Draft minutes of

Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA) Board Meeting

held on 11 September 2026

at Taunton Town Council Committee Room, Deane House, Taunton, TA1 1HE

Members of SRA Board:

Cllr Steve Ashton, *Chair* **-** Somerset Council
Tony Bradford - *Vice-Chair,* Parrett Internal Drainage Board (IDB)
Anthony Betty, Parrett IDB
Cllr Mike Caswell, Somerset Council
Ian Collins, Wessex Regional Flood & Coastal Committee
Cllr Henry Hobhouse, Somerset Council *(substitute)*
Cllr Marcus Kravis, Somerset Council (*substitute*)
Claire Newill, Natural England
Cllr Mike Stanton, Somerset Council
Iain Sturdy, Axe Brue IDB *(substitute)*
Wendy Welland, Axe Brue IDB
Matt Wheeldon, Wessex Water
Ian Withers, Environment Agency

In Attendance:

Bel Deering, Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA)
Jennie Channing, SRA
James Divall, Somerset Council
Caroline Dunn, SRA
Ross Edwards, Environment Agency
Paul Elliston, SRA
Sam Hitchcott, Somerset Council
Piers Hooper, Somerset Council
David Mitchell, SRA
Anna Meares, Somerset Council
Neil McWilliams, Somerset Council

ITEM 1 INTRODUCTIONS AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Cllr Mike Stanton welcomed Board members, officers and members of the public to the meeting.

Apologies were received from Cllr Ros Wyke, Cllr Claire Sully, Cllr Nick O'Donnell, Somerset Council, David Tratt, Axe Brue Internal Drainage Board, and officers Donna Gowler, Natural England, and Jonathan Hudston, Somerset Rivers Authority.

It was reported that substitutes were attending for the absent Somerset Council members. Iain Sturdy had also been nominated to attend as substitute for David Tratt on behalf of the Axe Brue Internal Drainage Board.

ITEM 2 CHAIR'S UPDATE

The Chair acknowledged the recent passing away of Andrew Gilling, who had served for many years as Chair of the Axe Brue Internal Drainage Board and as a member of the SRA Board. He reported that representatives of the SRA and the Drainage Boards had attended the funeral and he paid tribute to Andrew Gilling's long-standing contribution to flood and water management in Somerset.

The Chair advised the Board that David Mitchell would be leaving his role as SRA Manager to succeed Iain Sturdy as Clerk and Chief Executive of the Somerset Drainage Boards Consortium. He thanked Mr Mitchell for his work and support since joining the SRA in 2018, including his support outside normal working hours. The Chair welcomed the fact that Mr Mitchell would continue to attend SRA Board meetings in his new role.

The Chair reported that the main river maintenance works funded by the SRA were progressing well. Works referred to included activity at Panborough Drain, Lox Yeo and King's Sedgemoor Drain.

The Board were informed that the SRA Annual Report had been published and circulated electronically. The Chair commented that the annual reports provided a useful record of SRA activity and progress over time.

The Chair then reflected on his decision to stand down as SRA Chair, having been chair since June 2022 and a member of the SRA Board since June 2019. He referred to the significant changes in Board membership during that period. The Chair identified a number of achievements and developments during his period on the Board. These included the completion of Phase 1 of the King's Sedgemoor Drain bank-raising works in September 2025, with acknowledgement of the role played by the Drainage Boards.

He also reflected on flooding and near-flooding events affecting Moorland, continuing concerns about pumping trigger points and the arrangements for deploying temporary pumps and cranes. He noted the changing nature of flood risk in Somerset, including an increase in localised flash flooding affecting smaller groups of properties. Although these events might affect fewer properties individually than major flooding on the Levels and Moors, he emphasised that their impact on affected residents was equally significant.

Other developments highlighted by the Chair included the adoption of the SRA's new strategy and ten-year plan in 2024, the ministerial visit in February 2026 and the subsequent allocation of £50 million for flood resilience work in Somerset. He also welcomed the addition of Matt Wheeldon and Wessex Water to the Board, which had strengthened the partnership's understanding of integrated water management.

The Chair described the SRA as a strong example of partnership working. He noted that effective partnership did not require unanimous agreement and that constructive challenge and differences of opinion had contributed to better decisions. He referred particularly to previous debates concerning responsibility for delivering the final phase of the King's Sedgemoor Drain bank-raising works.

The Chair thanked Board members and officers for their support and said that he had greatly enjoyed his time as Chair. He confirmed that he would remain a member of the Board following the election of his successor.

Tony Bradford, Vice-Chair, thanked the Chair on behalf of the SRA for his service as Chair. He said that he had developed considerable knowledge of flooding and water management, had given significant time to the role and had always been available to discuss matters of concern. He acknowledged that they had not always held the same views but said that constructive debate had enabled them to reach solutions intended to benefit Somerset's residents. He welcomed the fact that Cllr Mike Stanton would remain on the Board.

The Chair thanked Tony Bradford for his remarks. He acknowledged that they had sometimes disagreed but had always resolved matters constructively. He wished the Board and the incoming Chair well for the future.

ITEM 3 ELECTION OF CHAIR

David Mitchell, SRA Manager, said that nominations for a new Chair of Somerset Rivers Authority would need to be proposed and seconded by Board Members present – and only Board members present could vote. He confirmed that two nominations had been received:

- Cllr Steve Ashton, nominated by Cllr Mike Stanton and seconded by Cllr Henry Hobhouse.
- Tony Bradford, nominated by Anthony Betty and seconded by Cllr Mike Caswell.

