance to a number of activities to the SRA

ITEM 3 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING 12 SEPTEMBER 2025

The minutes from the previous meeting held on 12 September 2025 were agreed as accurate.

Under matters arising, David Mitchell (Somerset Rivers Authority) provided updates on several points from the September meeting:

1. Mr Mitchell said that work continues developing and enhancing the Power Bi report under the performance and monitoring item of the agenda. He noted that a draft version has been circulated for members to review.
2. Mr Mitchell referred to an action at the Board meeting on 12 September where a request was made to publish descriptions of Community Flood Action Fund schemes that had been funded on the SRA website, he explained that this had now been completed and included in the Power BI report.
3. Cllr Wyke had requested a Cost-Benefit Analysis for the King's Sedgemoor Drain project. Mr Mitchell explained that this has been deferred until after winter to assess operational performance. He noted that the report is expected in March.
4. A request was made for an update from Community Engagement Officers. This has been scheduled as an item for a future Board meeting.

ITEM 4 CHAIR'S UPDATE

The Chair reported that correspondence had been sent to the Government's Floods Minister Emma Hardy, raising concerns about the impact of the withdrawal of main river maintenance and requesting urgent intervention. The Chair noted that the issue was raised by Sarah Dyke MP at the Environment Food and Rural Affairs (EFRA) Select Committee, where Somerset's situation was cited as an example of the challenges facing flood risk management nationally. Following this meeting, Emma Hardy met Sarah Dyke to discuss the issue. The Chair explained that the consequences of this meeting were that a ministerial visit to Somerset was committed to and anticipated to take place early in the new year. The Minister agreed to meet with councillors and the Internal Drainage Boards to review the implications of withdrawal of main river maintenance and explore potential funding solutions. The Chair stressed the importance of presenting a united position during this visit to secure long-term commitments.

The Chair expressed concern regarding the Environment Agency's decision to withdraw from maintenance on smaller main rivers as this issue has significant implications for flood resilience in Somerset. He noted that the matter was raised at the recent Association of Drainage Authorities (ADA) Conference, where the

potential risks to communities if maintenance responsibilities are not adequately funded was emphasised. He highlighted that discussions have also occurred at South West Association of Drainage Authorities (SWADA) meetings, with strong support from Internal Drainage Boards and local authorities for a collaborative approach to address the funding gap.

Tony Bradford, Vice-Chair, supported the Chair's view and stated that there had been too much time spent arguing over what was going to be done, it was time to discuss a plan to see how maintenance could be undertaken in the future.

The Chair noted that he had attended a recent Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra) workshop focused on water level management. The session included insights from Dutch approaches to integrated water management, which may inform future strategies in Somerset. He highlighted the potential benefits of adopting similar principles to improve resilience and efficiency.

The Chair concluded his update by announcing that Dixie Darch, a former SRA Board member, had been appointed as the new Chair of the Somerset Catchment Partnership. He welcomed this appointment and noted the importance of continued collaboration between the Catchment Partnership and the SRA to deliver nature-based solutions and integrated catchment management.

Members expressed strong support for the Chair's lobbying efforts on river maintenance and agreed that the withdrawal of Environment Agency maintenance poses a significant risk to Somerset's flood resilience.

Piers Hooper (Environment Agency) highlighted that Somerset is lucky to have the SRA to raise additional money for main river maintenance. Mr Hooper said that as a partnership, the decision needs to be made collectively on who can deliver SRA-funded extra maintenance work in the most cost-effective way. Mr Hooper also updated the Board on the main river maintenance consultation. He confirmed that since the Board meeting in September, a second consultation period is due to begin to give another opportunity for affected landowners to respond. 1500 landowners previously written to will be written to again.

The Chair invited Claire Newill to update on Natural England's new strategy. Ms Newill explained that Natural England's strategy has a new vision focusing on security through nature and the role it can play in supporting growth. The details of this can be found here: [Natural England Corporate Strategy](#)

The Natural England update promoted discussion about natural flood management (NFM) and the evidence base that supports it. It was agreed that a discussion about the NFM evidence base and its effectiveness should be scheduled for a future Board meeting.

Ross Edwards (Environment Agency) said that there is detail on the evidence on the benefits of nature-based solutions on the Environment Agency website and he

recommended the Board to look at the detail. He noted that the Environment Agency currently spends 3-4% of its budget on nature-based solutions.

