

# Joint Scrutiny Panel of Somerset Rivers Authority

Tuesday 9 July 2019

11.00 am Taunton Library Meeting Room,  
Paul Street, Taunton, TA1 3XZ



To: The Members of the Joint Scrutiny Panel of Somerset Rivers Authority

Cllr S Coles (Chair), Cllr N Cottle, Cllr A Groskop, Cllr John Hunt (Vice-Chair), Cllr L Leyshon, Cllr Lisgo, Cllr Maxwell, Cllr Osborne, Cllr Pearce, Cllr Smedley, Tratt and Vigar

Issued By Julian Gale, Strategic Manager - Governance and Risk - Date Not Specified

For further information about the meeting, please contact Peter Stiles on Tel: (01823) 357628, Email: [democraticservices@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:democraticservices@somerset.gov.uk) or Lindsey Tawse on Tel: (01823) 355059, Email: [democraticservices@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:democraticservices@somerset.gov.uk)

Guidance about procedures at the meeting follows the printed agenda.

This meeting will be open to the public and press, subject to the passing of any resolution under Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972.

This agenda and the attached reports and background papers are available on request prior to the meeting in large print, Braille, audio tape & disc and can be translated into different languages. They can also be accessed via the council's website on [www.somerset.gov.uk/agendasandpapers](http://www.somerset.gov.uk/agendasandpapers)



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# AGENDA

Item Joint Scrutiny Panel of Somerset Rivers Authority - 11.00 am Tuesday 9 July 2019

**\*\*Public Guidance notes contained in agenda annexe\*\***

1 **Apologies for absence**

2 **Declarations of Interest**

Details of all Members' interests in District, Town and Parish Councils will be displayed in the meeting room. The Statutory Register of Member's Interests can be inspected via the Community Governance team.

3 **Minutes from the previous meeting held on 26 February 2019** (Pages 7 - 16)

The Committee is asked to confirm the minutes are accurate.

4 **Public Question Time**

The Chairman will allow members of the public to ask a question or make a statement about any matter on the agenda for this meeting. **These questions may be taken during the meeting, when the relevant agenda item is considered, at the Chairman's discretion.**

5 **SRA Joint Scrutiny Panel - Draft Terms of Reference** (Pages 17 - 20)

To agree the Terms of Reference.

6 **SRA - 2018/2019 End of Year Review & Finance Update** (Pages 21 - 64)

**Possible exclusion of the Press and Public**

**PLEASE NOTE:** Although the main report for this item and appendices 1 & 2 are not confidential, the supporting appendix 3 available to Members contain exempt information and are therefore marked confidential – not for publication. At any point if Members wish to discuss information within this appendix then the Committee will be asked to agree the following resolution to exclude the press and public:

**Exclusion of the Press and Public**

To consider passing a resolution having been duly proposed and seconded under Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 to exclude the press and public from the meeting, on the basis that if they were present during the business to be transacted there would be a likelihood of disclosure of exempt information, within the meaning of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972:

Reason: Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

7 **Key Projects Update** (Pages 65 - 72)

To consider the report.

Item Joint Scrutiny Panel of Somerset Rivers Authority - 11.00 am Tuesday 9 July 2019

8 **SRA Precepting Legislation Update** (Pages 73 - 76)

To consider the report.

9 **Joint Scrutiny Panel Work Programme & Future Training** (Pages 77 - 78)

To discuss future items for the Panel's work programme and future training opportunities. To aid this discussion the Panel's 2019 work programme is attached.

10 **Any other urgent items of business**

The Chairman may raise any items of urgent business.

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# Agenda Annexe

## Guidance notes for the meeting

### 1. Inspection of Papers

Any person wishing to inspect Minutes, reports, or the background papers for any item on the Agenda should contact the Committee Administrator for the meeting – Peter Stiles on Tel: (01823) 357628 or Email: [democraticservices@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:democraticservices@somerset.gov.uk) They can also be accessed via the council's website on [www.somerset.gov.uk/agendasandpapers](http://www.somerset.gov.uk/agendasandpapers)

### 2. Members' Code of Conduct requirements

When considering the declaration of interests and their actions as a councillor, Members are reminded of the requirements of the Members' Code of Conduct and the underpinning Principles of Public Life: Honesty; Integrity; Selflessness; Objectivity; Accountability; Openness; Leadership. The Code of Conduct can be viewed at: <http://www.somerset.gov.uk/organisation/key-documents/the-councils-constitution/>

### 3. Minutes of the Meeting

Details of the issues discussed and recommendations made at the meeting will be set out in the Minutes, which the Committee will be asked to approve as a correct record at its next meeting.

### 4. Public Question Time

**If you wish to speak, please tell Peter Stiles the Committee's Administrator - by 5pm, 3 clear working days before the meeting (Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2019). All Public Questions must directly relate to an item on the Committee's agenda and must be submitted in writing by the deadline.**

**If you require any assistance submitting your question, please contact the Democratic Services Team on 01823 357628.**

At the Chair's invitation you may ask questions and/or make statements or comments about any matter on the Committee's agenda – providing you have given the required notice. You may also present a petition on any matter within the Committee's remit. The length of public question time will be no more than 30 minutes in total.

A slot for Public Question Time is set aside near the beginning of the meeting, after the minutes of the previous meeting have been signed. However, questions or statements about any matter on the Agenda for this meeting may be taken at the time when each matter is considered.

You must direct your questions and comments through the Chair. You may not take direct part in the debate. The Chair will decide when public participation is to finish.

If there are many people present at the meeting for one particular item, the Chair may adjourn the meeting to allow views to be expressed more freely. If an item on the Agenda is contentious, with a large number of people attending the meeting, a representative should be nominated to present the views of a group.

An issue will not be deferred just because you cannot be present for the meeting. Remember that the amount of time you speak will be restricted, normally to two minutes only.

## **5. Exclusion of Press & Public**

If when considering an item on the Agenda, the Committee may consider it appropriate to pass a resolution under Section 100A (4) Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 that the press and public be excluded from the meeting on the basis that if they were present during the business to be transacted there would be a likelihood of disclosure of exempt information, as defined under the terms of the Act.

## **6. Committee Rooms & Council Chamber and hearing aid users**

To assist hearing aid users the Committee meeting rooms have infra-red audio transmission systems.

## **7. Recording of meetings**

The Council supports the principles of openness and transparency. It allows filming, recording and taking photographs at its meetings that are open to the public - providing this is done in a non-disruptive manner. Members of the public may use Facebook and Twitter or other forms of social media to report on proceedings and a designated area will be provided for anyone wishing to film part or all of the proceedings. No filming or recording may take place when the press and public are excluded for that part of the meeting. As a matter of courtesy to the public, anyone wishing to film or record proceedings is asked to provide reasonable notice to the Committee Administrator so that the relevant Chair can inform those present at the start of the meeting.

We would ask that, as far as possible, members of the public aren't filmed unless they are playing an active role such as speaking within a meeting and there may be occasions when speaking members of the public request not to be filmed.

The Council will be undertaking audio recording of some of its meetings in County Hall as part of its investigation into a business case for the recording and potential webcasting of meetings in the future.

A copy of the Council's Recording of Meetings Protocol should be on display at the meeting for inspection, alternatively contact the Committee Administrator for the meeting in advance.

## Joint Scrutiny Panel of Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA)

Minutes of a meeting of the Joint Scrutiny Panel of SRA held on Tuesday 26 February 2019 at 2.00pm in the Taunton Library Meeting Room.

### Present:

Cllr Ian Aldridge* ( <i>West Somerset C</i> )	Cllr Roy Mackenzie ( <i>Mendip DC</i> )
Cllr Eve Berry ( <i>Mendip DC</i> )	Cllr Kathy Pearce ( <i>Sedgemoor DC</i> )
Cllr Simon Coles ( <i>Vice-Chair - in the Chair</i> ) ( <i>Taunton Deane BC</i> )	Cllr Brian Smedley ( <i>Sedgemoor DC</i> )
Cllr Anna Groskop ( <i>Somerset CC</i> )	David Tratt ( <i>Axe Brue IDB</i> )
Cllr John Hunt ( <i>Somerset CC</i> )	David Vigar ( <i>Parrett IDB</i> )
Cllr Libby Lisgo ( <i>Taunton Deane BC</i> )	

(\*Substitute for Cllr Rosemary Woods)

**Other Members Present:** Cllr David Hall (*Somerset CC*) and Cllr Alan Wedderkopp (*Taunton Deane BC*).

#### 42 **Election of Chair and Vice-Chair** - agenda item 1

Cllr Lisgo, seconded by Cllr Mackenzie, moved that Cllr Smedley be elected Chair for the ensuing year. Cllr Smedley declined the nomination.

On the motion of Cllr Aldridge, seconded by Cllr Pearce, Cllr Coles was elected Chair for the ensuing year.

On the motion of Cllr Groskop, seconded by Cllr Mackenzie, Cllr Hunt was elected Vice-Chair for the ensuing year.

(It was noted that the former Chair, Julian Taylor, was no longer a member of the Panel as he had ceased to serve on the Parrett Internal Drainage Board).

#### 43 **Apologies for Absence** - agenda item 2

Cllrs Sue Steele, Nicholas Thwaites, Gerard Tucker and Rosemary Woods.

#### 44 **Declarations of Interest** - agenda item 3

There were no declarations of interest.

#### 45 **Minutes of the Previous Meeting** - agenda item 4

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 May 2018 were confirmed and signed as

correct.

46 **Public Question Time** - agenda item 5

There were no public questions.

47 **Key Project Update** - agenda item 6

**(a) Taunton Strategic Flood Alleviation Improvements Scheme**

The Panel considered the report of the Assistant Director, Planning and Environment, Taunton Deane Borough Council and the Project Executive, Taunton Flood Project, Environment Agency on progress with Phase 2 of the Taunton Strategic Flood Alleviation Scheme.

Taunton Deane Borough Council and the Environment Agency were working together to provide a long-term strategic solution to reducing flood risk in Taunton and the wider catchment area posed by the River Tone and three local streams, acknowledging the increased risk arising from climate change. The strategic solution was required to protect existing property and to allow the town to develop safely.

Work completed on phase 2 had included surveys, ground investigations, engagement with landowners, modelling and concept designs. This work had shown that major engineering work would be required involving a new flood storage area and dam in the vicinity of Bradford-on-Tone and raised or new flood defences in Taunton town centre, at an estimated combined capital cost in the order of £50m. No funding package was yet in place and it was recognised that the full funding necessary was unlikely to be found in the short term.

The report referred to:

- the work already completed for Phase 2 having identified several local intervention options that could provide a useful increase in flood capacity pending the longer-term delivery of the larger flood risk reductions involving water storage upstream and improving flood defences in Taunton.
- the Borough Council and the Environment Agency having agreed a revised Project Delivery Plan including local intervention options such as improvements to local streams, raising bridges, optimisation of local floodwater storage and various minor works at or near Bathpool.
- these local interventions would be complimentary to the larger strategic scheme and would be 'quick wins' that could be delivered in the short term to buy the town additional years protection while work continued on the longer-term strategy and funding was hopefully secured for its delivery.
- investigations being made into these local intervention options and the submission of an application for 2019-20 SRA grant funding to support



- their design.
- the production of a Strategic Plan for consultation with key shareholders describing a range of interventions and components that together would provide a long-term flood risk management solution for Taunton.

At its meeting in December 2018 the SRA Board had considered the revised scope of the scheme to be an appropriate basis for continued joint project working.

Discussion points and responses by the Assistant Director, Planning and Environment, Taunton Deane Borough Council and the Senior Manager, SRA included:

- could serious flooding be successfully resisted by relatively small-scale measures, especially taking into account development in areas of significant flood risk?
- would the local interventions contribute to the long-term strategy and form part of an upgraded scheme rather than have a relatively short shelf-life and need to be replaced, with the associated cost implications?
- in view of the wide-ranging implications, should the SRA Board consider the climate change emergency resolution passed by Somerset County Council and District Councils?
- After it was confirmed that a dam was part of the flood attenuation scheme it was asked if the scheme would provide the 1 in 100 year protection required. If not, could it be upgraded at a later date? An EU-funded project (Co-Adapt) may offer a new method for addressing uncertainties around the impacts of climate change and help ensure the right projects are delivered at the right time.
- Potential flood risks at Firepool as a result of run-off was discussed. If necessary a temporary solution may be required..

The Senior Manager, SRA indicated that, while climate change was taken into account in the 20 Year Flood Action Plan which was under review, he would follow up the issue raised with the SRA Board.

#### **(b) Oath to Burrowbridge Pioneer Dredging**

The Panel considered the report of the Director of Operations, Somerset Drainage Boards Consortium, on progress with the delivery of a full Oath to Burrowbridge Pioneer Dredge on the River Parrett.

The report referred to:

- Oath to Burrowbridge project work having commenced in late 2017 and having so far included design, bathymetric and topographic surveys, numerical modelling and the production of environmental surveys and reports. Overall, results had indicated reduced flood risks to 65sq km of land in the Parrett catchment, and an additional 200 properties currently at direct risk of flooding.

- minor increased flood risks to Curry Moor and North Moor associated with the Oath - Burrowbridge dredging and the River Sowy/Kings Sedgemoor Drain Enhancement Scheme, their mitigation and further improvement of the situation on Curry Moor and North Moor through other works promoted in the Flood Action Plan.
- the next stage of the project which would be to prepare the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), undertake consultation with stakeholders and local communities and prepare Water Management Plans.
- the view that the scheme could be delivered in time to access funding from the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership by the deadline of Spring 2021 and that, with the full backing of the SRA Board and timely, satisfactory conclusion of the EIA and Statement, dredging work would be able to start in Autumn 2019.

At its meeting in December 2018 the SRA Board had:

- approved the delivery of a full Oath to Burrowbridge pioneer dredging scheme, aiming to dredge in Autumn 2019.
- agreed in principle that the SRA would fund temporary additional Environment Agency pumping required to support the scheme (subject to more information on costs) pending the delivery of more SRA projects that produced further benefits to Curry Moor and Curry Moor.
- agreed that the flood risk baseline used for assessing the impacts of the scheme should be that pertaining before the 2013-14 floods.

Discussion points and responses by the Senior Manager, SRA and the Chief Engineer, Somerset Drainage Boards Consortium, included:

- the project was moving forward at pace and the consultation process should begin soon ahead of a two-year programme of work starting in Autumn 2019.
- while the scheme might have a marginal negative impact on Curry Moor and North Moor, there would be significant benefits to the area as a whole and overall the situation on Curry Moor and North Moor remained considerably improved compared to how it was before the 2013-14 flood.
- the project had not been delayed or otherwise impacted by maintenance dredging, as pioneer and maintenance dredging were not inter-dependent.
- the differences between pioneer dredging and water injection dredging - the former was a traditional, more substantial deeper dredge while water injection, which involved the dispersal of silt via flow and tide, was efficient, cost-effective and less invasive but removed less material and required more maintenance.
- by how much had the area affected by flood risks reduced and what actual area of land was going to be improved? What buildings constituted a 'property' - are residential, business and farm buildings included'?
- the cost and value for money of the scheme and future maintenance.