Mr Mitchell invited any further nominations. None were received. Each candidate was then invited to address the Board before the vote.

Cllr Ashton said that, although he had joined the Board relatively recently, he had considerable personal experience of flooding. He lived in a watermill on the River Parrett and had experienced flooding at his property on two occasions. His interest in flood modelling and flood risk had led him to seek membership of the Board after becoming a councillor. He also noted the considerable knowledge and experience held by existing Board members and said that he would rely on their support. He referred to his Somerset Council responsibilities relating to climate change and said that climate change was likely to increase the scale of the flooding challenges facing Somerset. Cllr Ashton noted that the recently announced £50 million flood resilience funding would not be able to address every immediate risk and said that the Board might face public criticism before the resulting works could be delivered. He asked members to support his nomination.

Mr Bradford said that continuity was important for the Board and referred to the possibility of further changes to the chairmanship following the 2027 local elections. He highlighted his long-standing membership of the SRA, his knowledge of the Somerset Levels and his experience of local water management and flood risk.

Mr Bradford said that his priority would be to improve flood resilience and protection for Somerset's communities. He acknowledged that his approach could be direct but

emphasised that the principal duty of those involved in the SRA, the Drainage Boards and local government was to provide the best possible service to Somerset's residents. He referred to the effects of the 2013-14 floods and the subsequent establishment of the SRA, including its annual ringfenced funding for flood risk management. He said that, if elected, he would work to ensure that SRA funding was used effectively to make Somerset safer.

The Board voted by a show of hands. Cllr Steve Ashton received the greater number of votes and was elected Chair of the Somerset Rivers Authority Board.

Mr Bradford congratulated Cllr Ashton and confirmed that, as Vice-Chair, he would give the new Chair his full support.

Cllr Ashton thanked Mr Bradford for his support and acknowledged the importance of his experience. He also welcomed the fact that Cllr Stanton would remain on the Board and said that this would assist the transition to the new Chair.

Cllr Ashton assumed the Chair for the remainder of the meeting.

ITEM 4 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chair invited Board members to declare any interests relating to the business on the agenda.

Mr Bradford reiterated his standing declaration that he owned land to the north and south of King's Sedgemoor Drain.

The Chair declared that he owned and lived in a watermill on the River Parrett. He stated that he was not aware of any works undertaken or funded by the Somerset Rivers Authority that affected the property but considered it appropriate for the interest to be recorded.

No further declarations of interest were made.

ITEM 5a MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 5 JUNE 2026

The Chair invited comments on the minutes of the previous Board meeting held on 5 June 2026.

Mr Sturdy requested an amendment to the paragraph on page 4 beginning with his name. He explained that the discussion had related particularly to Northmoor and asked for this to be made clear. He also requested that the wording stating that sustainable drainage systems and other measures would not work if "the area they were to drain was full" be amended to state that they would not work if "the area they were draining into was already full". He emphasised that this was an important technical distinction.

Mr Mitchell agreed to confirm the precise wording with Iain Sturdy following the meeting and make the necessary amendment. The Chair confirmed that he would sign the minutes once the correction had been incorporated.

ITEM 5b MATTERS ARISING

Mr Mitchell updated Board members on several action points from their 5 June meeting:

1. Update Board members' register of interest. Mr Mitchell advised that he had sought guidance from Somerset Council's governance team and members would be contacted to obtain their declarations, although these are not required to be published online.
2. Follow up with Board members who are unable to access the Project and Performance Power Bi report. Members were asked to test the link of the later Power Bi that had been circulated and advise the SRA team if they were unable to access the report so that any remaining access issues could be resolved. Members noted no issues.
3. Circulate Annual Report draft before September Board meeting. This action had been completed, and the Annual Report was circulated on 12 August 2026.
4. Schedule a working group to discuss flood risk impacts of new developments. The proposed working group meeting to discuss the effects of new development had been postponed because the planned hybrid meeting could not be accommodated at County Hall and no alternative venue could be secured at short notice. Arrangements were being made to reschedule the meeting.
5. Schedule a Natural Flood Management discussion/workshop to align with Wessex Regional Flood & Coastal Committee session.
6. Undertake a One-year review of the Community Flood Action Fund (CFAF). The action to undertake a review of the Community Flood Action Fund would be addressed through a presentation under item 11 by Caroline Dunn.
7. Environment Agency and Somerset Council to progress the business case and funding route for permanent pumps at Bathpool and share timescales with community.

Ross Edwards, Environment Agency, advised that a Wessex area bid to a national multi-million-pound recovery fund (set up following the 2026 winter flooding) had been unsuccessful. However, progress was still being made. A project manager had been appointed for the proposed permanent pumps at Bathpool, where temporary pumps had historically been deployed. He explained that a project team had also been established to improve pumping stations so that temporary pumps could be installed more quickly and safely. This was expected to be a multi-year programme involving significant investment, although its detailed scope and cost had not yet been finalised.

Mr Edwards reported that an approximately £11 million programme of permanent pumping-station upgrades was under way. Pumps at Midelney were being replaced during the summer, work was taking place at Huish Episcopi, and upgrades at

Northmoor and Westover were planned for the following year. He noted the Environment Agency was reviewing the temporary pumping trigger points and remained committed to completing the review during September 2026 and reconditioning work was also under way at Allermoor Spillway.

