# ITEM 7 Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA) Board Public Questions and Answers, 20 March 2026

There are seven sets of public questions and answers stretching out to page 19 of this document. Each set starts on a new page.

**Public Questions and Answers from Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA) and SRA partners**

**Question 1, from Julian Hodge**

Dear SRA Board,

I have had a reply to a post that I put out on Facebook to email yourselves about some questions asked which could possibly be discussed at the Boards' meeting. The date of the next meeting wasn't disclosed but I thought I would send my questions in to you as suggested.

You have carried out dredging this winter, which is good, but can it be explained why every time the work is carried out, it appears to be between Burrowbridge and down to Northmoor Pump?

I only ask as if you look at the screenshots, the river round the worked area is significantly wider then downstream of Northmoor Pumps (not sure when maps was updated last so likely not showing the results from this year's work). Quick measure on my phone maps was 16yds down to around 10yds wide (some areas were nearly 8yds so approximately half the width!) The river width seemed to roughly match the worked area when you got to near the fire station.

If the river was dredged next time from Northmoor to Colley Lane, the extra water that would be able to naturally flow down the river every day of the year would probably be as much as all the extra pumps being used at the moment! Therefore, a lot less water even making it onto the moors and less chance of these occurrences happening.

With people now thinking more about unclogging waterways to help get more water to the pumps, the river is our main waterway and the screenshots show it's choking the flow of water. Northmoor drain is currently having works carried out to increase water flow around the bridges with pipes apparently being installed to aid flow. How is this any different from the narrowing around Dunwear?

If Burrowbridge is a key location for dredging works, why hasn't the bridge there been targeted for the relief holes cleared?

With the majority of the dredging works over the years appear to be around the Moorland / Burrowbridge section, it feels like it's more about being visible in doing it to make the villagers feel safer. Whereas, working between Sam Gamlins outlet to Dunwear would increase river capacity more as it's half the width at present of upstream areas but hardly anyone would see it so exposure wise, it doesn't look as good.

What is going to make more of a difference than increasing the width of the river through the narrow sections? Yes, there is a cost but how much is this flood going to cost overall in comparison? Why not work on different sections each time to then dredge the main river over X number of years? For example, if you are dredging yearly:

Year 1 - Somerset Bridge to Sam Gamlins, Year 2 - Sam Gamlins to Northmoor,

Year 3 - Northmoor to Burrowbridge.

Then if the boat can get above Burrowbridge:

Year 4 - Burrowbridge - Parrett lock gates,

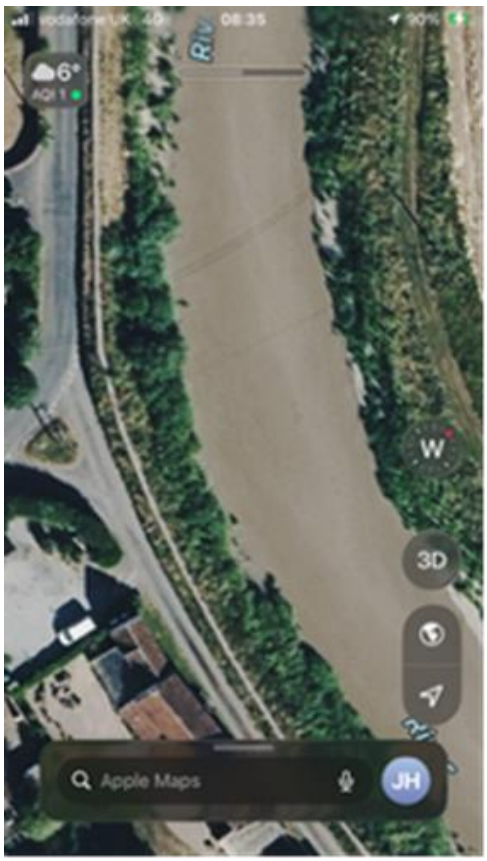
Year 5 - River Tone upto lock gates.

Some people may say that opening up the river width may help lead to tidal surge flooding but realistically there isn't many times a year currently that this would happen and with the barrier built, should stop any risk of tidal flooding. Prior to this being completed, work could be carried out like normal but on the bends, profiling a smooth bank to aid the outgoing flow but leave the incoming flow affected banks so incoming tide faces more water disturbance.