The Chair thanked all for their input.

ITEM 5 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

Two questions were submitted via email to the SRA Board. The first question was sent by Wedmore Parish Councillor Bill Smart and the second by Charles Williams of the Three Villages Flood Group.

Both questions were responded to in person at the Board meeting.

For the questions and the answers, see Appendix A to these minutes, page 13.

ITEM 6 ADMINISTRATION

The SRA Chair noted that he will not be putting himself forward as chair at the 5 June Board meeting and an election for a new Chair will take place.

The Board noted the dates of the 2026-27 meetings and there were no questions raised.

As recommended, the Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA) Board approved the proposed meeting dates for the financial year 2026-27.

ITEM 7 INVESTMENT IN WATER STORAGE RESERVOIRS ON THE SOMERSET LEVELS AND MOORS

Ross Edwards (Environment Agency) delivered a comprehensive presentation on the major capital investment programme on flood storage reservoirs on the Levels and Moors. This work increased water storage resilience across the Somerset Levels and Moors. Mr Edwards explained that this infrastructure is as critical as the rivers and the pumps across the system. He explained that £90 million is being invested in upgrading critical reservoir infrastructure at Southlake, Currymoor, and Westmoor reservoirs to meet Reservoirs Act 1975 statutory safety standards. Examples of works included raising banks, reinforcing spillways, new siphons and upgrades to screens. He noted that the improvements will deliver significant operational benefits, maintain flood storage capacity and improve the ability to manage water levels during extreme weather events.

A copy of the presentation can be found here: [Flood storage reservoir investment 2025](#)

Points raised:

- The Chair expressed his interest in this, particularly as Westmoor is in the middle of the division he represents on Somerset Council. He said that over the years the work has taken, there has been very good management and relationships between the parishes affected.
- Cllr Wyke asked if there were other potential sites that could have these water storage reservoirs? Cllr Wyke explained that in her area there are certain sites that flood every winter so she wondered if these could be engineered to hold the water. Piers Hooper (Environment Agency) responded saying that moves are being taken to require smaller water storage sites to meet higher standards. The Environment Agency reservoirs team is working with Defra to place a Statutory Instrument before Parliament that will require this. There should be progress on this in the new year.
- The Chair requested clarification on the implications of the Statutory Instrument as he felt that what was described would be a regressive move. In his view, reservoirs are currently over regulated. Mr Hooper stated that it is health and safety driven following the Balmforth Review. The work is also looking to make the application of regulations more risk-based rather than doing work just for the sake of it.
- Iain Sturdy (Somerset Drainage Boards Consortium) welcomed the presentation and said that the work was welcome and necessary. He noted that it highlighted the importance of the key infrastructure in flood risk areas being maintained so that it works to its maximum efficiency. It is important that reservoirs are only operated when they are necessary and when the capacity of main rivers is exceeded. If main rivers are not maintained and the capacity is exceeded prematurely, and reservoirs fill prematurely, that reduces the standard of defence and protection that the assets provide. He said that the need for capital investment in these principal assets should not be separated from the need to invest revenue to maintain the watercourses feeding these reservoirs. He noted that the failure to maintain main rivers reduces the standards that assets can operate to as a flood defences.
- Tony Bradford emphasised his view that draining down of these reservoirs in advance of expected rainfall is key to protecting the area from flooding.

The Chair thanked Mr Edwards for his presentation.

The Board noted the presentation and welcomed the significant investment by the Environment Agency. Members agreed that the improvements represent a major step forward in strengthening Somerset's flood resilience.

ITEM 8a FINANCE REPORT AND ENHANCED PROGRAMME PERFORMANCE MONITORING

Sam Hitchcott (SRA Finance Manager) introduced her paper. She presented the financial position as at the end of Quarter 2 2025-26 and noted that at the start of the

year, the total available funds were £7.265m. This consisted of £4.132m carried forward from 2024-25 and £3.133m raised through the 2025-26 precept.

Ms Hitchcott said that at the end of Quarter 2, 4% of funds were forecast to be spent on administration and staffing of the SRA, 1% will be spent on SRA core work and development, 9% held in contingency and 86% 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 £283.6k from £627k to £831k.