Mr Bradford requested a clear explanation of the different funding streams for permanent pumps, temporary pumps, pumping-station improvements and the £50 million programme. He emphasised the need to avoid duplication and to focus on getting the funding required. He also expressed concern that the revised trigger points had not yet been agreed and asked that this work be progressed urgently before the onset of wetter weather. Mr Edwards responded and acknowledged the complexity of the different funding arrangements. He clarified that there was approximately £11 million available for a permanent pump replacement programme. The programme to improve pumping stations for the quicker and safer deployment of temporary pumps was separate and was still being scoped. Once the scope and costs had been established for that, the relevant funding applications could be made. He reiterated the Environment Agency's commitment to complete the trigger-point review during September 2026.

Iain Sturdy supported the request for greater clarity and suggested that a short presentation or graphic be prepared to explain the different programmes and funding streams. It was agreed that this information should be circulated by correspondence rather than deferred until the next meeting. David Mitchell noted that he had raised a similar request with Piers Hooper, as the Strategic Manager for the £50million Flood Resilience Programme fund. He said that there was some confusion between existing funding streams and proposals within the £50 million programme. Greater clarity was required to ensure there was neither duplication nor a gap in provision. Mr Hooper agreed to work with the Environment Agency to prepare and circulate a short summary explaining the funding streams and the associated pumping programmes.

Cllr Henry Hobhouse asked whether Bridgwater, where a temporary pump had reportedly been deployed for an extended period, would continue to be a location for temporary pumping. He also requested information about pumping in the Brue catchment and the future allocation of temporary pumps. Ross Edwards agreed to provide a response on the specific points. He added that the draft revision of the trigger-point arrangements included the Brue. This proposal had been discussed with the Internal Drainage Boards.

8. Follow-ups on winter flooding and recovery work:

a. Environment Agency to confirm outcome of its bid to a national multi-million pound Flood Recovery Fund following in 2026 winter flooding. Dealt with under previous matter arising (7).

b. Confirm status of Bathpool Section 19 report scheduled to be completed by 31 August.
c. Latest status on Somerset Levels and Moors 'Section 19' report.

James Divall, Somerset Council, said that works were continuing on the Section 19 reports for Bathpool and Glastonbury. He noted that the reports were being progressed as quickly as possible, with the Levels and Moors report also informing the developing £50 million flood resilience programme.

ITEM 6 PUBLIC QUESTION

Five questions were submitted via email to the SRA Board by Bryony Sadler, Andrea Hine, Christina Brown, Jim McAuliffe (Parish councillor, Rode) and Jeremy Hickman. For questions and answers, see Appendix A to these minutes, pages 19 to 23.

ITEM 7 UPDATE ON £50M FLOOD RESILIENCE FUNDING

Piers Hooper introduced the update, taking his circulated report as read. He reported that the necessary approvals for the £50m Flood Resilience Fund were progressing and proposals were to be considered by the Somerset Council Executive. The approach outlined in his paper had been agreed with the programme's advisory group, whose organisations were largely represented at the SRA Board meeting. He thanked the organisations involved for their co-operation and collaboration, noting that the funding represented a significant opportunity but that a substantial amount of work remained.

Mr Hooper explained that funding allocated to the Taunton flood alleviation programme could reduce the amount required from other sources and potentially enable additional schemes or feasibility work to progress. References were made to work between Town Bridge and Longrun Meadow, the area between Firepool and the locks, and longer-term proposals associated with Longrun Meadow. It was suggested that a map explaining the relevant project areas should be circulated to Board members.

Points raised:

- Tony Bradford welcomed the investment but emphasised the need to consider the long-term maintenance of any assets improved or created through the programme. He said that the two-year delivery period was short and that arrangements for maintaining infrastructure needed to be considered from the outset. Without adequate future maintenance, there was a risk that the benefits of the investment would not be sustained. He suggested that consideration might need to be given to establishing a resilience or maintenance fund.
- Matt Wheeldon, Wessex Water, questioned why the programme had not been placed directly under the governance of the SRA. He observed that the membership of the programme's advisory arrangements appeared to overlap

considerably with the SRA Board and asked how the work would transfer into longer-term arrangements once the £50 million had been spent. He considered that the SRA possessed substantial existing knowledge and experience that should be retained and used. James Divall, Somerset Council, responded and explained that the programme had a broader scope than the SRA and included community representation. The Government had selected Somerset Council as the accountable body for the funding, and the governance arrangements had therefore been established within the Council's existing framework. Somerset Council's Section 151 Officer was legally accountable for the funds, requiring the programme board to provide the appropriate oversight and approval. Future discussion about the relationship between the programme and the SRA remained possible.

- Cllr Stanton added that the minister had been aware of the SRA when the funding arrangements were determined. He understood that the decision to allocate the funding through Somerset Council, with its Executive as the formal decision-making body, had been taken on government advice. The advisory group's role was therefore to advise the Executive on the discharge of its responsibilities for the public funding. Mr Hooper reported that a significant update was expected following the Somerset Council Executive meeting on 23 September 2026. Approval at that meeting would enable the first substantial tranche of funding and delegated arrangements to progress, allowing smaller projects to move forward more quickly.
- Iain Sturdy raised the financial position of the Internal Drainage Boards. He explained that the IDBs were already developing several projects intended to provide an early start to the programme, but that they did not yet have access to the funding and were consequently carrying financial risk. In response, Mr Hooper said that arrangements were being prepared so that, subject to the Executive's approval on 23 September 2026, the significant costs already incurred could be reimbursed as quickly as possible. Work had also begun on grant agreements with delivery partners so that agreements could be signed and funds released promptly if approval was secured. This would enable partners to continue developing and progressing programme proposals.