- a Panel member's suggestion that other Panel members should view a water injection dredging.

The Panel noted the report and supported the decisions made by the SRA Board at its December 2018 meeting

### **(c) Brue Catchment**

The Panel considered the report of the Senior Manager, SRA on progress with SRA-funded proposals for work on the River Brue and in the Brue catchment and some of the challenges experienced in moving the project forward.

The report referred to:

- the SRA Board's decision in 2015-16 to allocate £500,000 towards capital works that would optimise the capacity of the River Brue using funding from the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership (HotSWLEP) and difficulties in delivering these improvements arising from the need to work within strict environmental and regulatory constraints combined with a lack of consensus on the flood risk benefit of the proposals.
- works undertaken having been limited to some updating and enhancement of the Brue hydraulic model and some of the tree works.
- the holding of a workshop in March 2018 at which there was strong support for developing a holistic Brue Plan providing a framework for future SRA projects in the catchment.
- the decision of the Axe-Brue Internal Drainage Board in December 2018 to step back from leading the project as it was thought unlikely that a scheme to dredge the Brue between Westhay and North Drain Pumping Station would be able to secure the necessary approvals in time to meet the Spring 2021 deadline for accessing the HotSWLEP funding.
- the need for a broader package of works in addition to dredging requiring the expertise of a range of delivery partners.
- the proposal that the SRA Senior Manager should work with SRA partners and stakeholders to seek a consensus on the best options for making use of the capital funds currently allocated towards the Brue catchment and should update the SRA Board on the way forward at its March meeting (should it not be possible to identify a capital scheme or schemes that could be delivered within the time available, it might be necessary to ask the SRA Board to reallocate the funding).

Discussion points included the need for tangible progress and the importance of not losing the HotSWLEP funding. The Senior Manager, SRA confirmed that the funding would be lost if it was not used within the deadline but that it could be re-directed if necessary.

The Panel noted the report and the latest position on projects within the Brue catchment and supported the proposal for a different approach to delivering projects in the catchment.

#### **(d) River Sowy/King's Sedgemoor Drain (KSD) Enhancement Scheme**

The Panel considered the report of the Senior Manager, SRA and the Flood and Coastal Risk Management Team Leader, Environment Agency on progress with the Sowy/KSD Enhancement Scheme, to which it had been agreed that there should be an incremental approach.

Works recently completed or in hand included:

- de-silting at Parchey Bridge and Dunball railway bridge and the removal of obstacles, etc.
- the scoping of works upstream of the Dunball A38 road bridge.
- developing the design of the first stage scheme for the main channel improvements on the Sowy and KSD involving: repair/improvement of water level control structures; restoring low spots on the banks of the Sowy and KSD using excavated material; and widening the lower Sowy to obtain material to raise or create banks on that stretch of the river.
- outline designs to demonstrate further enhancement works on the Sowy and KSD.

At its meeting in December 2018 the SRA Board had noted the progress made and supported the development of the design for further enhancement of the Sowy/KSD system.

The Panel noted the report and the latest position on the scheme and supported the combined efforts of the Environment Agency, Internal Drainage Boards and Natural England to identify a package of works that delivered the desired benefits within the timeframe and funding of the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership.

#### **48 2019 - 20 Enhanced Programme - agenda item 7**

The Panel considered the report of the Senior Manager, SRA providing the opportunity to review the draft 2019-20 enhanced programme of works before it was finalised by the SRA Board in March 2019.

The report indicated that:

- 33 proposals were submitted by SRA Delivery Partners with a total value of £2.007m which were scored against Flood Action Plan objectives and SRA policies. After review, the SRA Technical Group decided that five proposals should not be taken forward and that the funding originally requested for some proposals should be reduced by 10% to enable more schemes to be included in the programme. In total, 28 schemes were now being put forward in priority order for funding from the 2019-20 Shadow Precept and Internal Drainage Board contributions with a total value of approximately £1.702m.
- it was proposed that £1.057m should be allocated from the 2019-20

Shadow Precept towards the River Sowy/Kings Sedgemoor Drain (KSD) Enhancement Scheme taking into account its key project status, the deadline for accessing the match funding contribution from the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership (HotSWLEP) and other factors.

- five proposals for feasibility studies that should result in well-developed schemes being brought forward in future years.
- geographical spread of the schemes throughout the county was reasonably balanced but there was less balance in terms of spend.
- taking into account the public match funding for the agreed Sowy/KSD scheme the total value of the 2019-20 programme was £2.985m. This would result in a shortfall of £65,000 against the estimated Shadow Precept of £2.920m which it was proposed to address using SRA contingency funds. If the proposal relating to the Sowy/KSD scheme was approved, the total budget available for the scheme would be approximately £5.302m.

Discussion points included:

- the need to raise public awareness of, and encourage public support for, the work undertaken by the SRA - a list of projects and expenditure in addition to the maps showing the geographical spread of schemes would be helpful.
- Somerset should, like other areas, receive Government grants for flood relief rather than have to rely on local funding.
- a scheme in Mendip (Easthills Cemetary, Warminster Road, Frome) that had not met the funding criteria.

The Panel noted the report and supported the SRA Board's recommendations which were to:

- provisionally approve the proposed 2019-20 Enhanced Programme as listed subject to final approval when funding was confirmed.
- approve the proposed level of funding - £1.057m to be set aside for the 2019-20 Shadow Precept to enable delivery of the agreed Sowy/KSD Scheme in 2019/20 and 2020-21.
- approve the allocation of £65,000 from contingency to meet the Sowy/KSD public match funding requirement in the 2015 HotSWLEP Funding Agreement.

49

### **Building Local Resilience Update - agenda item 8**

The Committee considered the report of the Manager of the Somerset Local Authorities Civil Contingencies Unit on progress with SRA Workstream 5 which was intended to deliver outcomes against Flood Action Plan Objective 3: 'Increase resilience to flooding for families, agriculture, businesses, communities and wildlife'.

Progress with some activities had been slower than anticipated during 2018 due to the departure of the Community Resilience Officer but several promising projects were underway, and the opportunity had been taken to refocus the workstream.

The report:

- provided an update on the development of flood networks, referring to the collection of information on known flood groups and the identification of areas where there appeared to be gaps in coverage.
- drew attention to a proposal to develop the flood networks approach by: raising awareness - through media coverage, emails and linking in with other groups and networks eg. environmental groups; engagement - through “drop-in” sessions in local communities, follow-up discussions with interested communities, and holding network events at key locations.
- outlined achievements during 2018 relating to other projects and activities eg. part-funding and supporting the Somerset Prepared Community Resilience event last October; a survey carried out through the Community Council for Somerset to investigate whether access to flood insurance remained an issue for residents following the major flooding event in 2013-14.
- referred to the proposed recruitment of a Community Engagement Officer (two-year fixed term).
- new projects planned for 2019-20.

The Civil Contingencies Manager reminded the Panel of the aim of the flood networks project which was to identify, map and where necessary develop links between existing flood groups, building on existing good practice, and to encourage them - at a grassroots and volunteer-led level - to pool knowledge and link together on a district and/or catchment basis so that communities could engage with the SRA. Project outcomes would be more resilient communities and groups that were able to support each other both in planning for, and dealing with, flooding. The Civil Contingencies Manager cited West Somerset as a well organised and co-ordinated flood network group and confirmed that there was a small amount of grant funding available to support network development.

Discussion points included: the results of the flooding survey which showed that 22% of the people surveyed did not have flood insurance, although it was not known at this stage whether this was due to affordability; the use of social media for communication between/with flooding groups; progress on developing flood networks in the Mendip area; the proposal to advertise for a Community Engagement Officer and an assistant soon.

The Panel noted the report, welcomed the progress being made and supported the actions planned for 2019.

The Committee considered the report of the Senior Manager, SRA on progress with delivering each of the actions within the original Somerset Levels and Moors 20 Year Flood Action Plan published in March 2014 and proposals for updating the Plan.

The report covered:

- actions that had been completed, were underway or had yet to be started involving: dredging and river management; land management; urban run-off; infrastructure resilience; building local resilience; and complex inter-related work
- significant political changes that would shape the way in which flood risk was managed in the future including: the Brexit process; the publication of Defra's 25 Year Plan; and forthcoming legislation such as the Agriculture Bill and the Environmental Principles and Governance Bill
- the need for the SRA, its partners and stakeholders - following review, assessment and consultation - to agree a shared vision for Somerset for the next 20 - 25 years, a revised Plan underpinning that vision and a clear strategy for delivering the revised Plan.

The Panel welcomed the progress being made and supported the proposed approach to taking the Plan forward.

51 **SRA Precepting Body - Update on Progress of Rivers Authorities and Land Drainage Bill** - agenda item 10

The Committee considered the report of the Senior Manager, SRA on progress with securing the passing of legislation to enable the SRA to become a precepting authority.

After several unsuccessful attempts, the Rivers Authorities and Land Drainage Bill (a Private Members' Bill moved by David Warburton, MP for Somerton and Frome) had received its Second Reading in Parliament on 8 February 2019 and would now go forward to the Committee Stage for detailed consideration (though the date for this was currently unknown). If successful at the Committee stage, the Bill would receive a Third Reading in the House of Commons and then pass to the House of Lords. Therefore it was possible that the Bill would receive the Royal Assent and become law before the end of the current Parliamentary session, provided no objections were raised. Panel members were asked to support this proposal by responding to, and raising awareness of, Defra's consultation to ensure that there were as many positive responses as possible. The Chair agreed to respond to the consultation on behalf of the Panel.

It was reported that Defra, in a recent consultation paper on the Management of Water in the Environment, had acknowledged the SRA as an example of new ways of funding local flood risk management activities and indicated that the Government proposed to secure the future of the SRA with the necessary

legislation. While this was good news and welcome progress there was currently no further detail and any action would be subject to positive responses to the consultation. Panel members were asked to support this proposal by responding to, and raising awareness of, Defra's consultation to ensure that there were as many positive responses as possible. The Chair agreed to respond to the consultation on behalf of the Panel.

It was agreed that Panel members should be sent the link to the Defra consultation.

Panel members acknowledged the difficulty of continuing to fund flood management through the shadow precept, being dependent on District Councils agreeing to continue to contribute each year and the challenges of maintaining the priority of funding flood action as time moved on from the major event in 2013-14.

The Panel noted the current position and welcomed the progress being made.

#### **Work Programme and Date of Next Meeting** - agenda item 11

52

The Panel endorsed its proposed work programme and noted that a date for its Summer meeting would be circulated.

Panel members were invited to identify any subjects about which they would like to have information.

#### **Other Urgent Business** - agenda item 12

53

Cllr Mackenzie referred to the Annual Meeting of the South Western Branch of the Association of Drainage Authorities in November 2018 and the matters discussed.

(The meeting closed at 4.16pm)

**Chair**  
**SRA Joint Scrutiny Panel**



## Somerset Rivers Authority Joint Scrutiny Panel Paper

### SRA Joint Scrutiny Panel Terms of Reference

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

The SRA Joint Scrutiny Panel is asked to:

1. Review and agree SRA Joint Scrutiny Panel Terms of Reference.

#### **Introduction**

1. The Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA) was launched on 31 January 2015 to play a key role in flood protection for the county. It is run by a Board of partners including the Environment Agency, Natural England, the Somerset Internal Drainage Boards, the Lead Local Flood and Highway Authority (Somerset County Council) and the other Somerset Local Authorities in their roles as Flood Risk Management Authorities.
2. The SRA Board is to provide a strategic overview of the continued delivery of the Somerset Flood Action Plan; Flood Risk and Water Level Management in Somerset; and to provide a public forum and single point of contact for collective decision-making in respect of Flood Risk and Water Level Management in Somerset.
3. The SRA Board also has responsibility for identifying, prioritising, sourcing funding and overseeing the delivery of additional flood risk and water level management work across the whole of Somerset.
4. At its 23 March 2016 Board meeting, the SRA Board agreed to the establishment of a Joint Scrutiny Panel (similar to the Joint Waste Scrutiny model), which would meet twice a year, at the most critical and important times. This would ensure that officer attendance at Scrutiny Committees would be minimised, whilst providing all relevant partners with the opportunity to scrutinise the work of the SRA Board.

#### **Role of the Joint Scrutiny Panel**

5. To examine the activities of the SRA and provide assurance to the SRA's constituent councils and partners that it is operating effectively.
6. To encourage wider involvement in the work of the Somerset Rivers Authority.

#### **Membership**

The Joint Scrutiny Panel shall consist of two non-executive elected members from each of the **five** Somerset councils and one from each Internal Drainage Board, totalling **12** Panel members.

It is a matter for each Local Authority and the Internal Drainage Boards to nominate or terminate the appointment of members serving on the Panel. The length of appointment is a matter for each partner represented on the body.

#### **Meetings**



The Joint Scrutiny Panel will meet twice a year for the business stated. Additional meetings will be arranged as required.

The date and time of each meeting will be agreed by the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Panel, in conjunction with the support officer.

The host authority will be responsible for issuing the papers and producing the meeting notes to all attendees. This will be done electronically. The Panel member and/or the Local Authority or Internal Drainage Board they represent will be responsible for any additional costs or services, including:

- Any printing or stationery requirements
- Any travel and subsistence expenses incurred i.e. car parking costs, fuel
- Any equipment required for site visits, i.e., appropriate footwear, hard hat, etc

### **Quorum**

The quorum for the Joint Scrutiny Panel shall be 6 representatives, with a minimum of 1 representative from 4 separate partners.

### **Election of Chair**

The Joint Scrutiny Panel shall elect a Chair and Vice-Chair annually.

### **Agenda Items**

The Scrutiny Panel Chair and Vice-Chair shall agree each meeting agenda in consultation with the support officer and liaison with the Senior Manager of the Somerset Rivers Authority.

Agenda Items for the next meeting shall be a standing item on the Panel's agenda.

### **Voting**

It is intended that agreement will be reached by consensus, however if a vote is required each Panel Member will have one vote. In the event of a tie the Chair shall have the casting vote.

### **Members' Conduct**

Members of Local Authorities and Internal Drainage Boards on the Joint Scrutiny Panel will be bound by their own Codes of Conduct. All Panel Members will need to comply with the principles of the Host Authority's Members' code of conduct as it applies to the declaration of interests, and compliance with the principles of public life set out by the Nolan Committee on Standards in Public Life.

Panel members are encouraged to participate fully in meetings, but must be aware of the limitations in capacity of officers to respond to detailed, individual queries between meetings.

### **Declarations of Interest**



Members of the Joint Scrutiny Panel must declare any interest during meetings of the Panel (and withdraw from the meeting if necessary) in accordance with their Council's Code of Conduct or as required by law.

**Openness and Transparency**

All meetings of the Joint Scrutiny Panel will be open to the public unless it is necessary to exclude the public in accordance with Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972.

**Confidentiality**

In accordance with their Council's Code of Conduct, elected Members of the Joint Scrutiny Panel must not disclose any information considered 'exempt' in accordance with Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972.

**Host Authority**

The Joint Scrutiny Panel will be hosted under Local Government arrangements by Somerset County Council and supported by officers from the County Council's Democratic Services team.