Points raised:

- Tony Bradford queried a difference in the contingency figure in the paper and the figure given by Ms Hitchcott. The paper stated contingency will be £910k but Ms Hitchcott said £831k. Ms Hitchcott confirmed that the figure in the paper is correct. Mr Mitchell said the figure in the paper would be corrected.
- The Chair queried the level of contingency as it is higher than normal. Ms Hitchcott explained that agenda item 9 would address this.
- The Chair asked Ms Hitchcott whether the contingency level was sufficient to cover potential cost escalations in major projects. Ms Hitchcott confirmed that she is happy with the contingency level and noted that this provides flexibility to address emerging priorities and unforeseen costs later in the year.

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

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

ITEM 8b: QUARTER 2 2025-26 PERFORMANCE MONITORING

Caroline Dunn (SRA Project and Performance Officer) introduced the paper. She drew the Board's attention to Page 2 of the report, which showed an overview of how projects were progressing. She highlighted that there were 41 live projects, some of which had been running for 3-4 years. Many of these projects, for example, Hills to Levels and the Community Flood Action Fund, have multiple sub-projects. Ms Dunn drew attention to Table B and the length of time some projects are behind schedule. Ms Dunn offered to speak to Board members outside the meeting if they have questions.

Ms Dunn took the Board through the project outputs delivered during the previous quarter. She explained that a link to an online Quarter 2 Power Bi report was sent to all Board members. The purpose of the online report is to allow Board members to access greater detail on project spend and outputs. Ms Dunn gave a brief overview of the online report and encouraged Board Members to familiarise themselves with the report.

Points raised:

- Cllr Wyke suggested that where one organisation is delivering multiple projects it would be useful for the Board to get a detailed overview on progress of all projects to understand delivery performance.
- The Chair reminded Board members that if they have any questions between meetings to contact Caroline Dunn and David Mitchell.
- Matt Wheeldon (Wessex Water) commented that it would be valuable to have more detail on the maps included in the report such as boundary of the Moors or show rivers. Mr Mitchell said that he would like to add this and will take advice on including further details into maps.

As recommended, the SRA Board noted the overall delivery status of the schemes and activities within the current SRA Enhanced Programme for Quarter 2 2025-26.

ITEM 9 PROPOSED 2026/2027 ENHANCED PROGRAMME AND BUDGET

David Mitchell presented the draft 2026-2027 Enhanced Programme and Budget and said that it was an important piece of work as it decides what the SRA will fund for the following year. He noted that the recommendation is for the Board to provisionally approve the programme: he explained that the reason for it being a provisional approval is because funding is only confirmed once Somerset Council confirm their budget setting, as SRA funding comes via Council Tax.

Mr Mitchell explained the reason for the second recommendation in his report. Following a recent review of actual and forecast spending approximately £300,000 has been identified to be returned to contingency. It is recommended that workstream leads and Management Group explore options for additional projects to make use of these funds as part of the 2026-27 Enhanced Programme.

Mr Mitchell stated that the estimated income for 2026-27 will be £3.3m from shadow precept and IDB contributions. He noted that this was the twelfth year that the SRA have been able to fund the Enhanced Programme. Mr Mitchell said that grant applications were submitted in September, mostly by partner organisations. The applications were then reviewed by Workstream Leads, Technical Group and Management group. Twelve projects are now recommended for grant funding.

Mr Mitchell summarised the budget and drew attention to the fact that in 2026-27 SRA Community Engagement Officers will be funded as part of core costs rather than from project funding for the first time. There is no change to overall cost to the SRA. He also explained that 'committed projects' refers to projects whose funding had been deferred for one year but will require funding in 2026-27. Mr Mitchell drew attention to Table C as it gives an overview of how SRA funds are allocated across workstreams. He noted that whilst 34% goes to Workstream 1, the SRA continues to fund projects across all workstreams.

Points raised:

- The Chair asked how the estimated contingency figure is worked out. Mr Mitchell said that the team looked at existing contingency amount, various scenarios of how much funds could be returned to contingency from projects that no longer needed them, how much is required to fund the 2026-27 Enhanced Programme and from this, funds that could comfortably be carried forward are estimated.
- Iain Sturdy noted that the Environment Agency had bid for approximately £500k for additional main river maintenance in 2025-26, which he welcomed. He noted that there was no bid from the Environment Agency to top up their maintenance funding for 2026-27 and the presumption is that the work being carried out this year will not be carried out next year. He explained that he and others had an in-principle conversation around delivering extra main river maintenance next year and the IDB may want to come back to the SRA with a late bid for top up funding for some main river maintenance. Mr Mitchell responded to say this proposal could be considered as part of the process for making use of the unallocated funding linked to recommendation 2 in this paper.
- Cllr Wyke raised concerns about the River Yeo (that passes through Cheddar) as she had recently received photos of it topping its banks, she requested that this flood risk is considered at some stage as it has quite an impact on the residents of Cheddar. Mr Hooper replied to say that the Environment Agency was not aware of any previous flooding in the location. Mr Hooper offered to speak to Cllr Wyke outside the meeting about this.
- Claire Newill said that it was great to see a balance of projects across the workstreams and seeing the Community Flood Action Fund (CFAF) included for next year. She commented that it would be good to see a summary of CFAF projects that are being applied for and completed, to learn about the outcomes delivered and to help future applicants know what can be funded.
- Mr Mitchell asked Board members to encourage their organisations to put forward ideas for making use of unallocated funds.

As recommended, the SRA Board provisionally approved the proposed 2026-27 SRA Enhanced Programme and Budget.

The Board approved the SRA Workstream leads developing a proposal for making use of unallocated funds for the SRA Board to consider at its meeting on 6 March 2026.

ITEM 10 RIVER SOWY – KING’S SEDGEMOOR DRAIN (KSD)

Iain Sturdy (Somerset Drainage Boards Consortium) provided the Board with an update on King's Sedgemoor Drain bank raising. He said that the project had been completed on time and within budget. Mr Sturdy confirmed that there will be approximately £150k returned to the SRA. He explained that there would be some ongoing commitments with the project which included a 12-month defect period, and any defects will get rectified by the contractor at their expense if they are a construction fault, or at the client's expense if they are the result of an unexpected or

unforeseen fault. He noted that there may be some remedial works to do following the winter, however this is fully expectable within a project like this.

The Chair noted how significant the completion of this project is for the SRA as it was a key part of the Flood Action Plan. He stated this is a huge achievement.

Points raised:

- Cllr Wyke highlighted her disappointment in the news that some landowners had damaged part of the new banks by driving on them. She asked if money for damages would be recovered? Mr Sturdy shared Cllr Wyke's disappointment. He said that the landowners have been spoken with, and it is not believed to be malicious behaviour.
- Mr Bradford indicated his confidence that the project will be a success, however there has not been any rain therefore until then, there is no evidence that it has worked.

The Chair thanked Mr Sturdy for his update. There were no further questions.

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

The Board also noted the substantial completion of KSD bank raising works.

ITEM 11 RIVER BRUE MODELLING

Andy Wallis (Project Manager) presented findings from the River Brue hydraulic modelling study. He said that the final output of work consisted of several in-depth reports which are currently being reviewed and commented on by the River Brue modelling project steering group. He explained that a high-level assessment had been carried out of the cost and benefits of combinations of options, as well as main engineering and environmental challenges and opportunities involved in delivery. Mr Wallis took the Board through the various options in his presentation. He explained that the purpose of combined option testing was to identify whether there was value in delivering a number of these options as a strategic delivery programme, which would take into account the combined benefits and combined costs to understand whether this would provide better outcomes than simply undertaking a number of stand-alone options. Taking projects forward as a programme increases the likelihood that a positive business case can be made to secure funding. It is difficult to make a strong business case based only on flood risk benefits.

The presentation can be found here: [SRA Board Presentation River Brue Modelling 5 December 2025](#)

Points raised:

- The Chair asked how the strategic approach discussed in the paper would be realised. Which organisation will pull together the relevant partners to undertake the work needed? Mr Hooper said that there is potential to take what has been learned from the modelling forward. The Environment Agency

have £250k lined up for the Brue for next year. He said that the next steps would be to look at what elements of the project could be delivered with the available funding.