Mr Hooper informed the Board that the proposals had been considered by the relevant Somerset Council scrutiny arrangements and had received support.

The Chair thanked Mr Hooper for his update.

As recommended, the SRA Board noted and endorsed the approach taken so far on the £50m flood resilience funding.

ITEM 8 PRESENTATION ON TAUNTON INTEGRATED CATCHMENT STUDY (TICS)

Anna Meares, Somerset Council, presented an overview of the Taunton Integrated Catchment Study, which had been completed earlier in 2026. She explained that the

study had been commissioned to address the complex and interconnected sources of flood risk affecting Taunton and its surrounding communities. The project brought together Somerset Council, Wessex Water, the Environment Agency, Somerset Rivers Authority and other stakeholders.

The study had used detailed modelling, data collection and stakeholder engagement to develop an evidence base for flood-risk management across the Taunton catchment. Its outputs included a prioritised roadmap for potential investment and flood-resilience activity over the following 25 years.

Ms Meares advised that engagement had not yet taken place with all affected landowners.

Points raised:

- Anthony Betty, Parrett Internal Drainage Board, raised concerns about the future maintenance of attenuation ponds, including those provided as part of new developments. He emphasised that the effectiveness of such infrastructure depended on satisfactory arrangements for its continuing maintenance. He noted that all flood-risk interventions required maintenance, including attenuation features, natural flood management measures and river maintenance. Mr Betty said that maintenance requirements and associated costs should form part of the development and assessment of any future scheme. Ms Meares responded explaining that the benefit of an integrated catchment model is that it looks at the downstream as well so this would have been considered as part of the investigation.
- Mr Wheeldon asked whether the project team had considered the different funding mechanisms and investment cycles of the participating organisations. He stressed the importance of coordinating those arrangements so that opportunities were not lost because individual organisations had funding available at different times. Ms Meares confirmed that the preferred options had been considered by risk management authorities, together with the potential funding streams, timescales and benefits relevant to each organisation.
- Cllr Marcus Kravis asked how the preferred option for each hotspot had been selected from the three modelled alternatives. He also sought clarification about the costs and allowances included in the economic appraisal. Ms Meares explained that three scenarios had been modelled for each of the 12 hotspots and each had been assigned a cost-benefit ratio. The strongest option had been included as the preferred solution for that hotspot. This did not necessarily mean that all 12 preferred options would be recommended for implementation, as some did not provide a sufficiently positive cost-benefit case. She acknowledged that further clarification of the detailed cost calculation might be required.

- Cllr Stanton placed the study in the wider historical and catchment context. He noted that severe flooding in Taunton was no longer within the immediate memory of many residents. He emphasised that measures protecting Taunton could affect the speed and volume of water moving downstream and that interventions therefore needed to be considered across the wider catchment rather than in isolation. He said that the SRA partnership provided an important forum in which those interconnected effects could be considered collectively. Mr Divall praised Ms Meares for the work she had done in collaboration with Wessex Water and other RMAs on this particular area. He said that this needed to be looked at as a programme of works and individual projects, as there were aspects which could be picked up within the My Community's part of the £50 million flood resilience programme.
- Cllr Henry Hobhouse questioned the evidence supporting natural flood management where it was not accompanied by substantial water-storage capacity. He asked where sufficient water could be stored to make a material difference to flood risk in Taunton. Ms Meares responded that the full technical report contained detailed modelling of the volumes that could be retained by particular interventions. She advised that the study had been prepared by specialist consultants and that its conclusions were supported by the technical work undertaken.
- Claire Newill, Natural England, highlighted the relationship between agricultural runoff, sediment and blocked drainage. She said that working with landowners and land managers on nature-based and in-field measures formed part of the wider response, alongside the maintenance of existing infrastructure.
- Ian Withers, Environment Agency, supported a catchment-based approach that considered the outcomes sought, the range of possible interventions, their costs and the benefits they were expected to provide. He emphasised the need for a robust justification for investment and for subsequent monitoring to demonstrate whether the intended benefits had been achieved. He also recognised the need to remain pragmatic and avoid delaying beneficial work while seeking perfect evidence.
- Cllr Mike Stanton noted the national policy support for nature-based solutions but observed that holding back material volumes of water upstream would require the participation of landowners and farmers. He said that suitable financial incentives would be required and that existing government schemes might not be sufficient to secure the necessary scale of land management.
- Cllr Henry Hobhouse added that some landowners might be willing to provide land for water storage where this could be combined with irrigation. However, he considered that the relevant Environment Agency licensing arrangements could make combined solutions difficult to progress.

The Chair brought the discussion to a close and thanked Anna Meares for the presentation.

RESOLVED: That the Board note the Taunton Integrated Catchment Study, its findings and the proposed next steps.

ITEM 9a QUARTER 1 2026-27 FINANCE REPORT

Sam Hitchcott, SRA Finance Business Partner, introduced her paper. She presented the financial position as at the end of Quarter 1 of 2026-27. At the start of the financial year, total available funds were £6.042m, consisting of £2.831m carried forward from 2025-26 and £3.210m raised through the 2026-27 council tax arrangements. Of the total available funding, £4.631 million had been allocated to projects and activities, with the remaining funding allocated to staffing, overheads and contingency.