**Review of Terms of Reference** - The Joint Scrutiny Panel will review its Terms of Reference on an annual basis.

**RECOMMENDATION**

The SRA Joint Scrutiny Panel is asked to:

1. Review and agree SRA Joint Scrutiny Panel Terms of Reference.

**Date:** 1 July 2019

**Author:** Lindsey Tawse, Democratic Services Team Leader, LTawse@somerset.gov.uk

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**ITEM 6****Somerset Rivers Authority Joint Scrutiny Panel Paper****2018-19 Review****RECOMMENDATION**

The SRA Joint Scrutiny Panel is asked to:

1. Review and comment on SRA financial performance and project delivery in 2018-19.

**Purpose of the item**

To inform the SRA Joint Scrutiny Panel about SRA activities in 2018-19 and give members the chance to comment and ask questions.

**Background and context**

The SRA Joint Scrutiny Panel meets twice a year. One traditional purpose of the Panel's summer meeting is to give members a chance to look back at the year gone-by, while the winter meeting is meant to look ahead to the SRA's proposed programme of works for the next financial year.

Appendix 1 provides a summary of SRA finance at the end of 2018-19 financial year and Appendix 2 provides members with a detailed account of things that happened between the start of April 2018 and the end of March 2019. Information in Appendix 2 is broken down by SRA workstream and where appropriate, activities are broken down into geographical areas. Note that as Taunton Deane Borough Council and West Somerset Council were not superseded by West Somerset and Taunton Council until 1 April 2019, old district boundaries are still used.

A presentation will accompany this item. The presentation will provide Panel members with some detailed examples of SRA funded projects from each workstream and across the county. It is particularly hoped that new members of the Panel will find this whole item a useful introduction to the full range of SRA works.

**Latest status**

At a meeting on 21 June 2019, SRA Board members also looked back at 2018-19. New SRA Board Members commented on the large variety of projects that the SRA was in the process of delivering. The Board highlighted the need to raise awareness as much as possible of the work the SRA is delivering. The Board discussed the current mix of projects and considered whether we have the correct balance of projects across the workstreams. SRA Board Members also discussed the fact that the current Flood Action Plan is 5 years old and due for review. It was agreed that as part of that review it would be important to consider what the priorities of the SRA should be in the short, medium and long term.

**Next steps**

The detailed information provided in Appendix 1 and 2 will provide the basis for the SRA's formal annual report for 2018-19 which will formally approved by the SRA Board at its September Board Meeting.

**RECOMMENDATION**

The SRA Joint Scrutiny Panel is asked to:

1. Review and comment on SRA financial performance and project delivery in 2018-19.

**Date: 28 June 2019**

**Authors: David Mitchell and Jonathan Hudston, Somerset Rivers Authority**

## Somerset Rivers Authority 2018-19 Finance Report

### Background and context

This report provides information on the financial position at the end of the 2018-19 financial year. The paper provides an overview of the funding available at the start of the year and a summary of how much was spent on each workstream. It then sets out the total amount of funding allocated to projects for 2019-20 onwards. It is important to note that the vast majority of the funding is allocated to projects which are currently in the process of being delivered. Only £220,000 is unallocated, and this forms the SRA contingency fund.

Somerset Rivers Authority does not deliver works, instead the partners that make up the SRA partnership deliver works on behalf of the SRA and once works are complete, claim back the cost of the works. There are two main sources of funding which the SRA draws on:

- Local Partner Funding – money raised annually by an additional amount on Council Tax and direct contributions from the Internal Drainage Boards.
- Growth Deal Funding – £13.049m of funding allocated in 2014 through the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership (HotSWLEP) for specific large-scale capital projects.

### 1. Financial Performance – spend as at 31 March 2018 and funds allocated to schemes 2018-19.

**Table A** summarises the financial position as at the end of 2017-18. It also shows the total amount of funds carried forward and available in 2018-19.

<b>Table A: SRA Spend as at 31 March 2018 and Funds Available for Use in 2018-19</b>			
	<b>Funds Received (or due)</b>	<b>Total Paid to Delivery Partners pre 2018-19</b>	<b>Remaining Funds</b>
	<b>£,000</b>	<b>£,000</b>	<b>£,000</b>
<b>SRA Funding</b>			
CLG Funding	341		
2015-16 Local Partners (Interim) Funding	2,700		
2016-17 Local Partners Funding	2,778		
2017-18 Local Partners Funding	2,843		
<b>SRA Local Partner Total</b>	<b>8,662</b>	<b>5,254</b>	<b>3,408</b>
<b>Growth Deal Funding</b>	<b>13,049</b>	<b>6,507</b>	<b>6,542</b>
<b>Total Available</b>	<b>21,711</b>	<b>11,760</b>	<b>9,950</b>
<b>2018-19 Local Partners Funding</b>			
			<b>2,880</b>
<b>Total available funds in 2018-19</b>			<b>12,830</b>
<b>Total Local Partners Funding</b>			<b>6,288</b>
<b>Total Growth Deal Funding</b>			<b>6,542</b>

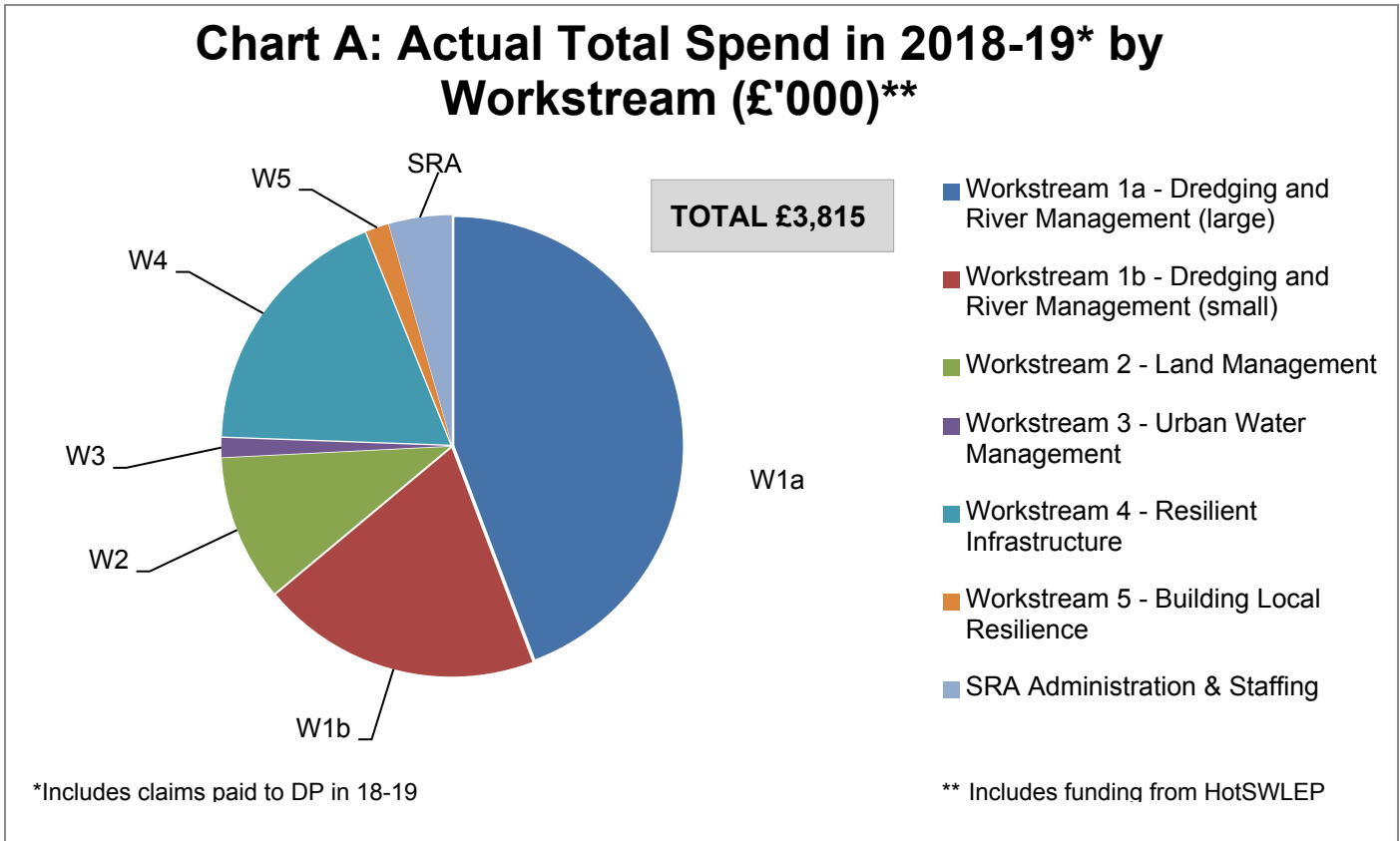
### 2. SRA actual and committed spend during 2018-19

For the purposes of this report, actual and committed are defined as follows:

- **Actual** – total funds that have been paid to delivery partners (DPs).
- **Committed** – is where DPs have either completed, but not yet drawn down the funds from the SRA or where DPs have contracted to have works undertaken.

SRA delivery partners can only draw down SRA funding after works are completed and invoices have been paid. This results in a delay between what SRA delivery partners have spent and how much has been claimed from the SRA. As the 2018-19 financial year has now ended there is no committed or forecast spend for 2018-19, all spend is what has been paid to delivery partners (actual).

Chart A shows the total actual spend for 2018-19.



During 2018-19 the SRA processed delivery partner claims totalling £3,815k, £1,122k (29%) of which was paid during Quarter Four. Of the total amount paid:

- 44% (£1,693) relates to Growth Deal funded actions including Bridgwater Tidal Barrier, delivery of 'Slow the Flow' Capital Grant Schemes, the Sowy/KSD Enhancement Scheme and Pioneer Dredging.
- 51% (£1,952) relates to Enhanced Programme works (funded from Local Partners funding).
- 5% (£170k) relates to administration and staffing.
- **A detailed breakdown of spend by project has been provided to Panel Members in 'Confidential Appendix 2018-19 Financial Detail'**



**Table B** summarises the financial position as at the end of Quarter Four 2018-19.

<b>Table B: Somerset Rivers Authority 2018-19 Financial Summary</b>			
	<b>Allocated Funds in 2018-19</b>	<b>Total Paid to Delivery Partners in 18-19</b>	<b>Forecast 2019-20 Onwards</b>
	<b>£'000</b>	<b>£'000</b>	<b>£'000</b>
Enhanced Programmes	4,922	1,951	2,971
Provision for Sowy/KSD Enhancement Scheme	943	0	943
Contingency	220	0	220
SRA Administration and Staffing	203	171	32
<b>SRA Funding – excl. Growth Deal</b>	<b>6,288</b>	<b>2,122</b>	<b>4,166</b>
<b>Growth Deal Funding</b> - Pioneer Dredging, Sowy/KSD, Bridgwater Tidal Barrier, Slow the Flow	<b>6,542</b>	<b>1,693</b>	<b>4,849</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>12,830</b>	<b>3,815</b>	<b>9,015</b>

### 3. Change in contingency from Quarter Three 2018-19

The total contingency held has increased by £41k since Quarter Three. The total amount of contingency held is now **£220,000**. Contingency can be used to fund project overspends, increases in project scopes and new projects. Table C below details the changes to the contingency fund.

**Table D** summarises the financial position at the end of 2018-19. It also shows the total amount of funds allocated to projects and carried forward to 2019-20.

<b>Table D: SRA Funds Allocated in 2019-20</b>	
	<b>Remaining Funds carry forward to 2019-20 £,000</b>
SRA Local Partner Total	4,167
Growth Deal Funding Total	4,849
<b>Total allocated to schemes for use in 2019-20</b>	<b>9,016</b>
2019-20 Local Partners Funding	2,926
<b>Total allocated to schemes for use in 2019-20</b>	<b>11,942</b>
<b>Total Local Partners funding</b>	<b>7,093</b>
<b>Total Growth Deal funding</b>	<b>4,849</b>

**Date: 28 June, 2019**

**Author: David Mitchell, SRA Senior Manager**

## Appendix 2: SRA activities 2018-19

Between the start of April 2018 and the end of March 2019, Somerset Rivers Authority was involved in an exceptional range of activities. These covered almost the full spectrum of flood risk management, aside from coastal issues which have never been part of the SRA's remit. The scope varied from major multi-million pound projects to jobs – such as gully-emptying – that individually cost less than £10 each.

Everything the SRA does is rooted in Somerset's 20 Year Flood Action Plan. Hence the SRA's five workstreams: Dredging & River Management (W1), Land Management (W2), Urban Water Management (W3), Resilient Infrastructure (W4) and Building Community Resilience (W5).

Common to all is the SRA's determination to give Somerset an extra level of flood protection and resilience.

Key points from 2018-19:

- £3.81million extra spent in Somerset on flood risk reduction and greater resilience
- Hundreds of places benefit across Somerset
- Biggest-ever use of water injection dredging techniques to maintain the River Parrett
- Hills to Levels wins UK River Prize for natural flood management
- Unique and massive review published of Somerset SuDS (Sustainable Drainage Systems)
- Circa 15,207 highways structures given extra cleaning to stop roads flooding
- First Somerset Resilience Day
- Major projects backed by SRA include further River Parrett dredging, River Sow-King's Sedgemoor Drain enhancements, Bridgwater Tidal Barrier, Taunton improvements

### W1: Dredging & River Management

**2018-19 summary:** *Work on **major projects** has included the biggest-yet water injection dredge along the River Parrett, de-silting at Parchey and Dunball on King's Sedgemoor Drain, repairs and improvements at North Drain Pumping Station in the River Brue catchment, and support for the Bridgwater Tidal Barrier and improvements around Taunton. Work on **smaller projects** has included repairs to the river banks in Frome town centre and along the River Avill Flood Relief Channel at Dunster, extra maintenance activities on West Sedgemoor, Aller Moor and around Sedgemoor, designs for improvements at Westonzoyland and West Sedgemoor Pumping Stations, and investigations at Moorland and Chadmead.*

Somerset Rivers Authority spends more on dredging and river management than it does on any other workstream. Schemes are designed and delivered for the SRA by a range of partners and contractors. Money comes from either council tax or the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership's Growth Deal Fund – or sometimes both.

There are three main strands. They are:

- major SRA projects
- major projects led by other bodies and backed by the SRA
- projects in the SRA's annual Enhanced Programmes

Water injection dredging and silt monitoring are outstanding examples of innovation in this workstream. Extra maintenance, repairs and improvements figure strongly across the county, and a revealing investigation has been carried out in the village of Moorland.

## Major projects

### 1 Maintenance dredging and silt monitoring

Towards the end of November 2018, a five-year contract for maintenance dredging along the River Parrett was let to water injection dredging specialists Van Oord. Within days, Van Oord's vessel Borr was taken to Dunball Wharf near Bridgwater in halves on the back of two lorries. The boat was bolted together and craned into the water. The crew then sailed up the Parrett to a compound near Westonzoyland Pumping Station, and worked many long and carefully-targeted hours during the first week of December.

Big tides and heavy rain meant that water levels in the Parrett were high, and conditions for water injection dredging were excellent. As powerful jets of water dislodged silt from the bed of the Parrett, big tides carried it away.