- Cllr Steve Ashton (Somerset Council) sought clarity on the link between water abstraction issues and option 10. Mr Wallis responded that there could be conflict between water abstraction requirements from the Huntspill River for the Gravity battery factory project versus a desire to lower the levels in the river for flood risk benefits.
- Cllr Wyke noted that her councillor division area stretches as far as South Drain. Communities in the area always raise flooding as an issue. Cllr Wyke requested a meeting with Mr Wallis to better understand in the local issues and the options described in the report. She said she has concerns about flooding from the River Sheppey. Mr Wallis said that he would be happy to discuss this further.
- Iain Sturdy referred to the presentation and asked whether the calculation on damages was based on the 20-year flood event or 100-year as this will impact on the cost benefit for a business case. Mr Wallis explained that the damages are not just based on one event. The report considers a wide range of events using statistics and probability when calculating the damages.
- James Divall (Somerset Council) added that Somerset Council wants to take an approach to the Brue that takes account of a wide range of benefits such as climate change and the council's Nature Recovery Strategy.
- The Chair asked for clarity on how this work will progress as no organisation is offering to take a strategic overview or deliver individual options.
- David Mitchell acknowledged the Chair's question but reminded the Board that the piece of work that was committed to was to complete the modelling. No organisation has yet agreed to progress any of the options in the report. He reminded the Board that it is not for the partnership to direct one of the partner organisations to deliver projects, the partner organisations need to agree to take projects forward. Mr Mitchell recommended that discussions take place outside the meeting to explore if an organisation will bring forward proposals to the Board to fund.
- Tony Bradford noted that he is keen to see work take place in the Brue as it has not seen the same investment as the Parrett from the SRA. He expressed frustration at having met to discuss these matters many times with no progress. He suggested forming a small committee to discuss the options, who will do the work and how it will be funded.
- Andrew Gilling (Axe Brue IDB) applauded the work that had been done but reiterated his concern that no work has yet taken place.
- Mr Sturdy queried whether the current approach should be reconsidered. He noted that while the works in the report are being described as 'improvements', many appear to focus on restoring the river to its previous condition. These should be thought more of as maintenance works that will deliver meaningful improvements. Maintenance works should be separated

from capital works such as Highbridge Clyse. The maintenance works should be done more quickly as these are more straightforward.

- The Chair invited Cllr Bill Smart who submitted a public question on this topic to contribute. Mr Smart agreed that this is an excellent report, however noted that this was only the report. He stated that there needs to be a single clear strategic direction, which can only be provided by the Board. Once the Board has determined this direction, he suggested that a focused committee be established to take the work forward. He noted that representation or contributions from councils would be valuable in demonstrating the support of local communities. Cllr Smart therefore proposed the formation of a small working group and emphasised that a clear decision would need to be made regarding which priorities or issues should be addressed.
- Cllr Nick O'Donnell (Somerset Council) asked if the options can be delivered separately focusing on the ones with the greatest benefit first. Andy Wallis said that ideally you deliver the projects under an 'umbrella' of one project to build the strongest business case, but yes, separate projects can be delivered at different times.
- Cllr Wyke stated that if leadership is required, she would be willing to provide political leadership as the issues really impact her council division. She suggested a meeting be convened with the right people and get some clarity about the projects to take forward and who will do it.
- Mr Mitchell summarised the discussion. The Environment Agency potentially has £250k to invest in the Brue. The IDB is interested to see maintenance work completed quickly. Somerset Council is keen to develop a strategic approach to the future of the Brue. Mr Mitchell suggested he convene a meeting with the relevant officers and Cllr Wyke to try and move things forward and report back in March.
- Wendy Welland (Axe Brue IDB) asked if the Gravity Battery Factory project could be expected to contribute towards the improvements to the Brue system. Andy Wallis responded to say this may be possible. Cllr Wyke advised that agreements had already been made between the Gravity company, government and Somerset Council on funding contributions.
- The Chair welcomed the idea of a working group. He proposed the following addition to the recommendations:
 - The Board ordered the convening of a working group to include the Environment Agency, Axe Brue Internal Drainage Board and Somerset Council to work out a strategic approach to coordinate all the various inputs, opportunities, potential funding sources and next steps.
- Some Board Members abstained in voting on this recommendation. Following discussion, it was agreed that the working group should be made up of officers only and no Board members at this stage. Officers will report back to the Board.

As recommended, the SRA Board noted progress towards completion of the River Brue modelling project.

The Board considered and commented on the summary of finding and recommendations from the modelling project and next steps.

The Board ordered the convening of a working group of officers to include the Environment Agency, Axe Brue Internal Drainage Board and Somerset Council to work out a strategic approach to coordinate all the various inputs, opportunities, potential funding sources and next steps and report back to the Board.