Ms Hitchcott said that expenditure during Quarter 1 totalled £594,000, compared with an original forecast of approximately £633,000. She noted that £29,000 of interest had accrued on SRA funds during Quarter 1. Somerset Council currently retained this interest to meet the costs of acting as Host Authority for the SRA. She highlighted that discussions were taking place with the Council's finance team to review the hosting costs.

Ms Hitchcott added that, if all financial movements were approved by the SRA Board, the contingency would increase by £69.6k from £907,000 to £977,000. Contingency funds would then equal 16.2% of Local Partner funds with the remainder allocated to specific schemes.

Mr Mitchell drew attention to the forecast expenditure profile. He noted that approximately £1.803 million was forecast to be spent during Quarter 4 and that this represented an ambitious delivery profile in view of previous programme slippage. He also reported that approximately 25 applications had been received for the following financial year, with a combined value of approximately £5.2 million.

There were no comments or questions.

As recommended, the Somerset Rivers Authority Board noted the financial performance as at the end of Quarter 1 2026-27; and

The Board also approved the re-allocation of £69,600 of underspends to contingency, as set out in Part Two of the report.

ITEM 9b QUARTER 1 2026-27 ENHANCED PROGRAMME PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT

Caroline Dunn, SRA Project and Performance Officer, presented the Quarter 1 performance report. This provided the Board with an overview of progress across the current SRA Enhanced Programme. She explained that the reporting arrangements

enabled the Board to monitor progress against programme objectives, agreed project milestones and the effective use of SRA funding.

Ms Dunn drew attention to Table B that summarised project status. She provided detail on why some projects were behind schedule. She explained that some delayed projects were substantially complete but could not be formally closed because small elements remained outstanding or final funding claims had not been submitted. Other projects had experienced complex and challenging development stages. The organisations leading those projects had confirmed that they intended to complete them.

Ms Dunn said three schemes were recorded as completed during Quarter 1. These were the SRA's contribution to the Bridgwater Tidal Barrier, River Parrett water injection dredging and shoulder works; and siphons appraisal work at Swallows, Crossmoor and Brown's Bank, Godney.

Ms Dunn demonstrated the Power BI reporting dashboard used to present information about SRA funding, expenditure, workstreams and programme outputs. Board members were asked to test the Power BI link circulated to them and to report any access difficulties or suggestions for additional information.

David Mitchell explained that the reporting system remained under development and that not all historic geographical information could yet be published because of data-quality issues.

Ms Newill asked whether reporting developed for the £50 million Flood Resilience Programme could be integrated with the SRA's Power Bi report. Mr Mitchell said that he was keen to integrate the data and officers should continue improving the Power BI reporting system and consider opportunities to include wider programme information.

As recommended, the Somerset Rivers Authority Board noted the overall delivery status of the schemes and activities within the current Enhanced Programme for Quarter 1 2026-27.

ITEM 10 TOP-UP FUNDING REQUEST FOR A358 DONYATT HILL FLOOD REDUCTION WORKS

Neil McWilliams, Somerset Council Highways Service Manager (Area West), joined the meeting remotely and presented a request for additional funding for flood-reduction works on the A358 between Donyatt and Peasmarsh.

Mr McWilliams explained that the A358 at Donyatt Hill experienced significant and increasingly frequent carriageway flooding, which often resulted in the full closure of the road, causing disruption and requiring traffic to be diverted. The route was strategically important and also served as a diversion route when the A303 was unavailable.

The aim of this project was therefore to reduce the likelihood of flood-related closures and resulting disruption. Mr McWilliams said it involved collaboration between Somerset Council, the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group South West (FWAG SW), the Environment Agency, local landowners and the parish council. Engagement with landowners and the parish council had helped to define the scope of the work.

Mr McWilliams reported that highway drain jetting and CCTV surveys had commenced. Surveys had been completed between Donyatt Hill and Church Street, between Donyatt Hill and Crow Lane, and from the Crow Lane junction to the village hall. Further surveys were required between Donyatt Hill and the outfalls into the River Isle. He noted that FWAG SW had met landowners adjoining Crow Lane and an engineering solution had been agreed, designed and costed. He noted that the proposed works included measures intended to prevent loose material and surface-water runoff from entering the highway drainage system. Mr McWilliams explained that the original £100,000 allocation had been based on an initial estimate prepared at the expression-of-interest stage in January 2026. Subsequent drain jetting, CCTV surveys, engineering assessment and engagement with landowners and the parish council had identified additional requirements. An increase of £75,000 was therefore requested, taking the total grant allocation to £175,000.

Points raised:

- Mr Bradford questioned whether some of the proposed activity constituted routine highway maintenance that should be funded by Somerset Council rather than the SRA. He sought assurance that SRA funding would deliver additional flood-risk benefits rather than replace Somerset Council Highways existing responsibilities. Mr McWilliams explained that the project extended beyond routine gully cleansing. It involved identifying and improving outfalls, addressing drainage connections to the River Isle, preventing material from entering the drainage system from adjoining land and delivering works at Crow Lane. He also reported that Somerset Council had increased its annual gully-cleansing programme from approximately 75,000 to approximately 125,000 gullies.
- Cllr Stanton supported the request, noting the recurring disruption caused by flooding at this strategically important location. James Divall emphasised that the proposal was a collaborative project involving several organisations and would benefit both the local community and users of the wider road network.