There were larger amounts of silt to shift than normal, because last year's dry summer meant that flows *down* the Parrett were lower than usual, which in turn allowed more silt to be carried *up* with the tide. In total, 37,500m<sup>3</sup> was removed in just a few days, from Burrowbridge down past Northmoor Pumping Station. That is 16,000 cubic metres more than got shifted over four months in the winter of 2015-16 using conventional methods. (In 2015-16, there were six excavators working from the banks, plus an excavator working for four weeks on a floating pontoon with a tug boat and hopper barges).

Maintenance dredging on the Parrett is delivered for Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA) by the Parrett Internal Drainage Board (IDB). The IDB acts under a Public Sector Co-operation Agreement with the Environment Agency, and works closely with the Environment Agency and Natural England on making sure that activities comply with a large number of legal requirements.

The River Parrett is the first place in the UK where water injection dredging techniques have been used on a tidal river in combination with a long-term, sophisticated silt monitoring programme.

Through partnership working and ongoing monitoring, the SRA is discovering ways of making maintenance dredging much cheaper, much quicker, and much less disruptive for local residents, farmers, nearby road users and the environment. It is a considerable success.

**Background:** In 2014, after devastating floods, the Environment Agency spent £6million on pioneer-dredging 8km (5 miles) of the Parrett and Tone. In 2015, the SRA funded a further pioneer dredge of 750 metres of the Parrett downstream of Northmoor Pumping Station. Pioneer dredging is the name given to the dredging of areas where large amounts of silt have accumulated over several years and banks need to be re-profiled.

The pioneer dredges in 2014 and 2015 removed 248,500m<sup>3</sup> of silt. People value this achievement and want to see it preserved.

The SRA has therefore funded maintenance dredging since 2015, in places along the Parrett where it has been needed. Works in the winter of 2015-16 used conventional techniques, then 2016, 2017 and 2018 used water injection dredging. If maintenance dredging was not done, silt would re-accumulate, flood risks would increase, and expensive pioneer dredging would eventually have to be done again.

### **Silt monitoring**

Silt monitoring is carried out every spring and autumn along the Parrett and Tone to inform the SRA's maintenance dredging programme. Works include single beam and multi-beam 'bathymetric' (underwater) surveys of the channel bed, and laser scanning of the banks, to measure any changes.

Some very advanced technology is being developed and installed. For example, fixed location sensors have been fitted at New Bridge on the River Tone and at Oath Lock and Somerset Bridge on the River Parrett. This flux monitoring equipment can measure silt movement in rivers in near real-time.

The SRA's short-term aim is to identify places where silt builds up – how silt builds up – and what type of silt it is – so that maintenance work can be accurately targeted and dredging activities optimised.

The SRA's longer-term ambition is to get a better understanding than anybody has ever had before of how the tidal River Parrett-River Tone system really works. Such knowledge is extremely valuable.

## **2 Pioneer dredging: Oath to Burrowbridge**

In July 2017 the Board of the SRA approved dredging the River Parrett between Oath and Burrowbridge, as soon as a legally compliant and affordable scheme could be found. Planning began in late 2017 and continued throughout 2018-19.

The scheme is being led for Somerset Rivers Authority (SRA) by the Parrett Internal Drainage Board (IDB), working closely with the Environment Agency and Natural England. The SRA is using Growth Deal funding from the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership.

This dredge is particularly important because it would supplement other dredges of the Parrett and Tone since 2014. It would tie in with other projects, such as enhancing the River Sowy (a.k.a. the Parrett Flood Relief Channel) and King's Sedgemoor Drain. It would help the SRA to reduce flood risks across a large part of the Somerset Levels and Moors that were badly affected in winter 2013-14 and summer 2012, particularly Aller Moor, King's Sedgemoor, Moorlinch, Muchelney, Huish Level, Wet Moor, King's Moor, and Witcombe Bottom. In total, it could potentially reduce flooding to around 65km<sup>2</sup> and benefit around 200 homes.

Design, bathymetric and topographic surveys, numerical modelling and the production of environmental surveys and reports have all been undertaken. Design cross-sections have been produced to sensibly maximise the additional flow achievable in the river within physical, environmental and budgetary constraints.

Modelling has shown that works should be focused on a 2.2km (1.4mile) stretch between Beazley's Spillway at Stathe and the confluence with the River Tone at Burrowbridge where greatest hydraulic impact can be achieved. It is proposed to remove 22,000m<sup>3</sup> of sediment using conventional methods with long-reach excavators on banks. Sediment will be used to widen banks and strengthen the Southlake reservoir dam wall.

In some areas, two-stage channels with marginal berms and areas of shallow water will be created. These improvements could benefit water voles, otters, fish, birds and invertebrates. Special attention has been paid to the need to protect hairy click beetles.

Subject to the results of statutory consultations, the SRA hopes to carry out legally-compliant works in autumn 2019.

## **3 River Sowy-King's Sedgemoor Drain enhancements**

The River Sowy was originally known as the Parrett Flood Relief Channel. It is a man-made river conceived after floods deluged 50,000 acres of Somerset in October 1960. After long debates about cost and size, the Sowy was dug out between 1969 and 1972.

The Sowy is used by the Environment Agency to take excess water away from the River Parrett near Aller. Water flows down via Beer Wall to King's Sedgemoor Drain (KSD) near Greylake, then re-joins the Parrett at Dunball.

Providing more capacity in the Sowy-KSD system, so that it can be used more effectively, is a key aim of Somerset's 20 Year Flood Action Plan, which is overseen by Somerset Rivers Authority.

Sowy-KSD works in recent years have included the creation of new river channels under the A372 at Beer Wall, the refurbishment of a water level control structure near Chedzoy and the removal of obstructive masonry from under Dunball Old Bridge, which carries A38 traffic southbound. All these works are part of a programme to reduce flood risks across 150 square miles.

### **Activities during 2018-19**

In autumn 2018, the SRA funded the dredging of two sites along King's Sedgemoor Drain, at Parchey Bridge near Chedzoy and at Dunball railway bridge, to give these structures back the capacity to deal with flows they had nearly 50 years ago. Silt and overhanging vegetation were removed at Parchey Bridge. A floating excavator and barge were used to move silt and a digger spread it over land nearby. At Dunball more material than expected was removed, including a load of builders' rubble and assorted debris from the KSD. The work will enable more water to pass through the two bridges as quickly and smoothly as possible, and it will reduce the risk of blockages caused by flood debris clogging up their arches.

Both jobs were done for Somerset Rivers Authority by the Environment Agency, using contractors GBV (Galliford Try and Black & Veatch) and dredging specialists Land & Water. Funding came from Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership (HotSWLEP) Growth Deal money.

More generally, progress has been made on further improvements planned for Dunball and on designs for increasing the capacity of key parts of the Sowy and KSD through work in these rivers' channels and on their banks. Several partners have been working together on a mitigation plan to ensure that proposed activities will be legally compliant. Options include replacing or refurbishing control structures at the Moorlinch and West Moor Raised Water Level Areas and Egypt's Clyse.

## **4 Strategic Approach to Mitigation**

Work on this project began in November 2017 and is continuing. Its three main aims are to:

- reduce costs and risks

- enable flood risk management schemes in the county to go ahead
- secure a wide range of environmental benefits

The project is being led for the SRA by Natural England, which has successfully been involved with more than 40 other similar approaches to mitigation across the country.

Mitigation means works that must be done – by law – to offset any unavoidably negative effects of projects. In Somerset’s case, there is an extra factor. One of the objectives of Somerset’s 20 Year Flood Action Plan is to “make the most” of the county’s special characteristics: its biodiversity, its environment, its cultural heritage. There are many features of international importance. So it is doubly vital to seek the best possible ways of reducing flood risks and protecting the environment. And it is best, wherever possible, to streamline ways of doing this.

Natural England has therefore been assessing detailed design and modelling data showing the impacts of the latest proposals for dredging and Sowey-KSD improvements. The project team is aiming to develop an approach which will provide certainty about the implementation of whatever water level management measures will be required as mitigation for flood risk reduction schemes that could harm legally-protected wetlands. Mitigation is likely to require changes to Water Level Management protocols and agreement from partners and landowners to deliver appropriate ‘shallow splash’ conditions in the winter months. (‘Shallow splash’ describes wet grassland that attracts and supports wild creatures such as waders).

Key partners and stakeholders are Natural England, the Environment Agency, Somerset County Council, Sedgemoor District Council, Somerset Drainage Boards Consortium, National Farmers Union, Country Land and Business Association (CLA), Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group South West, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and Somerset Wildlife Trust.

A detailed report setting out mitigation options and approximate costs is being developed with partners. It will be presented at a future SRA board meeting.

## 5 River Brue catchment

A lot of water in the catchment of the River Brue comes down to **North Drain Pumping Station (PS)**. So it is important for a wide area that the station works as effectively as possible. Pumping water from the North Drain into the Brue, as and when required, helps to avoid flooding on 9,700 acres of land.

In 2018, the Environment Agency used SRA funding and contractors AMCO to remove North Drain Pumping Station’s 50-year-old leaking and collapsing concrete roof. It’s been replaced with a lightweight modern roof. The walls have been re-pointed, cracks have been



stitched together using steel rods and crumbling bricks have been replaced. The work took 14 weeks.

Elsewhere in the Brue catchment, Somerset Drainage Boards Consortium have been working on SRA-funded plans for bank repairs along **Decoy Rhyne**. Surveys have been done and preliminary designs drawn up, in preparation for works going out to tender.

Repairs along Decoy Rhyne are needed for two main reasons. Firstly, in times of high flow, water can overtop or percolate through the banks. This causes land to flood and then, potentially, roads and properties. Dispersing this water generally requires pumping via North Drain Pumping Station. The second reason is that banks need to be stabilised to allow future maintenance and de-silting activities to be carried out.

Somerset Drainage Boards Consortium have also let a contract on behalf of the SRA to consultants Edenvale Young Associates. They have begun investigating ways of reducing flood risks from the River Brue and Southwood Brook to a stretch of road between Keinton Mandeville and Baltonsborough, and properties in **Tootle Bridge** and **Catsham**.

Both of these hamlets have a history of flooding, particularly Catsham. For example, there are two homes in Catsham that face a 50% chance of flooding every year from Southwood Brook and the Brue. The most vulnerable property in Tootle Bridge has a 10% chance of flooding every year from the Brue. The Environment Agency has records of homes flooding in this area more than 10 times since 1999. A sewage pumping station is also at high risk.

A strategy for the whole Brue catchment is being developed by Emilie Graille of Somerset Catchment Partnership. In March 2019, Ms Graille ran a Water Quantity and Climate Change workshop at the IDBs' offices in Highbridge with members of the SRA's Technical Group. This covered numerous topics including Water and flood risk management, Land management and sustainable agriculture, Waste water management, Ecosystems and connected habitats and Working with stakeholders.

The SRA has been re-formulating its plans for the Brue. Following a series of workshops and meetings with partners, money that was originally allocated to dredging the Brue is going to be split three ways.

**1** A significant percentage is still earmarked for de-silting works on the Brue between Westhay and North Drain Pumping Station. Carefully optimising the river's capacity will help to reduce the frequency, depth and extent of flooding.

It will also help with the implementation of existing Water Level Management Plans in the Brue's catchment, and support favourable conditions for wildlife on several legally-protected sites (Sites of Special Scientific Interest, Special Protection Areas, Ramsar Wetland of International Importance).

**2** An SRA contribution will enable a major £1.5 million flood alleviation scheme to go ahead in Highbridge. Led by Wessex Water, the scheme will protect 21 homes in Field Way. The SRA will use Growth Deal funding from the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership for this work.

**3** Detailed plans have been drawn up for a second phase of repairs and improvements at North Drain Pumping Station. As with the first phase, this work will be led for the SRA by the Environment Agency. It will include repairing the station's gravity sluice, which has significant cracks in its wingwalls. Were the structure to fail, and control flaps become inoperable, a wide area of Tealham and Tatham Moors could be inundated. Forced reliance on pumping alone would be expensive and significantly increase the carbon footprint of the pumping station. Upstream reaches of the Brue could also potentially run dry, causing extensive environmental harm.

## **6 Bridgwater Tidal Barrier**

Nothing like this barrier has been attempted in Somerset before: it is a big, complicated, challenging project. It will reduce tidal flood risks to 11,300 homes and 1,500 businesses. Its current estimated cost is £100 million but its benefits are valued at £1,331 million.

Work on the Bridgwater Tidal Barrier is being led by the Environment Agency and Sedgemoor District Council. Somerset Rivers Authority is helping with the funding of the early stages of this project, using Growth Deal money from the Heart of the SW Local Enterprise Partnership. All partners have been learning as many lessons as possible from other towns with new barrier developments, like Ipswich and Boston. Forecasts of Flood Defence Grant in Aid and external funding show the scheme is affordable.

Bridgwater Tidal Barrier will be located between Express Park and Chilton Trinity village. It will have two vertical lift gates and is expected to be operational in 2024, subject to funding and statutory approvals. The scheme includes improvements to existing downstream primary flood defences along the River Parrett together with new secondary defences in the flood plain. The barrier and downstream defences are being designed to protect Bridgwater and nearby communities for the next 100 years, against tides that have a 0.5% chance of occurring in any year.

### **Activities during 2018-19**

- Sedgemoor District Council bought Heron Court at Express Park, next to the intended site of the barrier, to allow for greater flexibility in the layout of the site, and to make construction easier.
- Outline design completed for the barrier and downstream defences.
- Ground investigations completed into the suitability of nearby 'borrow pit' locations to provide material for the downstream defences.

- Key landowners consulted over principles for permanent and temporary land access and over the extraction of local 'borrow pit' material for the building of downstream defences.
- Outline design for the barrier and downstream defences presented to key stakeholders and the public in December 2018, and businesses in February 2019.
- Public drop-in held at Chilton Trinity in February 2019 to present the scheme proposals and to seek further community views and feedback.
- Somerset County Council and Sedgemoor District Council submitted a bid for funding to the Housing Infrastructure Funding in March 2019.
- Secured Technical Assurance of the Outline Business Case for the Barrier and downstream defences from the Environment Agency's Large Project Review Group. This allows for the preparation and submission of the Transport Works Act Order (TWAO) needed for the scheme to be delivered. The TWAO is being prepared for submission to the Secretary of State at Defra at the end of 2019.

## 7 Taunton Strategic Flood Alleviation Improvements Scheme

**Background:** Taunton has flooded badly before and climate change threatens worse. In 1960, more than 360 homes, shops and business premises were flooded. In response, the River Tone through the town was re-modelled and defences were reinforced in the 1980s. Taunton did not flood in 2013-14 but it came very close to flooding in 2000 and 2012. If nothing is done to improve matters, climate change is predicted to put many properties at higher risk, because increased flows of flood water will overtop the town's defences. Lack of action will also make it harder for Taunton to approve planned developments creating around 4,350 new homes and nearly 10,000 new jobs.