Thank you for your time.

Yours Faithfully,

Julian Hodge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**Answers from Environment Agency and Internal Drainage Board**

**Environment Agency**: Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA) has made local decisions to regularly dredge sections of the River Parrett, and as an active partner of the SRA, we support this initiative. Unfortunately, the Environment Agency cannot secure funding for widespread dredging due to the sparse population in this landscape. You can find out more about the Environment Agency's investment & maintenance of the system here, it specifically includes our position on dredging.

To suggest the dredging is undertaken as visible reassurance is wrong. You are right to highlight the tidal nature of the river Parret and that dredging would help move water two ways, and during spring tides this inhibits further the ability of some pumping stations to evacuate water from the moors. When the Bridgwater tidal barrier is operational it will become a part of the flood risk management system for the Somerset Levels and Moors and will reduce risk from coastal flooding.

The location of dredging is determined in collaboration with relevant risk management authorities, taking into account the system's complexity. Dredging occurs where the incoming tide meets the fluvial river water, as this is where the maximum amount of sediment is deposited, making regular dredging most effective. This dredging is conducted annually and has been extended as part of a successful trial, with evidence available here. Partners are exploring how it can be enhanced further, specifically around the confluence of the Tone and Parrett.

**Parrett Internal Drainage Board:** There are benefits to maintaining the channel shape and size in other reaches of the River Parrett, and this was investigated in detail by the Environment Agency and partners after the 2014 floods. From this work, it is clear that the lengths that make the greatest reduction in flooding are those from Hook Bridge to Stanmoor Bridge on the River Tone, and Burrowbridge to Northmoor on the River Parrett, where annual maintenance is currently focused. Other reaches, particularly from North Moor to the M5 bridge, were also shown as likely to reduce flooding further, but those impacts are not as great as the work we currently focus on. More funding and resources to deliver the work would enable some of this work to be undertaken and flooding to be reduced further.

You are correct that there is a risk of increased tidal incursion to the river if dredging were implemented further downstream, and until the tidal Barrier is completed that risk remains. Once the Barrier is completed that risk will be abated, as it will be closed on those tides that pose the greatest risk.

Once the Barrier is complete it would be sensible to consider the advantages and disadvantages of further channel works to reduce fluvial flooding but the channel size in and around Bridgwater is largely dominated by the influence of the incoming tide which has greater impact than fluvial flows: for example, when the tide is out, the river is only partially full in Bridgwater even when it is bank full at Burrowbridge.

If the channel were to be dredged back to the hard tidal defences in Bridgwater it is unlikely that would have any beneficial impact on bank full conditions at Burrowbridge. People often refer to historic photographs of the River Parrett being

much bigger in Bridgwater than it is now as evidence that there was a better understanding of the need for dredging in Bridgwater, but they should understand that the channel was maintained in this way to enable Navigation and Shipping to be undertaken, and for the transfer of goods to the upstream areas in smaller vessels. Not principally for flood risk purposes.

It is already acknowledged that the impact of the Barrier on sediment regimes will need to be monitored and that it may be possible to close the sluice gate to exclude sediment on the highest tides, which are also the ones that bring the greatest volumes of silt into the River. However, that has not currently been agreed as a priority for the operation of the Barrier which initially will be closed infrequently, but with increasing regularity as sea level rise starts to impact water levels in the Severn estuary over the next 50 to 100 years.

It may be possible to demonstrate the case for more frequent closing of the Barrier if the benefits of reducing silt accumulation in the river and thereby a reduction in fluvial flood risk can be shown.

**Question 2, from Robin Brown**

Dear Sir/Madam,

Can the SRA look at forming a single authority to Maintain, Plan, Pump and deliver necessary water and flood management in Somerset? Involving the IDBs but completely removed from any EA input. The residents and businesses of Somerset have lost all trust and confidence in the Environment Agency and need to see action not broken promises.

Yours faithfully,

Robin Brown.

**Answer to Robin Brown from Somerset Rivers Authority Chair**

The SRA Board appreciates how stressful and upsetting flooding and the risk of flooding is to those affected and we understand why people are frustrated and critical of the organisations working to reduce the risk of flooding.

However, the Environment Agency is a valued member of the SRA, and its proposed exclusion from Somerset flood and water management arrangements would not be desirable or sensible for Somerset communities.