Mr McWilliams noted that any funding not required for defined project activity would be returned rather than spent unnecessarily. He advised the Board that the project remained in the investigation phase. Subject to the additional funding being secured, engineering works at Crow Lane were expected to begin before Christmas 2026. Drainage repairs and asset upgrades would follow completion of the surveys and were intended to be coordinated for delivery during 2027-28. The review of the road-

closure process would continue during 2026-27, with any resulting recommendations intended to be implemented in 2027-28.

There were no further questions.

As recommended, the SRA Board approved an uplift in the grant allocation for this project in the 2026-27 financial year from £100,000 to £175,000.

ITEM 11 COMMUNITY FLOOD ACTION FUND UPDATE

Caroline Dunn, SRA Project and Performance Oficer, presented an 18-month review of the SRA's Community Flood Action Fund (CFAF). She explained that the Fund supported eligible community organisations, including parish and town councils, constituted community groups, schools and charities, to undertake practical, locally led works intended to reduce flood risk and improve resilience. Grants of between £3,000 and £20,000 were available.

She said the fund filled a gap between larger SRA-funded projects and smaller interventions that communities could deliver using local knowledge, contractors and volunteers. Its objectives included supporting community-led flood-risk management, enabling practical local action, increasing resilience, encouraging partnership working and promoting sustainable management of flood risk.

Ms Dunn said that six rounds of applications had been dealt with. A seventh round had closed on 25 August 2026, but those applications had not yet been assessed. She said that across the first six rounds, 47 applications had been received, 21 applications had been approved, 12 had been rejected, 4 applications had been invited to resubmit and 10 had been referred to alternative funding sources. She noted that the recorded success rate was 45% with most applications being submitted by parish or town councils. The remaining applications had been received from schools, community groups and charitable organisations.

Ms Dunn reported that applications had been rejected where the applicant was ineligible, the overall project budget exceeded £20,000, the proposed work was already receiving SRA funding through another programme, or insufficient information had been provided to demonstrate that the proposal met the Fund’s criteria. Other applications had been referred to more appropriate funding routes, including the Hills to Levels Natural Flood Management programme and the equipment and training grants administered through Somerset Prepared. She noted that the works funded included watercourse desilting, ditch maintenance, vegetation clearance, clearance of culverts and drains, improvements to drainage infrastructure, desilting of existing attenuation areas and the purchase of a small permanent pump. As some projects comprised more than one activity, the number of types of work funded exceeded the number of approved projects. Of the 21 approved projects, 9 had been completed, 2 were partially completed, 5 were in progress and 5 were delayed. Delays had principally resulted from the need to obtain consents or

permissions, unsuitable weather or site conditions, ecological constraints and limited contractor availability.

Ms Dunn reported that the total two-year allocation to the Fund was £520,000. Grants totalling £211,242 had been awarded, leaving £308,758 available. Payments of £80,722 had been made for completed works.

Ms Dunn said that the Fund had enabled local organisations to use local contractors and volunteers to undertake practical work. Although many schemes were small, communities had reported improvements to drainage and watercourse performance. The Fund had also helped communities to identify assets, understand maintenance requirements and develop a clearer understanding of riparian responsibilities. Applicants were not permitted to apply annually for funding to repeat the same maintenance activity. Successful applicants were therefore required to consider sustainable maintenance arrangements and engage with the relevant riparian owners. Riparian-responsibility workshops were also available to help improve understanding.

She advised that the application process had generally worked well because it was simple and proportionate. Quarterly assessment rounds had supported relatively quick decisions, and the community-led model had improved access to funding for smaller organisations that might otherwise have been unable to undertake local flood-risk work. Challenges included applicants being uncertain about the intervention most likely to reduce flood risk, obtaining the necessary consents and permissions, and the limited capacity of small organisations and volunteers to manage grant-funded projects.

The review identified opportunities to strengthen promotion of the Fund, provide additional case studies and worked examples, and improve monitoring and evaluation in a proportionate way. This could include better baseline information, completion reporting and evidence of project outcomes.

Points raised:

- Anthony Betty welcomed the practical benefits delivered by the Fund. He asked how the SRA ensured that communities given grants had had relevant training before they undertook works and if this was monitored. Was there a way they could come back to the SRA in the event of an injury? Ms Dunn replied that grant recipients (such as Parish and Town Councils) have their own policies and procedures and it is up to them to make sure that their financial standing orders, procurement, commissioning of contractors and health and safety are all in place and fit for purpose.

The Board did not identify any immediate changes required to the fundamental structure of the Fund. The focus would instead be on improved promotion, appropriate follow-up with applicants and proportionate strengthening of monitoring and evaluation.

As recommended, the SRA Board noted the progress of the Community Flood Action Fund (CFAF).

The Board also considered whether any changes were required to the process and programme.

ITEM 12 RIPARIAN THEORY OF CHANGE

Paul Elliston, SRA Community Team, presented an update on the Riparian Theory of Change initiative, which sought to improve the understanding and management of riparian ownership responsibilities across Somerset.

He explained that riparian maintenance was the issue most frequently raised with the SRA Community Team. Field visits commonly identified inadequate maintenance, while community workshops had revealed widespread confusion and misinformation about riparian ownership and responsibilities.

