

Draft minutes of Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA) Board Meeting

held on 20 March 2026

in the Council Chamber at Somerset Council's offices in Brympton Way, Yeovil, BA20
2HT

Members of SRA Board:

Cllr Mike Stanton - *Chair*,
Somerset Council
Tony Bradford - *Vice-Chair*, Parrett Internal
Drainage Board (IDB)
Cllr Steve Ashton, Somerset Council
Anthony Betty, Parrett IDB
Cllr Mike Caswell, Somerset Council
Ian Collins, Wessex Regional Flood
& Coastal Committee
Piers Hooper, Environment
Agency (*substitute*)
Claire Newill, Natural England
Cllr Nick O'Donnell, Somerset Council
Cllr Claire Sully, Somerset Council
Wendy Welland, Axe Brue IDB
Cllr Ros Wyke, Somerset Council

In Attendance:

Bel Deering, Somerset Rivers
Authority (SRA)
James Divall, Somerset Council
Caroline Dunn, SRA
Ross Edwards, Environment Agency
Paul Elliston, SRA
Sam Hitchcott, Somerset Council
Jonathan Hudston, SRA
David Mitchell, SRA
Iain Sturdy, Somerset Drainage
Boards Consortium

Apologies:

Andrew Gilling, Axe Brue IDB
Matt Wheeldon, Wessex Water
Ian Withers, Environment Agency
Vicky Farwig, Wessex Water
Neil Ogilvie, Somerset Council

ITEM 1 INTRODUCTIONS AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA) Chair Cllr Mike Stanton welcomed SRA Board members and members of the public to the meeting. He welcomed Anthony Betty, who will represent the Parrett Internal Drainage Board (IDB).

Apologies were received from SRA Board Members Matt Wheeldon (Wessex Water), Andrew Gilling (Axe Brue Internal Drainage Board), Ian Withers (Environment Agency) and officers Vicky Farwig (Wessex Water) and Neil Ogilvie (Somerset Council).

ITEM 2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chair declared that he is a member of Somerset Drainage Boards Consortium and a Director of the Association of Drainage Authorities, where he represents Local Authorities.

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

The SRA team agreed to contact all Board members before the next Board meeting in June to request that they update their Register of interests.

ITEM 3 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING ON 5 DECEMBER

The minutes from the previous meeting held on 5 December 2025 were agreed as accurate pending three amendments

1. Page 3 - Ross Edwards requested wording be changed from 'currently spends' to 'aims to invest' regarding Environment Agency budget allocations.
2. Page 11 - a correction was requested where the minutes stated the Board had 'ordered a review' to say the 'Board requested a review'.
3. Wendy Welland said that she had attended the previous meeting therefore needed to be added to the attendance list.

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

1. 'Re-share the Power BI performance report with Board Members' had been completed. Mr Mitchell explained that some difficulties remained around finalising the report and sharing access with all Board Members. Members were asked to confirm whether they could access the link and to provide feedback. It was noted that the report remained under development and would be refined over time.
2. 'Provide a Post-Project Cost-Benefit Analysis for the King's Sedgemoor Drain project'. Mr Mitchell said this was scheduled later on the agenda.
3. 'Provide an update on the work of the SRA Community Engagement Officers'. Bel Deering would provide an update on Flood Group Networks at this meeting. A full update would be given by Dr Deering and her colleague Paul Elliston at the next SRA Board meeting.
4. Mr Hooper had not yet contacted Councillor Liz Leyshon to discuss issues at Clyse Hole as agreed a previous meeting. Mr Hooper stated he will follow up on this request.
5. At the 5 December SRA Board meeting, Natural Flood Management was discussed and it was suggested this be put on the Board agenda in the future for further discussion. Mr Mitchell said that a workshop session would be being arranged for later in the year.
6. An action for the SRA team to 'investigate ways to encourage more Community Flood Action Fund applications'. Caroline Dunn (Somerset Rivers Authority) said discussions were underway with partners to understand what barriers existed to applications being submitted.