The Environment Agency plays a crucial and under-appreciated part in flood risk management across Somerset. As a partner in the SRA since 2015, in line with the SRA's remit of doing extra, the Environment Agency has undertaken lots of additional work to help reduce the risks and impacts of flooding.

In its preparations for and its responses to Storm Chandra earlier this year, the Environment Agency did a huge amount to help protect people and properties through its use of pumping stations and extra pumps. No other organisation could have done so quickly and at such scale what the Environment Agency has done in recent weeks.

**Question 3, from Charron Pugsley-Hill**

Please can I ask the following questions to the SRA board for the meeting on 20th March. I will be attending the meeting.

Was a cost benefit analysis carried out following the flooding in 2014 on the Somerset Levels in terms of what changes to the water management of the Levels were needed going forward to prevent the avoidable flooding of homes and businesses on the Levels and the costs associated with temporary pumping and other consequences such as increased journey times and distances and losses to business. Have the effects on people's physical and mental health been assessed then also?

Will this work be revisited following the critical incident this year and its consequences?

Will the recommended work following the flooding in 2014 that was not carried out now be reconsidered and implemented?

Thank you

Charron

**Answer to Charron Pugsley-Hill from Somerset Rivers Authority Manager**

The main response to the flooding of 2013-14 was the production of a 20 Year Somerset Levels and Moors Flood Action Plan. This was published on 6 March 2014. Its purpose was to set out ways of reducing "the frequency, impact and duration of floods" in the short, medium and long term – in other words, as you put it, to consider "what changes to the water management of the Levels were needed". The first part of the Plan made a series of direct recommendations, the second outlined ideas for more complex, inter-related actions, for which, at that time, no funding was available. As this Plan came out when the Levels were still flooding, there was no time then to do cost-benefit analysis, and a lot more work on the Plan was left to be done subsequently.

Part of that work was the production of an Economic Impact Assessment. This came out in 2015. It looked at the costs associated with emergency response activities like temporary pumping. In 2013-14, it estimated these were between £14.3 and £19.3million. It looked in detail at increased journey times: it put the cost of highway and travel impacts in 2013-14 at between £9 and £15 million. It looked at losses to business: half of all Somerset businesses were affected; the cost of damages to business premises was between £2.5 and £4.1million; the cost to farming was up to £6.9million. It was harder to quantify the effects on people's physical and mental health, but the Assessment said the impacts were "devastating" and cost between £1.6 and £4.8million.

One of the consequences of the Flood Action Plan was the launch in 2015 of Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA). When the SRA was launched, the Levels and Moors Flood Action became the Somerset Flood Action Plan, and responsibility for it passed over to the SRA partnership. The majority of the actions in the plan have been completed or are in progress. Approximately 9 have not progressed for various reasons, chiefly to do with costs, intrinsic difficulties, problems being addressed in other ways, and better ideas being conceived.

In the House of Commons on 23 February, the Floods Minister Emma Hardy said that following her visit to Somerset on 10 February “the Environment Agency committed to reviewing the issues around water-level management in Somerset once this incident has come to an end. It will work closely with the internal drainage boards and the local council as part of the wider recovery plan.”

As the Environment Agency, the Internal Drainage Boards and Somerset Council are all part of the SRA partnership, collectively we will draw upon our experiences and knowledge to consider “what changes to the water management of the Levels [are] needed going forward”. To conclude, that exercise will look back in part to 2014, and what has been done since then, but it will also aim to take a fresh look at what should be done next. Lessons learned from the review of the January event will inform future grant funding proposals to the SRA.

**Question 4, from Barbara Ball**

We have had 3 flood warnings in 13 months, January 26th 2025, December 12th 2025, and January 27th 2026. This last one not as bad as 26th January 2025. Worse of course was October 2021.

The residents of Home Farm Way, Green Lane and Orchards paid for the bund to be restored at the back of Home Farm Way during 2023 and 2024. This bund has successfully held back a tremendous amount of water in the following floods.

So I ask how many flood warnings will we get by the end of this year with the climate predicted to become even wetter? We desperately need funding to have the culvert cleared in Station Road which is overgrown and full of silt that washes from the field. Also the other end of the culvert, and Shudrick Stream behind Green Lane. The Slape Stream that is in the same field across Station Road has been filled in so the water runs across the field finding its own path down to the cattle grid gate and into Station Road and into Holway House Park. The Atkins report of 2024 and the recent Section 19 report state if these works were done it would help eliminate a lot of the causes of the flooding.