He said the barriers to effective maintenance included: owners being unaware of their responsibilities, insufficient knowledge about how responsibilities should be discharged, different and sometimes complex permitting arrangements applying to different watercourses, fragmented ownership and piecemeal maintenance, limited staff and organisational capacity, inconsistent approaches to enforcement and insufficient awareness of how individual watercourses formed part of the wider catchment.

Dr Elliston said that SRA Technical Group members had agreed that substantial improvements were required. A Theory of Change process had therefore been established to provide a structured framework for moving from the current situation to the desired outcome. He noted that an initial workshop had been held in January 2026 with SRA partners, relevant external organisations and members of the SRA core team. The workshop had established the following long-term goal:

“Healthy, biodiverse and functioning catchments across Somerset with empowered, informed and confident riparian owners who are willing to take actions for the benefit of the community and the environment.”

Eight preconditions had been identified as necessary to achieve this goal. These included developing more streamlined services, accessible communications and effective support, together with knowledgeable local sub-catchment groups capable of coordinating maintenance in accordance with good practice.

Following the first workshop, participants had been invited to continue developing the emerging project plan online. This work included identifying the actions required, the organisations and stakeholders that would need to be involved, and the timescales within which individual elements might be achieved.

A draft project plan had now been prepared with a second, larger workshop proposed to refine the plan, test its assumptions, identify risks and potential

unintended consequences, and develop indicators through which progress could be measured. The precise date had not been finalised, although November 2026 had been suggested in the report.

Dr Elliston asked Board members to support the continuation of the process and encourage relevant officers from their organisations to participate in the next workshop. In addition to flood-risk specialists, participation was sought from strategists, decision-makers, programme managers and representatives from associated services identified as having a role in delivery.

David Mitchell emphasised that confusion about riparian ownership and maintenance responsibilities was widespread. He supported the proposed partnership approach and the further development of practical, accessible information.

Points raised:

- Tony Bradford asked how the initiative would address enforcement. He stressed that communication and voluntary action needed to be supported by an effective response where riparian owners did not fulfil their responsibilities. Dr Elliston responded and explained that the relevant organisations had different powers, responsibilities and permitting arrangements. Developing a more consistent and collective approach to permitting and enforcement was one of the matters intended to be explored through the next workshop.

The Board discussed the importance of securing participation from across partner organisations rather than limiting the process to flood-risk management officers. Relevant expertise could include planning, highways, environmental protection, community engagement and communications. Board members were asked to nominate and encourage appropriate staff to participate.

Members also discussed the Government's interest in riparian obligations. It was agreed that a concise summary of the work should be shared with the relevant ministerial office.

The Chair thanked Dr Elliston for the presentation and invited the Board to consider the recommendations.

As recommended, the SRA Board noted the progress of the Riparian Theory of Change initiative.

The Board also endorsed and supported completion of the Riparian Theory of Change development process as planned

ITEM 13 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Bel Deering, SRA Community Team, provided an update on plans for Somerset Flood Awareness Month, which would take place throughout October 2026. The campaign was intended to provide sustained, locally tailored awareness activity ahead of the winter and to encourage communities to consider flood preparation and

resilience. Planned activity included displays and exhibitions in libraries, schools and other community locations. The intention was to reach people who might not ordinarily attend formal flood meetings or engagement events. Artwork produced through the SRA's work with young people was also expected to be displayed during the month.

She encouraged Board members and partner organisations to promote the campaign through their own networks and communication channels. Members were also invited to publicise forthcoming catchment-level network meetings and other community resilience opportunities.

The Board was reminded that the Somerset Prepared Community Resilience Day would take place on 21 October 2026.

The next meeting of the Somerset Rivers Authority Board was scheduled for 4 December 2026.

The Chair thanked Board members, officers and members of the public for their attendance and contributions.

Appendix One

Question 1

Bryony Sadler, two questions,

1. Have the Trigger Points Plan been redone since this last winter 2026 and if so can we have a copy please?

Response provided by the Environment Agency

We're planning to have trigger points updated by the end of September and will be sharing our updated draft with partners shortly. It will be published online here: Somerset Levels and Moors: reducing the risk of flooding - GOV.UK, so is easily accessible to everyone.

2. If both Northmoor and Saltmoor pumping stations are both suffering from the actual point of where the pumps are submerged into the water, not being low enough and need some basin/bowls or just lowering the level in the drain creating to be able to give the pumps a draw of water, why has this not been done yet ahead of this winter when we are facing an Unprecedented El Nino effect which no doubt for us will mean rain, yet this job is an easy, quick and very effective way to start the process of getting water to the actual pumps, could this be looked at urgently?

Response provided by the Environment Agency

Getting more water to Northmoor / Saltmoor pumping stations so pumps can operate more of the time is on the programme of activity being considered via the Somerset Resilience Advisory Group. It's not as simple as repositioning pumps. There is complexity to this challenge as the system has been carefully designed, so making alterations needs to be fully considered.

Question 2

Andrea Hine

Hi

Please can I ask the following questions at the next week's SRA meeting

1. Has Wessex Water changed any protocol/processes or engineering for Clatworthy Reservoir or any other reservoirs above Taunton after 2014, back then we believe it was risk managed relating to Taunton, the impact on Bridgwater was not assessed. If no changes have been made this really needs to be investigated asap as any controlled release of water should be using more storage areas rather than just releasing it. The release will affect Taunton but it will then have a longer and bigger effect on Bridgwater and the Levels as this is where this water will sit until it is pumped out. So if there is a release process in the management of the reservoirs then more pumps and a better infrastructure needs to be in place before this happens to move this water out to sea to prevent the flooding of properties downstream and the responsibility and costs should lay with Wessex Water.