7. An action to 'convene a working group to progress next steps for the River Brue modelling project'. This would be covered later under Public Questions.
8. The Chair advised the Board that, contrary to his earlier statement at the Board meeting on 5 December 2025, he would now be putting himself forward for re-election as Chair at the June SRA Board meeting

ITEM 4 2026-27 SRA MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING (MoU) AND CONSTITUTION

David Mitchell explained that the SRA MoU and Constitution is reviewed each year and Board Members are asked to re-sign it on behalf of the organisation they represent. He said the document was given a more thorough review this year at the request of Somerset Council as Host Authority for the SRA. He noted that whilst the text in the document had been re-organised to more clearly delineate between the MoU section and the Constitution, there were no material changes to intent or the responsibilities of the partner organisations. Mr Mitchell said the SRA Management Group had reviewed and commented on the document and feedback had been incorporated into the final document.

There were no questions.

Cllr Steve Ashton proposed the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding with Cllr Mike Caswell seconding.

As recommended, the Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA) Board agreed and signed the 2026-27 SRA Memorandum of Understanding and Constitution.

ITEM 5 CHAIR'S UPDATE

Cllr Mike Stanton reflected on the recent flooding experienced across Somerset during January and February, noting that while a number of communities were affected, the event differed in character from previous major flood incidents. He noted that the event was similar but not identical to the major floods of 2013-14 and said that he believed that the dredging and bank raising of the King's Sedgemoor Drain will have played a role in reducing the impacts of the flooding. However, he noted that there was still much work to be done. The Chair emphasised that continued increases in rainfall intensity and volume would mean that flood risk management increasingly focused on reducing impacts rather than preventing flooding entirely.

The Chair reported that the Minister for Water and Flooding, Emma Hardy, had visited Somerset on 11 February to see the impact of the flooding and meet local residents, farmers, Environment Agency and Internal Drainage Board members. Cllr Stanton felt that many productive conversations were held and he hoped that there would be positive outcomes as a result of the visit. The visit was followed on 12 February by a Parliamentary adjournment debate focused on flooding in Somerset. The Chair encouraged Members to read the official Parliamentary record of that

debate, noting that while the Minister acknowledged the severity of flooding and the work of local partners, no confirmation of additional funding had been provided. It was suggested that any further funding decisions could become clearer following the end of the current financial year.

The Chair also drew attention to the Government's recently announced Land Use Framework consultation, noting that it might have future implications for flood risk management, food production and land management.

The Chair acknowledged that the Environment Agency was often the focus of public frustration during flood events but emphasised that the Environment Agency continued to operate within significant funding constraints. It was noted that during the recent flooding the Environment Agency responded earlier than some trigger points required, deployed substantial resources and worked closely with SRA partner organisations. The Chair highlighted the importance of recognising the good work of local Environment Agency staff and maintaining strong partnership working. Mr Bradford commented that flooding had not been limited to locations mentioned so far. He stressed that extensive areas, including in the Axe Brue catchment, were also flooded. Locations such as Wedmore and Chilton Trinity continued to experience floodwater. He expressed concern that, in some cases, floodwater appeared to have been displaced from one area into another, simply moving the problem.

The Chair reiterated the importance of residents reporting flooding incidents, noting that under-reporting could affect the accuracy of flood records and limit the ability of authorities to plan and prioritise future flood risk management activity.

ITEM 6 JANUARY MAJOR FLOODING INCIDENT

The Chair invited Nicola Dawson, Service Manager for Emergency Planning Response and Recovery at Somerset Council, to provide an overview of the incident.

Ms Dawson began by emphasising the severe impact of flooding, illustrating this with images and testimony from a resident whose home had been flooded during the storm. She presented images highlighting the scale of inundation. Ms Dawson stressed the importance of recognising community resilience, commending Ilminster Town Council for its proactive emergency planning, volunteer mobilisation and preparedness. She also praised the work of flood wardens and community volunteers.