The Environment Agency need to work with FWAG and talk to the landowners concerning their riparian rights and responsibilities. The council could also look to their responsibilities of clearing culverts and small streams and ditches. Funding should be available from the Somerset River Authority and Somerset Council itself.

My question is when are we going to get help from these organisations, and when can we expect the work to start?

Barbara Ball

**Answers from the Environment Agency and Somerset Council**

**Environment Agency:** The key recommendation for the Environment Agency from the 2024 study was a hydraulic model of the various watercourses in and around Ilminster, which is required to assess the feasibility of future options to reduce the risk of flooding. We now have confirmed government funding for this modelling stage. This should be undertaken in 2026-27 and report in 2027-28.

Hydraulic modelling is needed to help understand which options give the best flood risk reduction and benefits for the money spent. This will in turn help determine if/ how much funding can be applied for. The hydraulic model will help illustrate the effects of the options on the movement of flood water, as though they have been implemented on the ground. This helps understand the benefits, as well as showing if any unintended consequences or problems occur elsewhere because of the options.

The riparian responsibilities challenge is well-understood and all partners are engaged in raising awareness, providing support and guidance.

There have been numerous events held to support the community, to raise awareness of roles and responsibilities, and provide advice and support around actions residents can take to reduce the impacts of flooding. This includes bringing national expert ‘Flood’ Mary Long-Dhonau to Ilminster last year, with the ‘Flood Pod’, a Property Flood Resilience demonstration unit. Just this week we have had a follow up meeting with FWAG, the Town Council, Ilminster Area Resilience Group, and Somerset Rivers Authority. FWAG are actively pursuing natural flood management opportunities with local landowners, with input and support from the community. Ilminster Area Resilience Group (IARG) is a group of volunteers from the community, and this group continues to go from strength to strength. We will continue to offer support to the Town Council, IARG, and the wider community, with advice and guidance, face-to-face events, online support sessions and regular updates.

**Somerset Council:** Somerset Council – as the Lead Local Flood Authority – are working with the Highways Service to commission works to clear the ditch and the route egress in the piping on Station Road. This should be commissioned this summer.

Somerset Council have met colleagues from the Environment Agency, the MP, Ilminster Town Council and residents on Thursday 19th March to discuss the issues, walk the site and understand the key actions for next steps. Somerset Council will compile the action plan from Section 19 (current and past report) and work with the Town Council and residents’ group to address them.

One key action is procuring the works to clear the drain.

Another will be a bid to the SRA from the residents group to the SRA’s Community Flood Action Fund for the river clearance needed at the rear of the estate, and Somerset Council will work with the Town Council to explore the costs of jetting the culvert under the estate and next to the park homes facility.

**Question 5, from Councillor Bill Smart of Wedmore Parish Council**

The SRA project to improve conveyancing in the lower Brue catchment.

This is two questions which are inter-related.

The agenda and accompanying papers for this meeting make little, if any reference to the project to improve conveyancing in the lower Brue catchment, a project which has run for a decade, involved expensive hydraulic surveys and large scale modeling but little if any work on the ground. The best that can be detected is in agenda Item 9, appendix 1, page 11, where the IDB is to be awarded £270k for various neglected EA maintenance works.

Why is this project not included in any of the long list of 'proposed schemes and activities' set out in appendix 1?

On the 10th February this year, Emma Hardy the Floods Minister visited Langport regarding the then current flooding, which again saw most of the lower Brue catchment flooded. She is quoted in a BBC report as saying, "We are putting £75m into flood defences **this year** in Somerset" (this excluded the Bridgwater barrier). What action has the SRA taken to ensure that a part of this £75m can be obtained or diverted to fund the lower Brue project.

William Smart
Wedmore Parish Council

**Answer from Somerset Rivers Authority Manager**

To answer your question directly, there is no project specifically aiming to improve conveyance on the River Brue in the 2026-27 Enhanced Programme because the SRA has not received any grant proposals requesting funding for such a project.