Response provided by Wessex Water

No. Wessex Water has not changed any protocol/processes or engineering for Clatworthy or any other reservoirs above Taunton after 2014.

There are 3 reasons why flow from an impounding reservoir like Clatworthy is released.

- **The reservoir is full**. The dams have weir overflows & spillways that allow excess water, that cannot be stored in the reservoir (i.e. when full) to safely pass into the downstream watercourses.
- **Compensation flow**. This is a legal requirement written into the permit and is in place to protect the downstream river ecology.
- **Critical maintenance**. Bi-annually the scour valves are tested for 15-30 minutes, in accordance with the 1975 Reservoirs Act. This is done in accordance with the scour discharge consents. The reason for the short duration tests, is to confirm that the safety scour valves work satisfactorily.

The first reason is determined by nature.

The second reason is determined by the permit set by the Environment Agency.

The third reason is the only one we have any control over, is essential, and lasts for about an hour a year.

2. I would be grateful if the Somerset Rivers Authority could give us an update of the meeting/workshop to investigate the effects of cumulative house building in Somerset.

Many thanks

Andrea Hine

Response provided by Somerset Rivers Authority Manager

A meeting of the working group was scheduled to take place on 19th August at Somerset Council offices in Taunton. Unfortunately, Somerset Council was suffering problems with its IT systems on this day so the meeting room and IT facilities required to run a hybrid meeting were not available. The meeting had to be postponed. The meeting is being rearranged and will report back to the Board in December.

Question 3

Good afternoon,

I live on the banks of the Axe at Cocklake (BS28 4HH). Recently contractors have flailed the top metre of one bank and carried out a weedcut with an excavator but have left a 400 yard stretch at Bartletts Bridge (BS28 4HH) uncut with the promise (from the banksman/supervisor) that they were coming back with a weed boat (this was promised on 2 occasions). A contact at the SRA doesn't believe the boat has been ordered. As my concerns were quoted in the SRA Annual Report for 2025-26 on this very subject (and last year's cut by boat made a vast difference to flow over

the winter) I feel strongly that the weed boat is required this year. The two years that the cut didn't take place saw the weed dam the river and water was pushed in reverse around the minor drainage ditches on the surrounding moors leading to flooding of agricultural land, giving proof that when cut the rhyne system works perfectly, when weed is left it fails completely.

Can the Board confirm that a boat will be deployed this year please, if a boat won't be deployed please advise the reasons why, when it has been proven to make a major difference to flooding in this area.

Kind regards

Christina Brown, Wedmore

Response provided by the Environment Agency

The EA is exploring if it can adjust other plans to make the weedboat available. The EA will update the enquirer when they have a definitive answer.

Question 4

Hi there,

I would like to ask the following question:

The Flood Resilience project for Rode was part-delivered in 2021 – 2023. The outstanding work is fundamental to the overall success of the project, and includes repairs to an attenuation tank and drains at the junction of Straight Lane and Crooked Lane at the south-west end of the village. The project was funded by the SRA, and we (Rode Parish Council) has received repeated assurances that the remaining funds (not yet spent) have been “ring-fenced” for the project completion. Unfortunately the creation of the Unitary Authority (Somerset Council) and the demise of Mendip District Council led to the project falling into a “black hole”. Despite numerous attempts, we are still no closer to the project being completed. This is a vital project to provide flood resilience in a small village, where over 50 properties are at a HIGH RISK of surface water flooding.

We would like to understand when the project will be completed.

Best regards, Jim McAuliffe (Parish Councillor, Rode)

Response provided by Somerset Council

The Rode Parish Project is a complex one. It has several challenges that we still are trying to overcome. First is capacity to be able to deliver the project. The parish will be aware that we have had some challenges recruiting the personnel into the service for both engineering and project manager. We now have new engineer starting in

November and we are trying to recruit a project officer since the service's establishment growth bid was accepted.

The other issue includes the original project not being set up correctly through procurement and the correct permissions not being obtained with highways. The project needs a restart from reviewing the scope of the project, resource set up, ensuring permissions are in place and procurement process in place. This could be done again by the Council as and when resource is available or the funds could be presented back to the SRA and a new lead partner appointed.

Funds are still there and available for this project, it is capacity and the need to review the project which is holding up the delivery.

One option with our limited capacity is to outsource the work to our consultants but this will increase the costs but ensure delivery. This is something the Council is exploring to understand costs and timelines.

Question 5

Afternoon

A gravel shoal has built up in front of the Bridge in Exford. The EA will not remove it or will allow access to the river to riparian owners to move it.

All of the residents around the centre of Exford are concerned about not if it floods but when it will flood! We all want to be proactive in removing the gravel and not allowing our homes to flood.

The river has also been diverted due to the shoal and is currently under mining the road bank in some places you can insert a stick well over a metre.

The riparian owners are the White Horse Inn (The bank is a pub garden) The opposite side is Somerset Bridges who are more than happy to allow work to be done but they don't want the cost as it's of no benefit to them.

Regards

Jeremy Hickman

Response provided by the Environment Agency

Enquiry has been sent to Devon and Cornwall EA enquiries team, as this location is not within the responsibility of the Wessex Team, who will be in contact with the enquirer directly.