The Taunton Strategic Flood Alleviation Improvements Scheme (TSFAIS) covers the Tone, its catchment and numerous tributaries. TSFAIS is led by the Environment Agency and Somerset West and Taunton Council. Somerset Rivers Authority has been part-funding the scheme's development for the last four years, using Growth Deal money from the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership early on.

Phase 1 of TSFAIS studies highlighted the need for a combination of two main options. Firstly, improved flood defence walls in the town. Secondly, an area for storing up to 1.8million cubic metres of water at Bradford on Tone, to provide extra protective capacity for the next 100 years.

### Activities during 2018-19

In August 2018, the SRA Board was told that work completed on Phase 2 of TSFAIS had included surveys, ground investigations, initial engagement with landowners, computer modelling, initial environmental surveys and concept designs. The Board was also told that the estimated cost of the two main options would be around £50million. A new flood storage

area and dam would also require an on-going commitment to maintenance. Taunton Deane Borough Council had put aside £6million of its own money for TSFAIS but all parties accepted that the total sum required was unlikely to be found in the short term.

A revised Project Delivery Plan has therefore been agreed. This Plan will focus on several smaller options for improvements identified during Phase 2 of TSFAIS studies. The aim is to give Taunton a useful increase in its capacity to manage flooding, pending the longer-term delivery of the two main TSFAIS options. The following smaller useful options are therefore being considered:

- 1 Vivary Park, Sherford Stream Improvements
- 2 Raising bridges on Mill Stream by Castle Street
- 3 Mill Stream flow diversions by French Weir
- 4 Optimisation of Long Run meadow storage, upstream of French Weir
- 5 Conveyance improvements on Galmington Stream (particularly consideration of culverts) near Parkfield Drive
- 6 Bathpool options:
  - a) Closing Canal Route at Firepool
  - b) Railway Culverts between Obridge and Bathpool
  - c) Flood Relief Channel at Bathpool parallel to Hyde Lane area
  - d) Over pumping at Old River Tone Outfall by Bathpool Bridge
  - e) Old River Tone Flap Valve Bund by Bathpool Bridge

Work is also continuing on a wider Strategic Plan, to address long-term issues such as funding.

The SRA is part-funding TSFAIS again in 2019-20. A key target for this coming year is to prepare a planning application for smaller options that will help to protect Taunton from flooding, and also feed into Taunton Garden Town ambitions for a better environment and better waterways.

A very important part of all this work is to produce solutions for managing any impacts upon other areas, particularly places downstream of Taunton.

## **Smaller projects**

### **Extra repairs, improvements and maintenance**

A scheme to repair the river banks in **Frome** town centre, and reduce flood risks to about 300 properties, was carried out during the summer. Works focused on strengthening the River Frome's revetment: the fortified layer designed to shield river banks from erosion, especially on bends hit hardest during storms and times of high flow. Stabilised banks mean the river can now safely carry more water away and so reduce flood risks. The

improvements were delivered for the SRA by the Environment Agency, using contractors Land & Water. Repairs were last done here more than 10 years ago. A popular sight with watching spectators was a big amphibious excavator. This was used for several jobs, such as shifting broken-off chunks of concrete from the river bed and putting rocks in place to protect the river banks. A tug boat and hopper were used to carry materials along the River Frome. Frome Canoe Club, Frome Town Council, Mendip District Council, Wessex Water and Network Rail were all involved in developing this project.

Just outside **Dunster**, repairs were made to the River Avill Flood Relief Channel. This runs from the edge of Dunster under the A39, and under a West Somerset Railway bridge, down to the sea. It consists of 300 eight-metre slabs of concrete. The joints between these were cleaned out and re-sealed. This strengthened the banks of the channel and so maintained its capacity to carry water away. This reduces the risk of flooding on the A39 and helps to protect local homes, businesses and land. The improvements were delivered for the SRA by the Environment Agency, using contractors Bridge Civil Engineering Ltd and specialist sub-contractors SW Concrete Repairs. Following the works, the channel showed its worth when 127 mm of rain fell at West Dunkery from 27 November to 4 December 2018 and another 134 mm fell between 15 December and Christmas Eve.

Also near **Dunster**, works carried forward from 2017-18 were finished off near the ancient monument of Gallox Bridge. The aim here was to prevent the erosion of a 35-metre stretch of bank, by putting in a 'rock roll' system, and thereby in turn protect an access track and the main River Avill flood bank. This project was joint-funded by the SRA and the Environment Agency, and delivered by the Environment Agency using contractors Land & Water. The works were successfully tested not long after their completion when 20mm of rain fell on West Dunkery between 1.15pm and 2.15pm on 31 May, 2018.

Both Dunster schemes complement earlier SRA-funded moves, such as buying equipment and a store for a new Dunster Flood Group and de-silting work at Ford Bridge upstream on the River Avill near Timberscombe.

Sedgemoor District Council used SRA funding for extra works to make local flood defence schemes and infrastructure in the **Sedgemoor** area more effective. A key aim is to deal with issues before they become problems. There were five activities:

- Clearance of an overgrown, congested ditch at Blackford near Wedmore, to help keep the local flood relief scheme working well
- CCTV survey and inspection of surface water system in Bridgwater. The system was found to drain nowhere. Those responsible are now being pressed to complete the drainage works required.
- Structural inspection and assessment of sluice structure at Bays Pond in Cheddar. Proactive maintenance works identified and scheduled for 2019-20.

- CCTV survey and inspection of flood relief scheme in North Petherton. Culvert-checking found no preventative maintenance works required now.
- Structural inspection of damaged culvert in North Petherton. Minor repair works required because of tree growth.

On **West Sedgemoor** and **Aller Moor**, SRA funding enabled the Parrett IDB to carry out extra maintenance of viewed rhynes. Work on West Sedgemoor covered 20.171 kilometres (12.5 miles), on Aller Moor 9.658 km (6 miles).

'Viewed rhynes' are a big network of the more important ditches, that the IDB keeps an eye on and usually maintains every two years. Extra SRA funding has allowed work to be done every single year. This additional work ensures that water is carried away more effectively from flooded and flood-prone areas to outfalls into main rivers such as the Parrett, and to pumping stations. This helps to protect local homes, farms and businesses, and local roads, including 650 metres of the A378 at Wrantage. It reduces the likelihood of summer flooding, which can be particularly damaging to farmers and wildlife, as it was in 2012. It also enables seasonal water level management in accordance with Water Level Management Plans. West Sedgemoor is a Site of Special Scientific Interest and a Special Protection Area and its character depends on people's ability to manage water levels.

## **Pumping stations**

At permanent pumping stations, SRA funding enables extra resilience, security and efficiency. It means the Environment Agency can better protect people, homes, businesses and land. The Environment Agency's own funding is restricted because of the limited number of properties at flood risk in the areas serviced by these pumping stations. But SRA funding reflects local priorities.

At **West Sedgemoor Pumping Station**, a plan has been drawn up to install a new trash screen that could be cleared automatically. This move would have three main benefits. First, it would protect pump equipment, by stopping material being pulled into the pumping mechanism. Second, preventing blockages would reduce local flood risks by stopping water backing up. Third, the Environment Agency would be saved the time, cost and trouble of manually removing weed and debris from the station's existing trash screen.

The SRA has paid for the costs of re-designing access arrangements to the site, and the tendering and implementation of those changes. Further stages now depend on Environment Agency funding. The project is currently expected to advance in 2020-21 or possibly beyond.

Roof repairs at **Long Load Pumping Station** have been completed, along with inlet channel works, partly using SRA funding originally allocated to roof repairs at **Saltmoor Pumping Station**. The move was made from Saltmoor because the Environment Agency found other funding and other means of doing what was required.

At **Westonzoyland**, it was hoped to fully electrify and automate the pumping station, and to replace its single diesel pump, which is powered by a 1990s' lorry engine. Automation would save the Environment Agency the time, cost and trouble of sending someone out to Westonzoyland to get the pump going and then later going back to turn it off again.

SRA funding paid for an options appraisal, outline design and costings to fully automate the site. Unfortunately, the costings indicated that full automation would cost more than £1million. This is not considered viable.

The Environment Agency has instead decided to develop what is called an emergency 'plug and play' pumping option. This could enable the mobilisation of large electrical pumps – with a total pumping capacity of up to 2m<sup>3</sup> per second – for operation under various flood scenarios. The Environment Agency intends to bid for more SRA funding so this can happen.

## **Finishing touches**

At **Cannington**'s major new flood defences, some landscaping work was done, which had been deferred from 2017-18 because of bad weather.

Areas of land were re-instated at **Long Load**, that had been used for access and haulage on a 2017 SRA project to build up low banks along the River Yeo. Better banks will help to reduce flooding and disruption caused by road closures. Thousands of cubic metres of silt were brought on to the Long Load site after being stock-piled during SRA-funded de-silting operations at Westport Canal and Witcombe Bottom.

## **Investigations**

Every year Somerset Rivers Authority aims to fund a small number of investigations. The SRA looks particularly for issues that lie beyond the scope of what other individual organisations can do on their own – or for issues that fall between the gaps of what other organisations are doing – or for some combination of the two. As a co-ordinating body, the SRA can get different organisations working together as partners in ways they would do not otherwise.

A good example can be found in **Moorland**. This village close to the River Parrett is best known for being at the epicentre of the massive floods of 2013-14. But in recent years, heavy downpours in Moorland have also highlighted more localised problems with surface water drainage. Intense rain – more than 50mm in 24hrs – has caused internal flooding in at least one property along Northmoor Green Lane, the flooding of a small number of gardens and driveways along Church Road and resulted in standing water on roads.

On behalf of the SRA, the Parrett IDB and Somerset County Council have been working together to identify the causes of various problems. Their investigations have turned out to be extremely interesting. They have shown how developments over the last century have affected the extensive network of inter-connected ditches that used to exist along property boundaries and along the sides of roads and fields. Similar stories could almost certainly be told about other villages on the Somerset Levels and Moors.

Moorland's old network of ditches has been impeded in numerous ways.

Watercourses often got culverted or filled-in when new homes and extensions were built, when parking spaces and driveways were created, and when gardens were enlarged.

Ditches that ran along both sides of roads have been extensively culverted and gully pots have been installed.

The network of small ditches that connects outfall pipes between properties to rhynes maintained by the IDB is in poor condition. Ditches are generally overgrown and clogged with silt; some have been filled-in or blocked with things like garden waste. A few ditches are difficult to access for maintenance due to the erection of sheds, garages and small agricultural buildings next to watercourses.

Very thorough analyses have been carried out for the SRA by the Parrett IDB and teams from Somerset County Council's Highways Department and Flood Risk Management section. Their work involved CCTV surveys, ditch de-silting, drain-jetting, vegetation clearance, consultation with residents and historical research.

These investigations led to proposals being drawn up for improvements. A bid was made to the SRA for funding as part of the SRA's Enhanced Programme of works for 2019-20, and this was formally approved by the SRA Board in March 2019. A key part of the plan is to engage with local people – especially those who own ditches – about their future responsibilities for maintenance.

Not far from Moorland, in **Chadmead**, detailed topographic surveys have been carried out along the potential routes for a ring bank to encircle and protect properties. The background to this work is quite complicated. Summarising severely, Chadmead flooded badly in 2013-14. Water reached the highest depth ever recorded locally. Following consultations with residents about a possible ring bank, the SRA Board ordered further investigations. These have been led for the SRA by the Parrett IDB, with the SRA's Community Resilience Officer helping to liaise with residents.

Research in 2018-19 has now established that a ring bank would need to be longer and higher than first anticipated, and include a section of concrete wall. The estimated cost would be at least £800,000 (not including land acquisition or compensation). Construction is expected to be difficult because of the need to work on soft peat. If material to build the



bank could not be dug out locally, 20-tonne lorries would have to make around 1,000 trips back and forth along mostly narrow lanes.

Research has also indicated that if flooding on the scale of 2013-14 were to re-occur, no homes would be flooded in the Chadmead area. This is because of the benefits of other moves taken locally, such as dredging, works at Beer Wall and the provision of additional pumping capacity.

In 2019-20, fresh discussions will be held with people around Chadmead before the matter returns to the SRA Board.

For other investigations, see the section about Tootle Bridge and Catsham in the Brue section and Beckington in W4.

## **Riparian responsibilities**

### **What are riparian responsibilities?**

After the 2013-14 floods, it was widely felt in Somerset that problems were made worse because too few riparian owners knew and carried out their responsibilities, particularly for maintenance.

One difficulty is the confusing word 'riparian'. It's a Victorian coinage from the Latin *riparius*, from 'ripa' meaning river bank.

A riparian owner is somebody who has any sort of watercourse (including a main river) on or under their property, or next to any boundary of their property - unless that watercourse is known to be owned by someone else. Ownership of watercourses along boundaries extends to the centre of those watercourses.

Anyone who owns a river and a river bank has responsibilities – chiefly, for maintenance. It is a common misconception to think that a body such as the Environment Agency has a legal responsibility to carry out activities such as dredging on rivers that it does not own. *It does not*. It has the power to do works on certain rivers for the public good; it does not have a duty to do so. *Owners are responsible*.

### **Activities during 2018-19**

Somerset Rivers Authority has been employing a part-time Riparian Responsibilities Officer (RRO) to help promote wider understanding of this situation. The RRO has met various organisations and groups, such as West Somerset Flood Board and West Somerset Flood Group. To further promote the cause, the RRO has also primed colleagues in Taunton Deane Borough Council (*as was*), the Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group SW, Somerset

Drainage Boards Consortium, West Somerset Council (*as was*), Yeovil Rivers Community Trust and Westcountry Rivers Trust.

The RRO is an additional resource for SRA partners to call upon to help fix problems and improve projects – to make things more joined up. So, for example, the RRO worked with Somerset County Council’s West Somerset Area Highways Office and a landowner in Stogursey to identify and resolve a significant highway flooding issue. The officer has also been part of the team involved in the major examination of problems in and around Beckington (see W4) and has worked with colleagues in the county council on watercourse maintenance issues.

Fly-tipping in watercourses on the Somerset Levels annoys many people. The RRO has been working with Internal Drainage Board colleagues on ways of identifying the most problematic areas and gathering evidence to help stop ugly and irresponsible dumping.

## **W2: Land Management including natural flood management (NFM)**

**2018-19 summary:** *24 capital grant schemes, 15 Triple C schemes, 23 highways referrals, 17 soil visits, UK’s first online auctions for natural flood management works and 14 actions; Hills to Levels won the UK River Prize.*

Somerset Rivers Authority funds the biggest range of natural flood management activities in the UK as part of its Land Management workstream. This award-winning workstream is admired nationally for its innovation, strong partnership working and increasing sophistication. It is led for the SRA by the Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group SW (FWAG SW). Activities generally go under the popular local branding of Hills to Levels. This makes it easier for partners to get involved and to contribute match-funding so that more can be achieved. It also helps that as Somerset has some famous hills and valleys and floodplains, the idea of trying to slow the flow of water from Hills to Levels can be simply understood.