I understand your frustration that projects you would like to see taken forward are not included in the 2026-27 Enhanced Programme. The lack of a project is directly linked to the resources available to the SRA partner organisations to develop and deliver new projects and also the need to prioritise those resources. The partners are subject to greater demand to deliver flood risk projects than can be accommodated.

As previously reported to the SRA Board it is recommended that flood risk in the Lower Brue is tackled as part of a broader approach to flooding including other factors such as economic development, environmental improvements, increasing resilience and adaptation to the impacts of flooding. Somerset Council is interested in leading on this strategic work, supported by the other SRA partners and stakeholders, but is not yet in a position to allocate staff to the task. This does not preclude an organisation applying for SRA funds to deliver a project or projects in the

interim. A meeting to discuss how things can be progressed is being organised for the end of April.

With regards the £75m you refer to, I have not been able to establish the details that underpin the Minister's quote so I am unable to say whether any of these funds could be available for the lower Brue.

**Question 6, from Dawn Ring**

I would like a question put to the board at the SRA board meeting on Friday 20th March. I won't be able to attend, but Bryony Sadler will listen for my answer

During the recent major incident declared in Somerset in January, we found ourselves at Moor House and our neighbours at the Black Smock, at risk of flooding from West Sedgemoor.

Whilst on the phone to the EA duty officer, I discovered that the elevation for out properties were taken by the EA in 2014 after the house was flooded. I was told our Elevation was 6.36 and 6.30, we agreed this must have been taken from the front door.

I protested that this was wrong and the water was only a few inches away from flooding us, that it was an old house that leans and we flooded from the rear of the house.

My neighbour had the same conversation at Burrowbridge the following day. His property in 2014 was 6.24m.

The following day the EA sent out a surveyor to re survey both houses.

Our property's elevation came back at 5.87 which is 430mm lower than previous records show. The Black Smock new survey was 5.82 now lower by 420mm. I truly believe that more water would have been stored on west Sedgemoor had we not shouted when we did.

Bearing in mind that we are neighbours in the same area, and 100's of properties that flooded in 2014 were also surveyed can the EA confirm that all the elevations they have on record are all correct? or have they just measured front door steps, when many houses flood from the back.

Kind Regards
Dawn Ring

**Answer from the Environment Agency**

As a way of helping individual householders to evaluate their risk in this event, we shared information about survey data on file with numerous residents on the Somerset Levels and Moors. This was shared with caveats that we could not guarantee that this data was 100% accurate, and direct observations of conditions should inform actions. Water levels are not the same across the moors, and levels at telemetry sites may be different than at property locations. We also requested that residents inform us if they thought the data was incorrect. As you mention, residents

from West Sedgemoor came and spoke with us in Burrowbridge to share their own observations from the area – we immediately acted on this information and deployed surveyors to attend site the following day. We then shared the results of that survey with yourself and other residents on West Sedgemoor.

We hold a great deal of data, of which survey data is one part. Our operational decisions are informed by a variety of sources, including direct observations on the ground. We have updated our records with the revised data and will review operational procedures with this updated information.

Pumping operations across the Somerset Levels and Moors are prioritised according to reducing risk to property. It is a fine balancing act to ensure we remove flood waters as fast as possible across the catchments. Local conditions may not reflect the overall picture; for example, it could appear that there is capacity in the river at a specific location, when in fact there is no room downstream. In this case, pumping could increase flood risk elsewhere, so may need to pause until water has moved through the wider system. For most of this flood event, we have not been able to pump at West Sedgemoor because of high river levels in the catchment. Staff have been on duty 24 hours a day throughout the event, maximising the safe evacuation of water across the whole of the Somerset Levels and Moors.

We value feedback from local communities about flood impacts and water levels. We support community volunteers across Somerset, and we have strong relationships with many communities, who share information with us during and after flood events, which helps to improve operational responses, flood warning accuracy, and our understanding of flood impacts.

**Question 7, from Bryony Sadler**

Dear SRA,

I apologise that I have three questions rather than the usual two. However, there are many thoughts and concerns locally, and ultimately it is our communities that are directly affected by the decisions being made.

1) I understand that there has been some consideration of making Northmoor a more permanent pumping station. At this stage the engineer involved appears to have discounted the idea, and I understand that National Grid has also requested payment in advance for operating a pumping station.