ITEM 12 STRATEGIC RISK REGISTER

David Mitchell presented the strategic risk register; he explained that this is a register of potential risks to the SRA partnership as opposed to project risks that are managed at the project level by organisations themselves. He said that the SRA keep a general overview of project risks. He highlighted that any risks that become a risk to the SRA will be escalated. He said that if a risk has to be escalated to the Board these will go through the SRA's Management Group first. He noted that the risk register being presented at the meeting is not because there is a current risk that needs the Board's attention, it is because once a year the register will be presented to the Board so that there is an opportunity to review it and comment on it.

Mr Mitchell drew attention to proposed changes set out in the paper. Two risks were assessed as decreasing – STRAT03 and STRAT05 - and two are assessed as increasing slightly – STRAT02 and STRAT10. Explanations for the changes were provided in the paper.

There were no questions raised.

As recommended, the SRA Board reviewed the strategic risk log.

The Board noted the addition of an 'opportunities' column.

ITEM 13 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Andrew Gilling raised the future management of Bleadon Sluice.

Iain Sturdy said that there was ongoing historic discussion between South West Water and the Environment Agency. He noted the status has an impact on flood risk and river management, however, is unsure what the involvement of the SRA will be.

Mr Gilling said that he would like to recommend this as a topic for a future Board meeting.

Meeting closed at 13:01.

APPENDIX 1

Public Question 1: Cllr Bill Smart, Wedmore Parish Council

Wedmore Parish Council welcomes the report for Item 11 of this meeting with the following observation and questions:

Table 1 Item 'River Brue topping up of low spots'

Assuming this refers to the raising of some bank heights to their previous design height will this work be undertaken by the EA [Environment Agency] as it is believed that they have been awarded grant funding to undertake such maintenance work within the catchment?

Will the SRA now be urgently undertaking the recommendation of finding a suitable organisation to undertake the work and in this respect, we would urge as a minimum, combined option 2 as once the work is completed it is unlikely that funding for further works will be found within the next decade.

Response

Piers Hooper (Environment Agency) confirmed that the Environment Agency had £250k allocated in its programme for Brue catchment maintenance work in the next financial year. He said the work done by Andy Wallis [see Item 11 above] had given a clear steer about where the benefits would be greatest. The aim was therefore to develop a project by 2026. Mr Hooper was unable to say how far the £250k would go

but the Environment Agency would look to deliver as much as they could within the constraints.

Public Question 2: Charles Wilson, 3 Villages Flood Group

The following question is submitted by Charles Wilson, a member of the 3 Villages Flood Group (3VFG) committee representing Mudford, Chilton Cantelo and Ashington. This question is addressed to the Highways Department, which I understand will be represented at Friday's meeting.

The 3VFG covers the lanes and roads in and around Mudford, Chilton Cantelo and Ashington. These highways are susceptible to pluvial flooding, most of which is attributable directly or indirectly to the poor state of roadside drains. The flooding can affect properties in Mudford, and isolate the other two villages, in all cases posing a serious risk to life if ambulance services cannot reach a coincident medical emergency. Chilton Cantelo contains a SEND school which has to close when the village is cut off by flooding, costing the Council a great deal of money in lost education days and contracted taxis being unable to take children to the school. The situation is deeply unsatisfactory. Is there any scope for the allocation of additional funds to allow for a thorough gully and drain cleaning programme that will mitigate the effects of pluvial flooding in the 3VFG area henceforward? The Flood Group is initiating a programme of drain monitoring by residents that would contribute to the drainage network operating more efficiently than at present.

Response

David Mitchell responded to the questions and explained that the matters raised by the Flood Group had previously been considered by the Community Flood Action Fund (CFAF) review panel, following an application submitted by one of the parish councils. He said that part of that earlier proposal involved training and gully emptying, and the panel had considered it carefully. However, the panel concluded the proposed works would be relatively ineffective unless the source of the water – including surface-water runoff – was addressed first.

Mr Mitchell explained that highways already undertake annual drainage maintenance, and SRA funding provides a second annual round of gully-emptying and drain jetting. He noted that based on current arrangements, an increase in maintenance frequency is unlikely, as the existing two rounds already represent both core and additional SRA-funded activity. Mr Mitchell said that greater local intelligence from residents (such as the monitoring the Flood Group is now organising) may help Highways better target its existing maintenance programme.

The Chair advised that the matter could also be raised at Somerset Council's Scrutiny Committee for Climate and Environment, which has a public question time and direct oversight of highways and drainage matters, offering another route for representation.