There are three main strands to this SRA workstream. They are:

- 1** – capital grants offered to farmers and landowners for Natural Flood Management projects that slow the flow of water and reduce flooding risks across the county
- 2** – ‘highways referrals’ – that is, looking for answers to highway flooding problems in better management of land nearby
- 3** – soil husbandry to reduce surface run-off

In April 2018, Hills to Levels won the UK River Prize for 2018. The project was first selected as a finalist in the category ‘Catchment-scale project – Demonstrating a whole river

approach to restoration'. The UK River Prize celebrates people and organisations that improve rivers and catchments, and seek to create a healthy natural environment.

The SRA is one of several bodies that have funded Hills to Levels over the last three years, firstly using Growth Deal money from the Heart of the SW Local Enterprise Partnership and more recently, money from council tax.

In the past year the SRA has approved 54 grant applications for natural flood management schemes across Somerset and 131 natural flood management structures and direct land Management interventions in 55 different fields.

All this work aims to reduce the depth and duration of floods in Somerset; diminish local flash flooding and flood risks; and minimise sediment being washed from fields on to the banks of rivers. Benefits include less need for de-silting in lower catchments and less need for pumping to remove water on the Levels.

One trend in this workstream is the increasing density and sophistication of schemes in particular areas. This helps to make each different element more effective. For example, more natural flood management works have been completed in 2018-19 on the outskirts of Yeovil. Eight leaky woody dams have been created near Lufton College to slow the flow of water entering Wellhams Brook, and major pond improvement works have been carried out at Manor Farm, Lufton. Modelling – and anecdotal evidence from flood wardens – suggests that these works and other schemes near Yeovil are benefitting the Martock area.

Martock Parish Council's Chair wrote to say thank you for NFM work upstream of Martock, in places such as Lufton, Montacute, Odcombe and Bower Hinton. It has provided "a degree of control over peak flows... it will minimise the number of flooding events in the village. Since the introduction of Hills to Levels work, I am pleased to inform you that no further floods associated with the water draining from the Martock catchment have occurred in the Parish."

Another example: seven woody leaky dams were created in the Marcombe Valley, near Ashbrittle in the River Tone catchment. These dams complement a series of earlier natural flood management interventions along this tributary of the Tone, including 13 other leaky woody dams, new ponds and de-silting of lakes. Work on the lakes was done with a Ruston-Bucyrus dragline, bought and specially restored for this job by the landowner (an enthusiast for vintage machinery).

FWAG SW have installed gauges to help measure changes in flows around three of the newest dams in the Marcombe Valley, and the effectiveness of all these projects in reducing flood risks is being monitored by a PhD student from Bristol. Data collected will help to create computer models that can evaluate the effects of natural flood management at catchment-scale. This is potentially a very significant piece of research, because one of

the debates about the value of natural flood management in the past has been about the geographical spread of its impact.

## **Innovation: NFM online auctions**

The UK's first online auction for natural flood management works was held in summer 2018, in the Somerset catchments of the River Parrett and River Tone.

This went so well that in early 2019 a second online auction for natural flood management works was run across the whole of Somerset, excepting only the lowest-lying areas where such works would have less point.

The software used developed by the Environment Agency in partnership with FWAG SW, Natural England's Catchment Sensitive Farming initiative and the Sylva Foundation at Oxford University.

Somerset Rivers Authority provided the money for the grants that farmers and landowners bid for. In total, over the two auctions, this was more than £65,000.

Both auctions were reverse auctions. In conventional auction, bids go up until the highest one wins. In reverse auctions, the victors are those who submit lower bids.

In Somerset's online NFM auctions, farmers were given a choice of natural flood management measures to bid for. These included planting crops that stop soil being washed off fields during the winter, after maize has been harvested; planting hedges to slow the flow of water; and aerating soil to increase the amount of rain that can filter into the ground.

In the first auction, 63 bids were successful across 14 different farm holdings. Better maize management and hedge-planting were most popular, followed by grassland sub-soiling, soil bunds and leaky ponds, and leaky woody dams. All bids were assessed by FWAG SW to make sure they were feasible and cost-effective. FWAG SW advisers later inspected all works to make sure they were carried out to a good standard.

In the second auction, which was widened to include the catchments of the River Axe and River Brue, 147 bids were successful across 26 different farm holdings.

The system is still new, but the signs are that it has several strengths. It cuts out paperwork. It saves time and money. It draws on farmers' and landowners' unrivalled knowledge of their own land. Using maps inside the online auction system, participants can pick out bits of their land where they believe that NFM activities will produce the best flood prevention results for them and for local communities.

Farmers agreed that the system was easy to use – and got results.

Anthony Gothard, a Stoke St Gregory farmer who won grants in both auctions, said: “It only took me a few minutes to place my bid online and there wasn’t any paperwork. I’m really pleased with what I’ve been able to achieve with the grant money.”

Sam Passmore of Manor Farm, Otterhampton near Bridgwater, who successfully bid for a better maize management initiative in summer 2018, said: “Being encouraged to implement measures which will improve our soil health as well as limit the risk of environmental damage, when combined with a financial incentive, should be seen as a win-win situation for us.”

## **Successful auction bids from first auction**

Better maize management includes techniques such as drilling and cultivating fields with a winter cereal or ryegrass, after maize has been harvested. Water running off from compacted maize ground can contribute to localised flooding. Encouraging the infiltration of water through soil can minimise runoff problems. Establishing green cover also helps to intercept rainfall and protect the soil surface.

### **Parrett catchment**

In the River Parrett catchment, grants were given for maize management on a total of 159.3 hectares. Places were: **Bower Hinton Farm, near Martock**, Wellhams Brook; near **Walford**, seven fields between the A38 and the M5, Parrett catchment; **North Petherton, Haddon Farm**, Petherton Stream; **Cannington College, Rodway Farm**, River Parrett; **Fiddington, Peadon Farm**, Stogursey Brook and Fiddington Brook; **Otterhampton, Manor Farm**, Fiddington Brook. There were also successful bids from **Bower Hinton Farm** for two leaky woody dams and a 24-metre soil bund, from **Barrington, Hill Farm**, Westmoor Main Drain for 215 metres of hedge planting and 50.5 metres of hedge planting on bund, and Rodway Farm at Cannington for 21.9 hectares of grassland subsoiling.

### **Tone catchment**

In the River Tone catchment, grants were given for maize management on a total of 51.1 hectares. Places were: **Wellington, Bryants Farm**, Westford Stream (fields just south of Wellington and Chelston); **Trull, Canonsgrove Farm**, Sherford Stream; **Meare Green Farm, near Stoke St Gregory**, River Tone; **North Curry** (including fields at **Huntham and Knapp**), River Tone catchment.

There were also successful bids from **Greenham, Lower Cothay Farm**, Upper Tone for 46.9 hectares of grassland subsoiling between Cothay Manor, Kittisford and Wellisford, and

from **Wellington, Bryants Farm**, Westford Stream for 18.6 hectares of grassland subsoiling.

Also near Wellington, in the catchment of the Upper Tone, **Pinksmoor Farm** bid for 40 metres of hedge planting on a new bund on the outskirts of Holywell Lake. This planting – featured on BBC Points West – has filled a gap in the lower corner of a field. It will help to stop localised flooding. FWAG SW say this is a great example of hedge planting on a bund; they are “very pleased” with it.

## **Schemes begun or completed in 2018-19**

Note that there is usually a time-lag between grants for schemes being approved by the SRA and work being done at sites by contractors. So although the SRA approved 54 grant applications in 2018-19, this does not mean that people always sprang into action immediately afterwards. All sorts of factors can affect timings, such as contractors’ availability and the seasons. It would be daft to plant trees in July, for example.

### **Capital grant schemes**

**Barrington**, Hill Farm, Westmoor Main Drain, Parrett catchment. Two hundred trees have been planted on sloping land above Barrington as part of a multi-pronged SRA attack on flooding problems resulting from run-off down Bonning’s Lane. The trees will help to stabilise soil, reduce run-off and slow the flow of water. See also the entry for Barrington under ‘Successful auction bids...’ (*above*). These schemes stem from – and are supported by – Barrington Parish Council.

**Binegar Bottom**, Mells River source catchment. A leaky pond, scrape and bund have been created on the south side of Binegar Bottom, to store rapid run-off and reduce peak flood flows. Lower Binegar and Gurney Slade are in a high flood risk zone 3. The last floods were in 2013 following heavy rain on a saturated catchment. This scheme was led by Binegar Parish Council, following advice from FWAG SW.

**Bruton**, River Brue. Brue Crew volunteers have been improving the Brue near Church Bridge in Bruton town centre, following detailed discussions with Somerset Wildlife Trust, The Wild Trout Trust and the Environment Agency. The weir has been v-notched to help draw flow, particularly during the summer. Other moves are planned in 2019-20.

**Compton Durville**: Lambrook Brook, Parrett catchment – (x2). Two grants were given for a package of works including a bund with a leaky outlet, inlet and outlet swales, de-silting of ditches, an upgraded trash screen plus de-silting, and culvert-jetting. Adaptations were also made to a large new pond to enable 2,300m<sup>3</sup> of floodwater storage, with a leaky outlet to control the water level. These works have reduced flood risks at Picken Bridge, Shapway and downstream in Mid Lambrook, East Lambrook and beyond.

**Cothelstone**, tributary of Back Stream, River Tone catchment. Around 4,950m<sup>2</sup> of a very large pond upstream of Bishop's Lydeard has been de-silted to allow for the storage of an additional 3700m<sup>3</sup> of water. In some areas, the silt was two metres deep. Phase 1 of a bigger scheme; Phase 2 involved SRA and Triple C funding. See Triple C section.

**Croford**, tributary of Hillfarance Brook, Tone catchment – (x2). A leaky pond has been created on Knights Farm land near Cotcombe Wood to divert peak flows from the Hillfarance Brook tributary and then slowly release stored water back into it. The pond was also fenced to avoid its banks being churned up by livestock.

**Crowcombe**: Leigh Mill Bridge, Lee Lane, Doniford Stream – (x2). A second phase of works following a 2017-18 scheme. The new works included fine-tuning dams, creating an additional brash dam, installing a flow spreader and planting 350 trees to help 1) increase the surface roughness of the floodplain and slow the flow, 2) take up water to reduce peak flow, and 3) stabilise the soil to reduce erosion which would otherwise cause sedimentation downstream.

**Dommett – Folly Farmyard (Buckland St Mary)**: River Ding, Parrett catchment. A new technique of hingeing living trees into a watercourse is being trialled here as part of a series of NFM works designed with an enthusiastic farmer. Hingeing involves adapting hedge-laying techniques to create living, green wood dams with saplings of willow and hazel. Other works included improving an existing leaky pond outlet, adding another leaky pond to make a cascade and increase storage capacity, and excavating around an old lime kiln to fine-tune flow paths.

**Fitzhead parish – Goulds Farm between Ford and Hoccombe**: Tributary of Halse Water, Tone catchment. A drainage pipe and leaky dam have been installed to improve the connectivity between roadside and boundary ditches and a pond previously created with SRA funding. The pond had not been filling up as often as desired – but it is now. It takes excess water from the road and reduces overtopping of ditches and overland run-off.

**Holnicote estate**, Horner Water catchment and River Aller catchment – (x2). Natural flood management works were completed at Hurdledown, between Exford and Porlock, and at Lower Selworthy Farm. Both schemes were part of the National Trust's major Riverlands initiative on its 12,000-acre Holnicote estate. At Hurdledown, 280 metres of hedgerow were planted with 1000 young beech trees to help slow the flow of rainfall down the Horner valley. At Lower Selworthy, works focused on a main location for River Aller catchment run-off, namely slopes running down towards the A39. Improvements included the creation of riparian corridor and habitat through the fencing-off of key areas and the creation of swales and scrapes. Both initiatives were funded by the SRA and the EU's Interreg 2 Seas programme as part of Somerset's new Co-Adapt programme. Co-Adapt is aiming to increase local resilience to the water-related effects of climate change: flooding and droughts. More Holnicote works are planned for 2019-20.

**Luxborough**, Monkham Farm, Upper Washford River. Three cross drains and two silt traps have been installed at Monkham Farm to catch and divert run-off water away from the road and village.

**Stoney Stoke**, Stoke Farm, tributary of River Pitt and Upper Brue – (x2). Two thousand trees have been planted to create 1.25 hectares of new woodland strip either side of a watercourse, with 1100 metres of fence re-positioned to allow for this. The aim is to absorb run-off from adjacent slopes and to slow down the movement of water. There are also plans to install six woody dams.

**Thorne St Margaret**, Rewe Farm, Upper Tone, Tone catchment. The SRA contributed 40% towards the cost of trees planted in a field above a steep bank that had previously collapsed onto the road. The trees will help to prevent future landslides by binding soil with their roots and drawing up water. The Woodland Trust gave the other 60%. See the Triple C section for more about Rewe Farm.

**West Bagborough**, Stout Lane, Back Stream, Tone catchment. A scheme to re-direct heavy flows of water from Stout Lane into Fuzzy Down field by digging out a grip and ditch and building a bund. This scheme will help to reduce the amount of water reaching West Bagborough. It was delivered for the SRA by Somerset County Council's Rights of Way section as part of a series of SRA-funded works in this part of the Quantocks.

**Yeovil** (Brympton parish), Lufton, Wellhams Brook, Parrett catchment – (x3). More natural flood management works have been completed on the outskirts of Yeovil. Eight leaky woody dams have been created near Lufton College to slow the flow of water entering Wellhams Brook, and major pond improvement works have been carried out at Manor Farm, Lufton. Hydraulic modelling has been done for the Wellhams Brook catchment to investigate the effects that natural flood structures may have. The study suggests that with all the structures proposed and installed, including flood water storage ponds and leaky dams, flood peaks may be reduced by just over a quarter (25.6%) during floods that have a 20% chance of happening every year.

**Waterrow**, Hurstone Farm, Upper Tone – (x2). Two grants were given for de-silting an existing pond and adapting its outlet to divert overflow into a new leaky pond, constructing four brash dams, de-silting a historic mill leat, filling floodplain gullies and installing coir matting to prevent loss of soil into the river, and taking excess spoil off the floodplain. Further works are planned.

## **Triple C match-funded schemes**

The EU's Interreg 2 Seas part-funds Hills to Levels through the Triple C initiative. The three Cs stand for Climate resilient, Community-based, and Catchment planning and management. The SRA match-funds Triple C schemes in Somerset. A short film



showcasing Hills to Levels was entered for the Interreg 2 Seas Video Awards in March 2019. (It won in April 2019).

**Aisholt Common:** The Quantock Hills AONB Service led work at three sites to slow the flow of run-off, reduce soil erosion, and trap sediment. Features included two cascades of woody dams, which used timber and brash from locally pruned-out silver birch and beech trees, and the installation of coir matting. The scheme complements earlier SRA-funded activities on the Quantocks, and will help to reduce flood risks lower down at West Bagborough. See also the entry for West Bagborough in the main section on 2018-19 NFM schemes.

**Cothelstone:** A sluice structure has been installed to enable a large freshly-desilted pond to operate as a leaky pond that can store more water and then release it slowly. The new structure consists of weir boards, a pipe with a sluice gate, stone blockwork to protect the outlet banks and stone downstream to prevent scouring. It replaced a broken penstock. This is Phase 2 of a bigger scheme. Phase 1 was described in the main section on 2018-19 NFM schemes. Phase 3 will involve restoring historic silt traps upstream.