May I respectfully suggest two points:

A) It would be extremely valuable for the engineer to spend some time with locals who have long-standing knowledge and experience of how the system works in practice before the proposal is discounted. There is a great deal of local understanding about how the system operates that could help inform this decision.

B) We should also explore alternative funding or power sources for a future pumping station, such as hydroelectric or solar power, or other funding streams, rather than relying solely on a solution that depends on advance payments to National Grid.

2) Having read through the SRA budget, I would sincerely urge you to reconsider how funding is currently being allocated.

Through working on, visiting, and attending projects that have previously been funded by the SRA, it seems that a significant proportion of funds is directed towards partner organisations. Some of these organisations, such as FWAG, may already be able to access funding through other routes, including DEFRA or the Woodland Trust, particularly for initiatives such as tree planting.

Similarly, work relating to highways should arguably be funded through the County Council. Given the current financial climate, it may be sensible to pause some of these allocations. Real resilience requires the system itself to be robust, with sufficient and sustained funding for the proper maintenance of drainage systems, watercourses, and flood management infrastructure. These are substantial sums of money, and with budgets under pressure it would be prudent to maintain a reserve that could be accessed in situations like the one we have just faced. That reserve could then be used to improve the resilience and efficiency of the wider water management system.

For example, the IDB could benefit from consistent operational resources, such as having a team and machinery working year-round to clear blockages, maintain rhynes, and manage the main drainage channels for the benefit of the whole system.

A further point linked to this is that, after roughly twelve years of funding these various schemes, it would be useful to assess their real-world effectiveness. Have any of these schemes materially helped during the flooding events this winter? While

projects such as tree planting, leaky dams, and small village initiatives are positive in principle, when funding is limited and many schemes are not actively reviewed after implementation, perhaps the priority now should be returning to the fundamental work required to manage the whole drainage system effectively — i.e. maintenance of the system.

3) I understand that the Minister has requested a full breakdown of this year's response, particularly regarding the pumping operation and the triggers that were reached.

Could you please clarify when and how this information will be made available to the public? It would also be helpful to understand how this review will feed into a clear plan going forward, and how greater local knowledge and input will be incorporated, respected, and acted upon in future decision-making.

Kind regards

Bryony

**Answers from the Environment Agency and Somerset Rivers Authority Manager**

**Question 1 – Environment Agency:** We have committed to reviewing when pumps should be activated, whether the current trigger points are right, and whether installing permanent pumps in certain locations could offer better value for money in the long term. This will be done with SRA partners. We are committed to reporting progress at future board meetings so communities have visibility, we will report back to Government and share information online. Nothing has been discounted, we are only in the early phase of recovery from the major incident.

On the specific point about the standing charge from electricity network operators, this is a very real challenge to the economic case for permanent pumping. It is well understood, and risk management authorities have been attempting to influence OFGEM on this topic.

Alternative renewable sources of power are not viable at the scale needed when the Somerset Levels and Moors are flooded. Solar powered pumps are already in use in the summer, moving relatively small amounts of water for irrigation. They would not be appropriate to move large volumes of water in the winter.

Any flood mitigation scheme must demonstrate a cost benefit to the taxpayer. So, any scheme that is put forward for additional funding, including extra permanent pumps, has to undergo financial scrutiny. Because the Somerset Levels and Moors are sparsely populated, attracting funding for large projects such as this can be difficult. We operate 21 pumping stations in Somerset, all of which require regular maintenance and upkeep.

All the Somerset Levels and Moors pumping stations were built based on land drainage and agricultural benefits, mainly in the period following the second world war. Some of the pumping stations predate this: they were originally driven by steam engines. Since then, pumping has become more important to reduce the likelihood and impact of flooding, but as the cost benefit assessment doesn't support the high cost of creating larger permanent pumping stations, we are currently only able to provide temporary pumps on an incident activated basis.

After the floods of 2014, a great deal of work was done to understand what the most cost-effective response to future floods would be. It was clear that pumping reduces the duration of flooding and is instrumental to our response.

The Somerset Levels and Moors have received a huge amount of investment since 2014, with work delivered by the Environment Agency and other Risk Management Authorities, making this landscape more resilient to flooding.

Our funding is nationally prioritised according to how it will benefit the most people. Typically, these are areas with the highest concentration of properties, businesses, and infrastructure. Even though the Somerset moors are sparsely populated and mostly farmland, this landscape has received significant funding from local and national government, and from local taxpayers through the Somerset Rivers Authority.