Ms Dawson noted that January was the second wettest on record, second only to the January of 2014. A third of the rain fell in only two days. She said that at the peak of Storm Chandra, a combined total of 1.2 million cubic metres of water per hour was coming down the Parrett and Tone catchments. Ms Dawson reported that 82 internally flooded properties had been recorded, this included 70 residential, 11 businesses and 1 school. She highlighted that under-reporting remained an issue. She noted that impacted properties were spread across a wide geographic area of Somerset, with particular concentrations in the Tone catchment, including a notable cluster in the Bathpool area of Taunton, which was enough to trigger a Section 19

report by Somerset Council. In contrast, she reported that approximately 2,860 properties were protected as a result of flood defences and operational actions.

Ms Dawson also addressed wider impacts, including prolonged road closures, disruption to rail services, farming and local businesses, waste collection, public transport and individual livelihoods. She acknowledged that the full economic and agricultural impacts were not yet fully quantified.

Ms Dawson described the emergency response as complex and prolonged. She explained that agencies initially responded to surface water flooding before managing the downstream impacts of exceptional rainfall in lower catchments.

She reported that the Environment Agency had deployed additional pumping capacity at 19 locations, undertaken bank reprofiling, removed channel restrictions, checked bypass channels and operated the River Sowey - King's Sedgemoor Drain flood relief system beyond normal operating protocols. She noted that extra staff were deployed on a 24/7 basis to check flood assets and maximise pumping efficiency. Community-facing measures included the establishment of staffed community information points, daily stakeholder briefings (with 22 written briefings issued), door-knocking of at-risk properties by council officers, fire and rescue services and the police, and the placing of rest centres and search and rescue teams on standby.

Ms Dawson confirmed that a major incident was declared on 27 January and stood down on 19 February, an unusually long duration reflecting the scale and persistence of the event. She explained that multi-agency strategic and tactical coordination meetings were held throughout this period.

The Chair thanked Ms Dawson for her update.

The Chair invited Piers Hooper (Environment Agency) to speak.

Mr Hooper thanked all the partners for their support throughout this flood event. He noted that the Environment Agency did as much as they could and as quickly as they could, within the constraints they operate under. He noted that the actions taken had helped to reduce flood levels and duration in some areas, although he acknowledged the severe impacts for those people directly impacted during the flooding.

The Chair thanked Mr Hooper for his update and invited Iain Sturdy (Somerset Drainage Boards Consortium) to speak.

Mr Sturdy stated that he felt post-2013-14 investment had significantly reduced potential impacts, particularly through improved conveyance and pumping capacity. He highlighted that damages had been avoided because of the ability to evacuate flood water quicker. Mr Sturdy referenced Ms Dawson's slide on the extent of flooding and said that the extent of a flood is often looked at, however when discussing Somerset, it was key to talk about the depth and duration of flooding. He explained that the flooding was early in the year, and from an agricultural perspective, had the flood been four weeks later, it would inevitably have led to an

environmental catastrophe. Mr Sturdy also noted the mental health impact on those affected.

Mr Sturdy emphasised the critical role of rapid evacuation of floodwater to create capacity for successive storms. He said that this event had shown the importance of maximising conveyance in main rivers and linked to this, the need for pumping capacity to discharge into these rivers. Mr Sturdy said that it was important to minimise delays in deploying extra pumping capacity. He also highlighted the need to recognise the service provided by farmland used for flood storage, noting that floodwater was often deliberately directed onto lower-consequence receptors to protect properties and infrastructure in other places.

The Chair thanked Mr Sturdy and invited James Divall (Somerset Council) to speak.