**Dommett - Folly Farmyard:** A clay-lined pond has been created in the corner of a boggy field, to fill during periods of high flows from an adjacent ditch, with a pipe outlet to the ditch. Spoil was used to raise the level of a wet gateway and the feeder ditch to the pond was cleaned out.

**Fitzhead – Knights Farm:** A scheme was designed for an infiltration ditch, extended hedgebank and hedge-planting to help control run-off. Works are due to be carried in 2019.

**Marcombe Valley:** Seven leaky woody dams have been created and monitoring equipment installed in the Marcombe Valley, near Ashbrittle in the River Tone catchment. (More information is given on p.17 in the introduction to this W2 section).

**Montacute:** A leaky woody dam cascade has been created in a small stream running through Mill Copse in the grounds of the National Trust's Montacute House near Yeovil. This will help to slow the flow at the top of the Wellhams Brook catchment, which feeds down past Martock into the River Parrett, and improve water quality by filtering out sediments.

**Odcombe – (x2):** A pond was enlarged and a penstock installed to create more storage for flood water and provide more control over water levels. Martock's flood wardens have been enthusiastic supporters of this scheme.

**Shepton Montague, Higher Farm:** Eight woody dams have been created to help slow the flow down to Pitcombe.

**Stoke Trister, near Wincanton:** Four leaky woody dams have been built in a small channel at Culverwell, which is known for being quite flash-floody in winter and has caused localised road flooding downstream.

**Thorne St Margaret – Rewe Farm:** 0.4 hectares of trees were planted in a field above a steep bank that had previously collapsed onto the road. The trees will help to prevent future landslides by binding soil with their roots and drawing up water. Triple C contributed 60% towards the labour costs of planting the trees and erecting fencing, plus the fencing materials. The SRA match-funded 40%. See also the entry for Thorne St Margaret in the main section on 2018-19 schemes.

**Tintinhull, Perrins Hill Farm:** Four leaky woody dams have been created along a tributary of Wellhams Brook, to slow down and store winter rainfall upstream of Martock in the River Parrett catchment.

**Wiveliscombe:** Fencing has been re-positioned along the top of part of Pyncombe Lane where a steep bank has previously collapsed and blocked the road. The SRA previously funded bank stabilisation. This extra work will help to further reduce the risk of landslides in wet weather.

**Wincanton, Moorhayes Farm:** Ten leaky dams have been created at two sites to trap woody debris and slow the flow of water.

**Wincanton, Suddon Grange Farm:** Six leaky dams (four woody, two brushwood) have been installed along a small brook to help slow the flow of water.

## Highways referrals in 2018-19

Roads range from the M5 down to rural single-track lanes. Investigations look at where water comes from, where it goes, and how land management initiatives could make a difference.

### Mendip

**Critchill, Frome:** Reports of field run-off from maize stubble on to the highway prompted a soil inspection visit in November 2018. Quotes for a sediment pond to prevent water reaching the road are awaited.

**Dinder and Masbury, A371:** Reports of surface water on private land discharging on to the highway. FWAG SW, the estate landlord and tenants met in February 2019 to discuss natural flood management and maize management. The farmer at Masbury has created a leaky pond; talks at Dinder are ongoing.

**Vobster Cross to Hatchett Hill:** Reports of surface water from private land discharging on to the highway. Discussions have been held with the farmer and the Mendip division of Somerset County Council's Highways Department about possible solutions, including enhanced flood water storage in the field and clearing the culvert beneath the road, but no definitive answers have yet been found.

## **Sedgemoor**

**Ashton Windmill, Chapel Allerton:** Reports of run-off from adjacent field causing highway flooding, sometimes for long periods during wet weather. Landowners to be contacted to discuss possible hedge-laying and compacted grass ley solutions.

**North Petherton:** Landowner advised about run-off from field adjoining Dancing Hill and the High Street in North Petherton. Action recommended: cultivating strips across the field to help to slow the flow in big rainfall events.

**Wedmore, Plud Street:** The farmer is to re-establish a hedge bank and hedge to solve the problem of run-off from a maize field. Chisel ploughing has also been done.

## **South Somerset**

**Barrington, Bonning's Lane:** Following reports of run-off from fields accumulating in Bonnings Lane, FWAG SW provided advice to the landowner on soil management, hedgerow and woodland planting, and installing a grass buffer strip. Hedge planting was successfully bid for in the first SRA natural flood management auction, and planted in Winter 2018. Coir rolls have also been provided to the landowner to install before each winter, in association with the parish-funded flood warden.

**Bruton:** Reports of surface water run-off on to Dropping Farm Lane creating a hazard, particularly during the winter. However, the farm manager was not aware of any issue and as the field is very flat it was difficult to see how any problem might arise.

**Chard, Brutton Way:** Reports of accelerated run-off from field access trackway contributing to localised flooding issues on amenity land managed by South Somerset District Council and properties adjoining Brutton Way. FWAG SW visited to see if cross-drains on the track would help but this idea was shelved as there was no sensible place to send water.

**Chard, Laurel Gardens / Crimchard area:** Investigations were carried out into complicated problems with surface water run-off and highway drainage. Talks involved FWAG SW advisers, Somerset County Council's Highways Department, landowners and residents. It was concluded that there were very limited opportunities for natural flood management works. Instead, Somerset Council has decided to move 47 gullies from its 4-year cleansing cycle to its annual programme. On this annual programme, the gullies will

also qualify for an extra SRA-funded cycle, so in 2019-20 they will be emptied twice. The county council has also made a successful bid to the SRA for three new silt-traps in the Crimchard area. These will help to protect around 60 properties.

**Somerton, Wasps Nest Farm Lane:** Reports of run-off surging onto the highway from above fields and collecting on Wasps Nest Farm Lane. SCC's Highways Dept wrote to landowners to urge them to maintain their ditches, but run-off still needed to be contained in fields or captured and dispersed in a controlled way. The SRA agreed to fund a culvert that will enable the water to flow within a ditch, as opposed to overtopping and travelling down the road where it floods the lane. The landowner has agreed to carry out ditch work, including digging grips to allow water to drain from the lane. An application for funding was submitted and approved in July 2018; construction is pending.

**M5 southbound near Shoreditch:** Frequent flooding on the M5 southbound carriageway near Shoreditch has caused several accidents. FWAG SW and Highways England visited the site with the landowner. Soil was inspected and areas were identified for natural flood management. It was agreed that FWAG SW should apply to the SRA for a grant to carry out ditch and field works on flow pathways, and contact landowners upstream. A programme of drainage maintenance was also agreed with Highways England.

**Peasmarsh, near Ilminster:** Reports of run-off from a field next to the A358 causing flooding to properties. The farmer agreed to install a cross drain in the gateway to divert run-off to an adjoining ditch.

**Long Sutton, Langport:** A member of the public told SCC Highways that run-off from fields adjoining Burnt House Lane and Langport Road was leaving soil and large stones on the road. The complainant feared that the state of the ditches could also lead to highway and property flooding. A visit found no signs of debris; a further inspection is planned to be sure.

**Wincanton, Riding Gate:** Reports of mud and silt running off land used for maize growing, blocking the drains and causing a potential skid risk. The farmer broke off from his pre-Christmas preparation of turkeys to put straw bales in the gateway to block silt. Unfortunately, the problem persisted. FWAG SW revisited, and the farmer is now planning to create a grassy field corner, change the field's management and put in a silt trap.

**Wincanton, West Hill:** Reports of run-off from maize fields contributing to localised highway flooding at West Hill. A FWAG SW visit found the fields' soil structure was in good condition. FWAG's recommendation was to make an application for Countryside Stewardship to install a 6m grass buffer strip to help slow the flow of field run-off and reduce the amount reaching the highway. This was successful.

**Lopen, Lopen Lane:** Reports of run-off from a field causing soil on this narrow road to block drains. Part of the problem is that the lane is marked as an access route to Over Stratton on sat nav and this increases the volume of traffic, which is undercutting roadside banks,

causing destabilisation and adding to the volume of sediment deposited. Visits made in summer 2018. Traffic management solutions being mooted, to reduce pressure and bank side erosion.

**Tatworth, A358:** FWAG SW and Somerset County Council (SCC) investigated a complicated situation involving highways run-off flowing across a field because of a damaged gateway drainage system and property flooding problems not helped by liquid digestate spreading. As the site was due to be developed by a major housing company, SCC agreed to check on flood control measures included in the planning application for the site.

## **Taunton Deane**

**Combe Florey (x2):** Advice given about land use and soil structure at two sites presenting flood risks to the A358.

**Kingston St Mary:** Discussions held with landowners about diverting water across fields to reduce problems of road flooding and deteriorating, causing dangers for cyclists.

**North Curry:** Reports of water running down a track onto Helland Hill, carrying mud, silt and stones into the highway drainage system. Landowner visited, and agreed to install some rolls of coir matting in a gateway to help fix the problem.

**Trull:** Discussions begun with farmer about water flowing onto road from farm fields and track.

**Wiveliscombe, Pyncombe Lane:** Landowners visited to discuss soil husbandry, grazing and farm traffic as part of a co-ordinated follow-up to SRA and Triple C funded schemes to reduce the risks of landslides and run-off.

## **Soil visits**

Investigating and encouraging better soil husbandry to reduce the run-off of surface water can sometimes lead on to the development of bigger natural flood management projects. For example, a visit to the Exmoor village of Winsford in late 2018 prompted the development of plans for works in summer 2019 that will include brash dams and woody dams in Winn Brook, watercourse fencing, gateway works and a soakaway ditch. Keeping soil in good health also brings obvious benefits to farmers. To avoid double-counting, the list below does not include visits already covered in the sections about 'Successful auction bids...' and 'Highways referrals'.

**Mendip:** Nunney (Sharpshaw Farm); **Sedgemoor:** Fiddington (Peadon Farm), Fordgate (Fordgate Farm), North Newton (Newcotts Farm), Otterhampton (Manor Farm), Spaxton

(Gothelney Farm), Thurloxtton (Keirles Farm), West Newton (West Newton Farm); **South Somerset:** Ashill (Southtown Farm), Curry Mallet (Stud Farm), South Petherton (Frogmary Green Farm); **Taunton Deane:** Bishops Lydeard (Portman Farm), Pinksmoor (Pinksmoor Farm), Wellington (Miscanthus Nurseries) - Subsoiling miscanthus trial, just north of A38 Wellington bypass; **West Somerset:** Brompton Regis (Lyncombe Farm), Winsford (Little Ash Farm), Wootton Courtenay (Brockwell Farm).

## W3: Urban Water Management

**2018-19 summary:** *A unique 747-page review of Somerset's Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) has been published, and a contract let for the production of Somerset-specific guidance for property developers to help them create high quality SuDS at new sites across the county. A SuDS inspections service has been funded; responsibility for rain garden facilities in Taunton handed over; progress made on plans for a storage pond in Yeovil; and a second phase of works completed at Wirral Park balance pond and pumping station in Glastonbury.*

In built-up areas, rain often falls on hard impervious surfaces such as roads, roofs and pavements so it runs off fast and cannot infiltrate into the ground. This can increase local flood risks. The SRA's Urban Water Management workstream lets partners focus on thorough, joined-up and distinctively local approaches to tackling flooding problems.

In 2018-19, this workstream's outstanding achievement was the publication of a massive review of Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) across Somerset. The scope of this **SuDS Review** is unmatched anywhere else in the UK. Locally, its findings are now being used to inform the production of Somerset-specific SuDS guidance for developers, funded by the SRA. Nationally, the review is providing an unprecedented level of hard evidence for ongoing debates about SuDs and stimulating widespread interest: see, for example, this blog by W3 leader Dan Martin on the industry-leading Susdrain website:

<https://www.susdrain.org/community/blog/somerset-suds-review/>

As part of the review, 20 recently-built sites were inspected for Somerset Rivers Authority by Somerset County Council, working closely with Wessex Water, local planning authorities, district council drainage engineers, the Environment Agency, Somerset Drainage Boards Consortium and contractors JBA. Sites were assessed to ascertain whether they were adequately designed, constructed as designed, have any deficiencies, and are being adequately maintained. They included big housing estates, retirement apartments, industrial units and offices, an arts centre, and a hotel and pub. Run-off was considered in detail.

Generally, in terms of being able to cope with basic flows of water, and allowing for climate change, over three-quarters of the sites surveyed were satisfactory or better.

However, 6% were rated poor or very poor. In these cases, little was known about who was responsible for maintenance or what the maintenance regime should be. Inspections at some developments still being built showed inadequate site management practices, allowing sediment and pollution to enter surface waters. Individual defects were also identified, such as poorly-constructed permeable paving, non-native vegetation, and road and car park levels being higher than the entrances to properties, raising the risk of water flowing into them.

Overall, the review showed that not enough is being done across Somerset to use SuDS to their full potential. SuDS are not just about managing the quantity of water, they offer wider benefits that enhance communities as a whole. They can play a key role in reducing pollution and improving water quality, make places much more attractive for people to live as well as creating habitats for wildlife.

The review found little evidence of consideration of water quality treatment in designs, although several sites did include features that would improve water quality. It also found little evidence of the deliberate provision of biodiversity and amenity benefits in drainage designs, and some sites had missed potential opportunities.

One example of good practice was Clarks' Houndwood development in Street. This considered SuDS at an early stage, and incorporated SuDS into the design brief and through the master planning stage. It used surface SuDS features to provide amenity and biodiversity benefits, including reed bed channels, tree pits and bio-retention planters in public and semi-public amenity areas.

The SRA and its partners want to encourage more high-quality design and better place-making across Somerset.

## **Activities in 2018-19**

An SRA-funded **SuDS Inspections** service has allowed local councils to check sites while they are being built. Learning lessons from the SuDS Review, team members have been fine-tuning checklists and reporting mechanisms.

Somerset County Council has let an SRA-funded contract for the production of **Somerset-specific guidance for property developers**, to help them create high quality, multi-benefit, integrated SuDS at new sites across the county. The guidance will incorporate specific requirements from all partners involved in the planning process and draw upon some of the challenges identified through the SuDS Review. The aim is to have detailed guidance completed by spring 2020 for adoption by Somerset's Local Planning Authorities.

Responsibility for the maintenance of new **rain garden** facilities at Middleway and Kilkenny Court in Taunton was formally handed over to Taunton Deane Borough Council (as was; now Somerset West and Taunton Council). The SRA and Wessex Water funded the

creation of several planters in 2017-18, to serve as small demonstrations of what could be achieved. Somerset County Council worked with Westcountry Rivers Trust on the planters, as part of the EU-backed **Somerset Sponge 2020** project. The aim of Sponge2020 is to encourage 'innovative participatory adaptation solutions to reduce the risks of and damage from urban flooding... at considerably lower costs'. The SRA has been part-funding the development of Somerset County Council's Sponge 2020 plans for car park retrofits in Taunton.

In a **Yeovil** scheme supervised by FWAG SW for the SRA, Yeovil Rivers Community Trust has designed a pond in the grounds of Preston Academy, along the Preston Brook. This will help to reduce flooding downstream. It will also benefit pupils' education and improve the area for wildlife. The school's governors have approved the pond, subject to various conditions. It will need, for example, to be constructed over school holidays.