As part of our continued investment programme, four Somerset pumping stations will receive new flood defence equipment in a £6 million upgrade. The project will modernise pumping stations at Midelney, Huish Episcopi, Northmoor and Westover.

While all 21 pumping stations in the area already have electric pumps, many were installed in the 1960s and 70s and are nearing the end of their operational life. The new pumps will have the same capacity as the existing pumps, as the buildings, electrical supply and drainage network is designed to this capacity. However, they will be more efficient and reliable than the older pumps, needing less maintenance and improving resilience.

**Question 2 – Somerset Rivers Authority:** 58% of all funds claimed from the SRA since 2016 have been allocated to W1 – Dredging and River Management, 12% to Workstream 2 (Land Management including Natural Flood Management), 7 % to Workstream 3 (Urban Water Management), 18% to Workstream 4 (Resilient Infrastructure) and 5% to Workstream 5 (Building Local Resilience).

Each of the SRA partner organisations have core funding relating to their statutory responsibilities. For example, Internal Drainage Boards are already funded to reduce flood risk to people and property, and manage water levels for agricultural and environmental needs, while also enhancing the local environment. The Environment

Agency is already funded to do work on Main Rivers. The SRA was established to enable extra flood risk management projects to take place, not to replace the core funding of the partner organisations. Projects the SRA funds are over and above the business-as-usual activities. The SRA funds Somerset Highways on the same basis as our other partners.

The SRA funds extra actions on and around roads to tackle flooding both on roads and in areas near roads – in places where runoff from roads may be causing flooding. When flooding occurs across Somerset one of the concerns that is already raised is that highway gullies and drains are not cleared regularly enough. The SRA funds extra gully emptying that Somerset Council cannot fund from existing budgets. It is positive that the SRA is able to contribute to an issue that is such a high priority for so many residents.

Understanding precisely what the real-world effectiveness of each SRA-funded intervention has made would be valuable information to hold but would be very expensive if it was possible at all. In reality a pragmatic and proportionate approach based upon the expertise of the SRA partner organisations is taken. For example, knowing exactly what impact the approximately £1.3m the SRA invested directly into conveyance improvements on the Levels and Moors in the past 12 months made to reducing the amount of property flooding in January and February would be valuable to know. Unfortunately, to get this level of detail would likely require computer modelling and be expensive, if it is even possible to know exactly. The proportionality of doing similar for much lower cost interventions such as natural flood management and gully emptying would likely result in challenge to the SRA for investing in studies and modelling rather than actions. FWAG SW is undertaking monitoring of a selection of SRA-funded projects and will be reporting their findings in the coming months.

The Environment Agency's research and evaluation of Natural Flood Management (NFM) demonstrate its effectiveness in reducing flood risk and providing multiple environmental benefits. Relying on the robust evidence base produced nationally when planning and implementing NFM projects is a more cost-effective approach than spending significant sums modelling individual low-cost interventions.
NFM measures, such as river restoration, wetland creation and woodland planting, have been shown to slow runoff, enhance infiltration, and reduce peak flood flows. These measures not only help manage flood and erosion risk but also contribute to climate resilience and sustainable water management. The NFM community pilots have highlighted the importance of community engagement and local partnerships in the successful implementation of these measures.

An important flexibility that the SRA has is to make local choices about how to spend our funds rather than following, for example, national government priorities. This has allowed the SRA to fund activities that do not generally meet the value for money threshold that national government funding requires – e.g. extensive Natural Flood Management, water injection dredging, funding of extra vegetation maintenance

along main rivers, building community resilience and extra highway maintenance to reduce flooding. The SRA relies on the expert officers within the partnership to bring forward projects that they assess as having a positive impact. These projects are then judged against the SRA's assessment criteria to judge whether the SRA should fund them. Every grant application is accompanied by an estimation of the outputs and outcomes the project will deliver using the available evidence and professional judgement.

**Question 3 – Environment Agency:** We listen carefully to feedback and value input from the communities we serve. We will share information via the SRA board meetings and will publish our progress direct to Government and online. Timings are not fixed and the review progress will interact with our broader recovery plans. A recovery team are already developing the programme of work needed after this major incident.