Mr Divall discussed how the various agencies had worked well together to respond to the flooding event. He noted that small clusters of properties were impacted across a wide area making the response more challenging. He said teams are still actively working through the recovery phase. Once this phase was complete, there would be a 'lessons learned' exercise and a Section 19 investigation would be undertaken for the Bathpool area of Taunton. He explained that no Section 19 was triggered for the Levels and Moors areas that flooded because the property flooding threshold was not met. However, Somerset Council would undertake a review similar to a Section 19 investigation for this area to capture any specific lessons learned from this event.

Mr Divall said that Somerset Council was preparing a new flood risk strategy and noted that there was a lot of learning from these events that could be taken to inform the strategy.

The Chair thanked Mr Divall and welcomed Claire Newill (Natural England) to speak.

Ms Newill emphasised that Natural England were here to support and advise the SRA partners and landowners during the recovery phase.

She highlighted the point that Mr Sturdy had made about agricultural businesses and the service they provided with flood storage. Ms Newill said Government had recognised this service and the Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS) included payments for enhanced flood plain and flood water storage at £366 per hectare. She noted that there was an opportunity to support landowners to review their current funding agreements and see if they were eligible to enter new agreements that could pay them for the services they are providing.

The Chair thanked Ms Newill and welcomed Ian Collins (Wessex Regional Flood and Coastal Committee) to speak.

Mr Collins said that the Wessex Regional Flood and Coastal Committee met in early January before Storm Chandra. He said the efforts of the Environment Agency as responders was extraordinary. He noted the debriefs that would follow would be extremely important to incorporate into decisions on planning for the future as events

like this became more common. Mr Collins noted that if the incident had been spread more widely across the country, he would be concerned about the impact this would have on the Environment Agency's ability to respond.

Board members were invited to comment and ask questions.

Tony Bradford raised his concerns about the amount of time that was spent speaking about what could be done and less time preventing it. He said partners knew where water would end up, and efforts should be concentrated on how to deal with water when it got there. He noted that this flooding event progressed quicker than previous events. He explained that there was a lack of understanding around agricultural land. He noted that this flood event happened after a drought where land was very hard therefore unable to absorb the water, so it ran off, which is why flooding happened so quickly. He noted that agricultural land was not valued as it did not meet the cost benefit because the value of the land was not as high as other areas. He argued, however, that in a flood situation, agricultural land was the most valuable land in the county because water was diverted here to protect houses in other areas. Mr Bradford said that water did not need to be stored, it needed to be got rid of as quickly as possible. He said there were two ways of doing this, one was down the River Parrett and one down King's Sedgemoor Drain. He noted that there needed to be solutions in pumping to evacuate the water at Dunball. Mr Bradford expressed his appreciation of how hard the Environment Agency worked.

Anthony Betty (Parrett Internal Drainage Board) explained that after speaking with residents his view was that some training was required in how responders communicated with residents. He said that some of the terminology that was used when Environment Agency representatives and police were door knocking increased fear and anxiety of residents. He recommended training in communication for staff. He said that there also needed to be consideration of the financial impact when roads such as the A361 were closed, and disruption was caused, when making the case for investment.

Wendy Welland (Axe Brue IDB) noted that the maps that had been shared within presentations had been focused on the Parrett catchment and did not focus on the Axe Brue which was also flooded and she felt it was important this area was not forgotten.

Cllr Mike Caswell (Somerset Council) noted that a lot of the water that was on the Levels came from the surrounding hills. He said that there were houses flooded in Cannington and houses close to flooding around Perry Green, Bridgwater, because water could not get to the main rivers to be evacuated. Mr Caswell felt this was, in part, due to a lack of maintenance.

Cllr Ros Wyke (Somerset Council) echoed Wendy Welland's comment about the Axe Brue flooding. She also said that there was not enough emphasis on Somerset Council's role as Highway Authority in flooding incidents and she felt this was an area that needed more focus.

Cllr Claire Sully (Somerset Council) raised concerns about community resilience and what happens now, after the flooding. She asked if there was an opportunity to work with NHS services and others. She said that people who were impacted by the flooding need help now, where do they go when they have physical and mental challenges following flooding? She asked Ms Dawson, what could be done now to support people with their mental health and ongoing resilience support? Ms Dawson responded to say that there was lots of support through the NHS and others, and leaflets with details had been provided at flood drop-in events. Ms Dawson highlighted that support would be a key feature of community engagement events.

Cllr Nick O'Donnell (Somerset Council) said that he supported what Cllr Wyke had said about the role of the Highways Authority. He explained that the main road in his area flooded for the first time, the reason was down to poorly maintained drains.

Cllr Steve Ashton (Somerset Council) commented that we heard a lot about constraints and he would like to know more about what these constraints were. The Chair responded to say the main constraint was funding.

In closing the item, the Chair thanked officers and partner organisations for the update and for their work during the flooding event. He noted that the information provided would help inform future discussions about flood risk management, investment priorities and community resilience across Somerset.

ITEM 7 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

Seven questions were submitted via email to the SRA Board.

Questions were received from Julian Hodge, Robin Brown, Charron Pugsley-Hill, Barbara Bell, Cllr Bill Smart, Dawn Ring and Bryony Sadler.

Five of the questions were responded to in person at the Board meeting. A response was also provided by email to questioners.

For the questions and the answers, see Appendix A to these minutes, page 14.

ITEM 8a FINANCE REPORT AND ENHANCED PROGRAMME PERFORMANCE MONITORING

Sam Hitchcott, Somerset Rivers Authority Finance Business Partner, introduced her paper. She presented the financial position as at the end of Quarter 3 2025-26 and noted that at the start of the year, the total available funds were £7.265m. This consisted of £4.130m carried forward from 2024-25 and £3.133m raised through the 2025-26 precept.

Ms Hitchcott said that expenditure during Quarter 3 of 2025-26 totalled £1.429m at the end of Quarter 3, 4.1% of funds were forecast to be spent on administration and staffing of the SRA, 0.3% on SRA core work and development, 12.6% held in contingency and 83% allocated to specific projects and activities within the Enhanced Programme.

She noted that, if all financial movements were approved by the SRA Board, the contingency would increase by £3.5k from £912k to £915k.

David Mitchell said he had circulated a Power Bi report containing the background information that went into the finance report. He asked for Board members to check the link and confirm their access to the report.

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

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

ITEM 8b PROFORMANCE AND PROJECT MONITORING

Caroline Dunn, Somerset Rivers Authority Project and Performance Officer, presented the Quarter 3 report, advising that total expenditure on projects and delivery during the period amounted to approximately £1.4 million. She explained that the report set out progress across five workstreams. She said that Part One of the report highlighted projects that had been completed, while Table D reported outputs and benefits for the quarter.

Ms Dunn presented the Power BI performance dashboard, which provided a visual summary of spend by quarter and delivery by workstream. She demonstrated how the dashboard could be used to explore activity geographically and by workstream, highlighting Workstream 5 – Building Local Resilience as an example. She explained that this work included community engagement activity. The mapping illustrated the extent of engagement activity delivered within a three-month period.

Ms Dunn provided a detailed update on the SRA's Community Flood Action Fund (CFAF). She reported that 16 communities had been awarded grants, which equalled approximately £170,000 worth of funding. She explained that six of the projects had been completed, with 10 more under construction. She explained that the figures reflected delivery over the first year of the fund rather than Quarter 3 alone. It was anticipated that a "one-year on" review, including lessons learnt, would be brought to the Board later in the year.

She directed Board Members to the SRA website, where completed CFAF projects were showcased. Ms Dunn provided examples of completed schemes, including drainage improvements, ditch clearance and culvert works delivered in partnership with parish councils and local communities. She emphasised that many of the projects addressed highly localised flooding issues and were delivered quickly due to strong community engagement.

The Chair thanked Ms Dunn for the presentation and highlighted the importance of CFAF in enabling communities to take practical action on flooding issues. He noted that the fund demonstrated the value of local knowledge and community-led delivery.

Points raised:

- Claire Newill (Natural England) welcomed the update and commented that it was helpful to see projects 'brought to life'. She suggested that the planned one-year review should include feedback from communities on accessibility of the fund and the wider impacts of the projects, in addition to quantitative outputs. Ms Dunn confirmed that feedback had already been received informally and that a more structured feedback approach would be developed.
- Anthony Betty (Parrett IDB) questioned the principle of funding works that were the responsibility of riparian owners. He expressed concern that this could create an expectation of SRA intervention. Mr Mitchell responded that funding was provided to enable communities to take action but it was made clear that the SRA would not fund ongoing maintenance and the expectation was that the CFAF applicant would make arrangements for ongoing maintenance.
- Tony Bradford raised concerns that some projects appeared to deliver limited flood risk benefit and he suggested that greater scrutiny, including Board site visits, might be appropriate. Mr Mitchell explained that all applications were assessed by a multi-partner officer panel and that projects were likely to deliver localised benefits.
- Iain Sturdy said that some good projects had come through CFAF which made a difference on the ground. His concern was that it was potentially encouraging organisations that previously did maintenance to do less as communities were stepping in. He said that the SRA was supposed to be about additionality and not cost-shunting.
- James Divall (Somerset Council) noted that this was all part of a bigger picture and communities needed support to come up with potential solutions and take action. He said that CFAF was not a single answer to deal with flooding in an area, it was part of a bigger problem, and to get communities feeling as though they could take some action, it was a powerful tool.

As recommended, the SRA Board noted the overall delivery status of the schemes and activities within the current SRA Enhanced Programme for Quarter 3 2025-26.

ITEM 9 2026-27 ENHANCED PROGRAMME AND BUDGET

David Mitchell reminded Members that the SRA Board is required annually to approve an Enhanced Programme of works to make effective use of the funds raised through the SRA precept. He advised that the paper and its appendices set out the proposed programme for 2026–27 and provided detailed descriptions of the schemes recommended for funding. He advised Board members that the programme was structured around the SRA's workstreams, with a significant proportion of funding proposed for dredging and river management, alongside investment across the remaining workstreams.

Mr Mitchell outlined the proposed budget for 2026–27, confirming that the SRA precept had been confirmed by Somerset Council, generating approximately £3.2 million in new funds and the Axe Brue and Parrett Internal Drainage Boards would continue their contribution of £10,000 each. He clarified that the starting contingency

figure should be £430,000, rather than £500,000 as stated in the paper, due to a drafting error.

Mr Mitchell highlighted a specific issue relating to the proposed Somerset Highways Enhanced Gully Emptying grant proposal. One of the proposed schemes within the programme is an allocation of £350,000 to fund additional gully emptying. Mr Mitchell advised that he had recently been informed that Somerset Council Highways might have secured alternative funding to undertake this work themselves.

He explained that at the time of publishing the Board papers, this alternative funding had not been fully confirmed. If confirmed, the SRA funding for this activity would no longer be required. This could result in an additional £350,000 becoming available for re-allocation. He confirmed that officers would bring forward options for how these funds could be allocated for consideration by the SRA's Management Group. Management Group would then make a recommendation at the June Board meeting.

Points raised

- Anthony Betty queried how the SRA could ensure that any funding provided to Highways for gully emptying was targeted at locations with the greatest flood risk, rather than routine maintenance. Mr Mitchell acknowledged the importance of this issue and confirmed there was a methodology used that resulted in only gullies in areas of high flood risk areas being targeted for an extra round of cleaning that would not happen without SRA funding.

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

ITEM 10 FLOOD GROUP NETWORKS

The Chair invited Bel Deering, SRA Community Engagement Officer, to provide an update on the development of Flood Group Networks across Somerset.

Dr Deering explained that Flood Group Networks had been established in response to feedback from local flood wardens and community flood groups, who had expressed a strong desire to connect with one another to share experience, knowledge and good practice. She emphasised that the initiative aligned closely with the Somerset Rivers Authority's vision and objectives under Workstream 5 (Building Local Resilience) and responded directly to community demand.

She said networks were designed to operate at catchment scale, enabling communities affected by flooding to work collaboratively across wider geographic areas rather than in isolation. Prior to launching the networks, officers had engaged with existing flood groups, including a long-established group in West Somerset, to understand what had worked well and what additional support communities were seeking.

Dr Deering advised that four initial catchment-based meetings had been organised within the Parrett Catchment, Tone Catchment, Axe-Brue Catchment and Frome Catchment.

She explained that the purpose of the first round of meetings had been to bring people together, test appetite for collaboration and understand what participants wanted the networks to achieve.

Dr Deering confirmed that further meetings were scheduled for some catchments, while work continued to determine the most appropriate next steps for others, particularly the Frome catchment. She stressed the importance of maintaining momentum and ensuring that the networks led to tangible outcomes rather than discussion alone.

She asked SRA Board Members to support the initiative by promoting the networks within their own communities and encouraging attendance in order to broaden representation and strengthen collaborative working across catchments.

Points raised:

- Mr Divall congratulated Dr Deering and Paul Elliston on the fantastic work they had done and continued to do. He said Somerset Council was trying to do more to support their work by services working collaboratively to assist with the Flood Group Networks.

The Chair thanked Dr Deering for her update and commended the significant work undertaken to establish the Flood Group Networks. He emphasised the importance of bringing communities, local authorities and partner organisations together to deliver collective action on flood risk, noting that no single intervention could provide a complete solution.

ITEM 11 RIVER SOWY – KING’S SEDGEMOOR DRAIN (KSD) COMPLETION REPORT

David Mitchell reported that the River Sowy - King’s Sedgemoor Drain (KSD) enhancement scheme Phase 1 had now reached completion. He said that the project had delivered a major programme of works, designed to increase conveyance capacity and improve flood resilience across the Somerset Levels and Moors. The project resulted in an increase from 17 cubic metres per second to 21 cubic metres of water per second that can now be passed through the system without going out of bank.

Mr Mitchell explained that the scheme formed an important element of Somerset’s 20 Year Flood Action Plan (drawn up in 2014). The majority of the project was delivered by the Environment Agency with the final section being completed by the Parrett Internal Drainage Board. The project had required close co-operation across multiple organisations. Works were complex, requiring careful coordination to manage construction requirements, environmental constraints, stakeholder management and liaison with multiple landowners. Mr Mitchell reminded the Board

that this work was part of a series of interventions along the Sowy-KSD corridor that worked together to reduce the impacts of flooding.

Mr Mitchell reviewed the original assumptions and benefits analysis that the project was based upon and showed that the original intention to increase capacity from 17 cumecs to between 20 and 25 cumecs had been achieved. The Sowy system could now safely be operated up to 21 cumecs in bank, with some observations suggesting that up to 23 cumecs had been safely passed through the system in bank. The enhancements made were particularly helpful at the start and end of a flooding event: they helped to reduce the depth and duration of flooding but would not prevent flooding.

The Chair commented that the River Sowy and King's Sedgemoor Drain project had been discussed by the Board over many years and represented one of the most substantial physical interventions delivered through the partnership. He emphasised that the scheme demonstrated the value of long-term collaboration between the partners of the Somerset Rivers Authority.

Points raised:

- Iain Sturdy noted that while the completion of the scheme was a major achievement, it was important that expectations were managed for what this work would achieve, as no single scheme could eliminate flood risk entirely.
- Cllr Ros Wyke said that the estimated cost of damages resulting from the floods of 2013-14 had been £147million but she noted that this had not been updated for inflation since then. She therefore suggested that the benefits of the SRA's Sowy-KSD scheme, as shown in Mr Mitchell's presentation, could perhaps be getting underestimated.

The Chair thanked officers and partners for their work on delivering the scheme and recognised the contribution of all those involved over the life of the project.

ITEM 12 ANY OTHER BUSINESS (AOB)

There were no items raised.

The Chair closed the meeting.

Appendix 1

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

For the benefit of readers who may not be so familiar with some acronyms as the questioners and respondents here, we have spelled them out in square brackets, for example EA [= Environment Agency].

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 than 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,

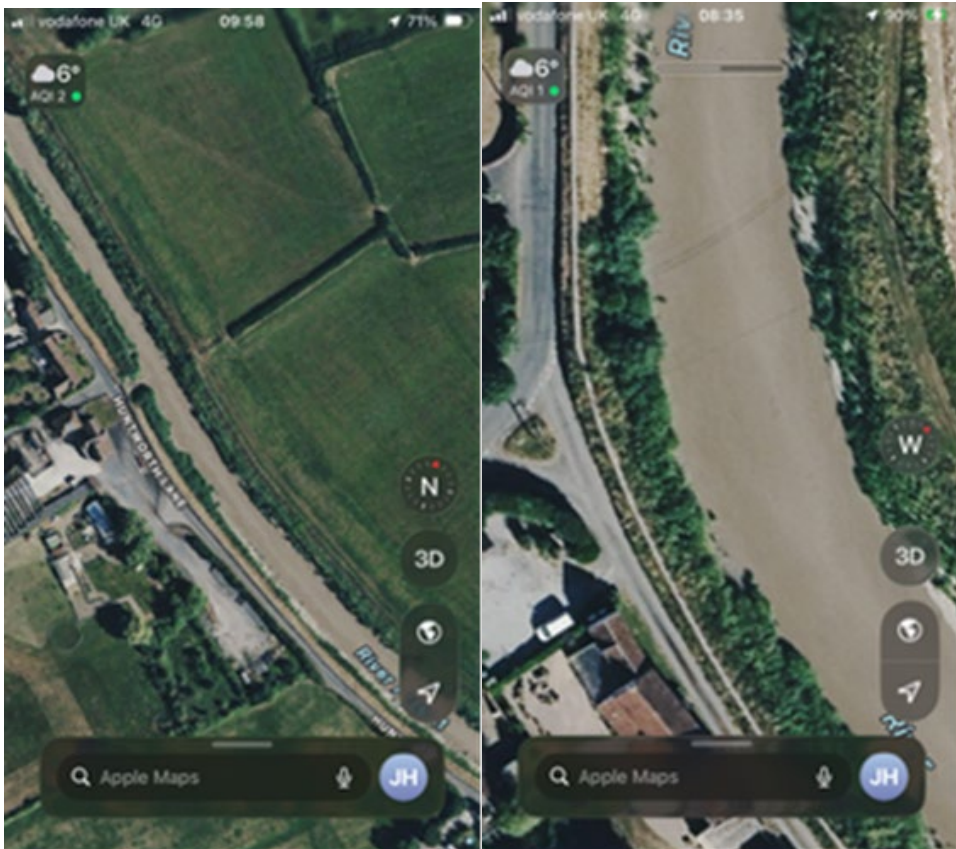
Year 5 - River Tone up to lock gates.

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





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 and 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 [=Environment Agency] 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 David Mitchell

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 [= Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group SouthWest] 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 [= Internal Drainage Board] is to be awarded £270k for various neglected EA [= Environment Agency] 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 David Mitchell

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 [=Environment Agency] duty officer, I discovered that the elevation for our 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 [= Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group SouthWest], may already be able to access funding through other routes, including DEFRA [= Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs] 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 [= Internal Drainage Board] 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 David Mitchell

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 [= Office of Gas and Electricity Markets] 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.

ENDS