Lastly in this workstream, a second phase of SRA-funded improvement work has been completed by Mendip District Council at **Wirral Park balance pond and pumping station in Glastonbury**. This was built in 1989 to help to protect more than 200 homes and four hectares of industrial estate from flooding. The SRA previously funded the replacement of life-expired one-way flap valves and gate valves, and the removal of two skips full of silt and debris from the inlet channel. Now Wirral Park's dated electrical control system has been updated to meet current regulations and to allow remote monitoring should the need arise.

## W4: Resilient Infrastructure

**2018-19 summary:** *Somerset Rivers Authority carried out an extensive programme of extra maintenance works to reduce flood risks to roads and nearby properties, including gully-emptying, drain jetting, edge of road clearing, de-silting of structures and culvert improvements. Drainage works have been carried out near Chelston and Stoke sub Hamdon; schemes designed for Monksilver, and Stogursey and Shurton; studies advanced at Beckington and Bradford on Tone.*

Although its name emphasises rivers, Somerset Rivers Authority deals with highways as well as waterways. This is because the SRA oversees Somerset's 20 Year Flood Action Plan, which was drawn up during the floods of 2013-14. Those floods closed 81 roads, often for long periods. Countless people suffered difficulties. Businesses lost time and money: 86% of Somerset businesses were badly hit – the estimated cost to the local economy was up to £15 million. So two of the Flood Action Plan's six main objectives relate directly to making Somerset's infrastructure more resilient: they are to 'Maintain access for communities and business' and to 'Ensure strategic road and rail connectivity, both within Somerset and through the county to the South West peninsula'.

A programme of additional maintenance therefore got the largest share of spending in this workstream in 2018-19. Hundreds of places susceptible to very local flooding benefitted.



De-silting of structures, gully-emptying, drain jetting and targeted edge of road clearing were all delivered countywide for the SRA by Somerset County Council. In areas covered by Internal Drainage Boards, an ongoing programme of remedial works to culverts is being led for the SRA by Somerset Drainage Boards Consortium.

## **Enhanced maintenance of highways and structures**

**Gully emptying:** Somerset County Council's Highways Department empties gullies in areas most susceptible to flooding once a year. The SRA funded an additional six-month round for 15,043 of the highest-risk gullies countywide; far too many to list individually! The aim is to keep roads open, make them safer, preserve access for communities, and safeguard properties from flooding.

**Drain jetting:** 134 places benefitted in 2018-19; in Mendip 25, Sedgemoor 23, South Somerset 33, Taunton Deane 25, West Somerset 28. Under existing budgets, Somerset County Council's Highways Department can only afford to jet drains when a bad blockage has occurred. SRA funding allows for earlier preventative maintenance at locations known to suffer problems with flooding, because they feature on annual gully-emptying rounds. Final selections are made using local knowledge and professional judgement.

**Countywide targeted edge of road clearing:** 906 extra tonnes of debris were cleared from 32.44 miles of road edgeways at 22 places, to stop structures such as drains and gullies getting clogged. Roadsides in rural areas highly susceptible to flooding were swept after trees began to shed their leaves. This work is delivered for the SRA by SCC's Highways Dept; it is an extra activity for Somerset because the county council does no other sweeping. The aim of this SRA-funded action is to reduce flood risks by stopping detritus entering and blocking drainage systems. Local knowledge and professional judgement are used in choosing sites and (where possible) road-edge clearing is integrated with other preventative maintenance activities such as extra gully-emptying.

Places were: **Mendip:** Ashwick, A37 Old Frome Rd – Underhill; Binegar, A37 Underhill – Marchants Hill; Cranmore (x2), A361 East Cranmore A361 and A361 Slait Hill - Haygrove; Kilmersdon, B3139 Kilmersdon Hill; **Sedgemoor:** Spaxton, Merridge Hill; **South Somerset:** Bruton, B3081 Dropping Lane; Cudworth, Cudworth Hill; Lopen, Lopen Lane; Montacute, Hollow Lane & Townsend; Tatworth & Forton, B3162 Forton Road & Horn Moor Road; Winsham, Whatley Lane; **Taunton Deane:** North Curry/Fivehead, Langport Rd; Wiveliscombe (x2), Hartswell, Langford Budville Road, Pyncombe Lane, South Street; **West Somerset:** Nettlecombe (x2), Clitsome Lane, Slade Lane; Old Cleeve (x2), Battallers Lane – Roadwater, Lodge Rocks;

**De-silting of structures:** Works were completed at seven locations. The biggest scheme was around Blake Bridge in Bridgwater town centre. This job was delivered for the SRA by SCC's Highways Dept using contractors Crestmoor Construction and several sub-

contractors. The two main aims were to increase the River Parrett's ability to flow under the bridge, and to safeguard the bridge itself, as serious pressures were being exerted on its arches by very large build-ups of thick, heavy silt. Methods used included high-pressure jetting of silt on the banks and some water injection dredging from a vessel on the river.

Other locations where structures were de-silted were: **Mendip:** Doultling Hill culvert, A361, between the Charlton House Hotel and Doultling Hill, tributary of River Sheppey; Fosse Combe Culvert, between Spargrove and Albion's Vale, River Alham; **South Somerset:** Jordan's South, bridge north of Horton Cross near Ilminster, tributary of River Isle. **Taunton Deane:** Harpford Bridge, between Holywell Lake and Langford Budville, Tone catchment; West Hatch Culvert, near Griffin Lane-West Hatch Lane junction, Parrett catchment; **West Somerset:** Ford Bridge, A398 west of Timberscombe, River Avill.

**Culvert inspections and remedial works in IDB areas:** Works have included de-silting, vegetation clearance, high-pressure water jetting and structural repairs. The main aims have been to improve the conveyance of water and to help prevent disruption to residents and road users.

One high-priority site was at Nythe, where a culvert was in a very bad state, with short sections of pipe disconnected and wonky. This increased the danger of water backing up and flooding the road. Also, a hole had appeared in the edge of the road and the ground was collapsing. This dangerously crumbling culvert was repaired at the end of March 2019, so that water could drain through under Nythe Road and traffic could keep flowing north of Langport between High Ham and Pedwell. Somerset Drainage Boards Consortium delivered the scheme for the SRA, using local contractors Bernard Perry. The job was completed ahead of schedule.

**A38 drainage improvements:** Work done for the SRA by Somerset County Council will reduce the duration of flooding on the A38 near Chelston, between Wellington and Taunton. The drainage system here is over 90 years old and cannot cope with a lot of heavy rain. A 300mm pipe was therefore fitted under the road close to Blackdown Garden Centre and the River Tone tributary Haywards Water, to take more water away. This improvement followed on from an SRA-funded scheme along the A38 at Rumwell the year before. In March 2019, the SRA Board approved funding for a major study into further upgrades near Chelston.

**East Stoke, Stoke sub Hamdon:** Two new manholes allowed for a full CCTV survey and very useful culvert-jetting. This year, detritus, roots and bits of broken pipe have all been cleared by SCC, using contractors Skanska. This SRA-funded work complements earlier highway drainage improvements carried out by Somerset County Council; 10 properties, and the road to Montacute, should now benefit from reduced flood risks. A report has also been prepared on the capacity of the system and potential further improvements. Findings are being discussed with the local county councillor with a view to engaging with residents.

## Designing schemes

**Monksilver:** The SRA Board agreed in September 2018 to put £170,000 from underspends on projects in 2017-18 into flood protection works in Monksilver. SCC's Highways Dept then designed a scheme for the SRA, focusing on problems at the northern and southern ends of the village. A contract was let to Skanska and works began in April 2019. The first two phases were completed by mid-May 2019. The scheme complements earlier projects by Somerset County Council, and more minor SRA-funded activities such as underground CCTV surveying, drain jetting, de-silting near The Notley Arms and natural flood management works upstream at Combe Sydenham. The latter were delivered for the SRA by the Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group SouthWest, as part of the Hills to Levels initiative.

**Stogursey and Shurton Highway Flood Relief:** Somerset County Council's Highways Department has been designing a scheme for the SRA at two sites. The main aims are to reduce the risk of Stogursey and Shurton being cut off by flooding, to improve the emergency evacuation route from Hinkley Point and to help protect some nearby properties. Site 1 is between Water Farm and Little Water Farm on Water Lane. Site 2 is Newnham Bridge on Shurton Road. Both places flood because of their low level and also, at Stogursey, because of an obstructed water channel. The parish council has agreed to work with landowners so as to get them to fulfil their riparian responsibilities in clearing water courses to reduce the level of flooding.

Water Lane design works progressed well during the year. At Newnham Bridge, matters have proved more complex, because variations in carriageway levels of more than half a metre make raising the road to a single uniform height more difficult. Works are expected to start in November 2019.

## Surveys and investigations

**CCTV surveys:** SRA-funded CCTV surveys have been done to address local flooding problems and local concerns about the condition of culverted watercourses, to inform investigations, and support proposed schemes. Accurate information enables Somerset County Council's flood risk team to pinpoint issues and to encourage the owners of watercourses and structures to take on their riparian responsibilities for them. If need be, CCTV survey results also help the team to carry out enforcement.

Aside from supporting an investigation into surface water flooding problems in Moorland (*see the W1 section of this report*), success stories have included works in Curry Rivel and Baltonsborough.

In **Curry Rivel**, a CCTV survey gave vital information about a culverted watercourse linked particularly with bad flooding at the village school. Information gathered has enabled SCC, and its contractor Skanska, to identify improvements that will help to reduce the risk of

flooding. These will be complemented by SRA-funded natural flood management measures, delivered by FWAG SW, to slow the flow of water in the upper catchment of the watercourse.

In **Baltonsborough**, a CCTV survey was done because various riparian owners had concerns about a culverted watercourse that was flooding property and the highway. Information gathered has enabled SCC to identify several collapsed sections of culvert and obstructions that could not be flushed away by pressure-jetting. SCC's project team have been using the survey's findings to engage people in conversations about their responsibilities. The aim is to co-ordinate necessary works until owners have resolved all major issues.

**Beckington surface and foul water investigation:** A review has been carried out for the SRA of all relevant information about Beckington, especially its underground drainage network. Work has also begun on various surveys and assessments. Beckington has a long history of flooding. People's homes have been affected and there have been many problems along Warminster Road and Bath Road, particularly in the centre of the village. Various partners have therefore been working together for the SRA on the first phase of a project to lessen the risks of flooding in the future. Mendip District Council is the lead partner. It has been collaborating with Wessex Water, Somerset County Council's Highways Department and the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group South West. An Options Appraisal Report is planned for 2019-20, and a bid for further SRA funding is expected, so that action can be taken.

**Flood alert systems:** On behalf of the SRA, Somerset County Council's Highways Dept has been liaising with equipment suppliers about the practicalities of setting up a sophisticated flood detection and warning system at Oake Road, **Bradford on Tone**. This would provide real-time information, to help generate and broadcast warnings and reduce the risk of people getting injured and vehicles damaged, particularly when it is dark.

## **W5: Building Local Resilience**

**2018-19 summary:** *The SRA funded Somerset's first Resilience Day, a flood insurance survey on the Somerset Levels & Moors and a pilot household resilience survey in Misterton near Crewkerne. It helped to set up the West Moor Futures Group and began work on Wet Moor, Tealham and Tatham Moor, gave communities grants for equipment and backed Somerset's new Co-Adapt project designed to tackle the water-related effects of climate change (flooding and drought).*

One of the six main objectives of Somerset's 20 Flood Year Action Plan is to "Increase resilience to flooding for families, agriculture, business, communities and wildlife". Hence this workstream. It aims to make people better informed and equipped, so they can better protect themselves against flooding and recover more quickly afterwards. It also aims to

encourage discussions about flooding and water management issues across Somerset, and particularly matters concerning adaptation and sustainability.

This is why the SRA funded the first **Somerset Resilience Day** in October. More than 80 volunteers, wardens, councillors and community leaders travelled to North Petherton for a day of talks, workshops and displays. Subjects included riparian responsibilities (what people who own watercourses are supposed to do) and the art of setting up a flood group – and keeping it going. A key feature was giving people chance to learn from each other's experiences. BBC Radio Somerset broadcast interviews with participants. Feedback from attendees included: "Excellent – well worthwhile. Good calibre presenters, articulate and authoritative" ... "Thanks for the massive amount of work in organising the event and for all the staff of the numerous agencies that attended. Makes us feel there is **real** help available." The event was organised by the Environment Agency and Somerset Prepared and 10 other agencies and organisations were also involved with different elements of the day. (*Somerset Prepared is a partnership devoted to helping Somerset communities be better prepared for emergencies. Members: Environment Agency, Somerset Civil Contingencies Unit (CCU), Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Service, Avon & Somerset Police, Somerset County Council, Safe South West, Rotary International, Somerset Rivers Authority, Community Council for Somerset, South West Ambulance Service, British Red Cross*).

In November, villagers in **Misterton** near Crewkerne took part in a **household resilience survey**. This was organised and funded by the SRA in partnership with Somerset Prepared, Misterton's lively parish resilience team, and a willing bunch of local Rotary volunteers. The centre of Misterton (near Crewkerne) was flooded in February 2016, and there have been various other emergencies in the past. It was therefore judged to be a good place to start exploring ways of getting people more interested in household resilience planning. That is, in thinking ahead and making a few simple, practical arrangements to help people keep themselves and their homes safe in the event of possible emergencies. After a four-page leaflet went to all households in the village in early November, Rotary members called at every property to offer further advice and gather information. Following on from this pilot project, other communities across Somerset are to be visited.

Also in November-December 2018, a **flood insurance survey** was carried out for the SRA by the Community Council for Somerset. Lack of affordable flood insurance was one of many worries faced by households in Somerset after the floods of 2013-14, and one of the survey's aims was to find out if this was still a problem in some of the worst-hit communities. A particular focus was on what difference the setting-up of Flood Re in 2016 had made. Questionnaires were sent to properties in Athelney, Burrowbridge, East Lyng, Fordgate, Moorland, Muchelney, Oath, Thorney, West Yeo and Westonzoyland, and county councillors engaged with residents in Chadmead and North Curry. People elsewhere in Somerset were able to get involved with the survey if they wanted to. Results will be used to help the SRA decide what further courses of action, if any, should be pursued.

The SRA funds grants for equipment and training given to Somerset communities by Somerset Prepared. Five places benefitted in 2018-19: **Curry Mallet** and **High Ham** in South Somerset, **Hatch Beauchamp**, **Milverton** and **Sampford Brett** (near Williton) in what is now Somerset West and Taunton.

The two biggest grants went to Milverton and High Ham. Milverton Parish Council was given a contribution towards a diesel generator, torches, foil blankets, first aid kits and training, snow shovels, rechargeable floodlights, hi viz jackets and walkie talkies. The equipment will be used by the 40 or so volunteers registered to help with Milverton's Emergency Plan. It will also improve the resilience of the village's Designated Place of Safety.

High Ham's flood defence committee was given a contribution towards the costs of hydro sacks, hydro snakes, rechargeable LED floodlights, hi viz jackets and Personal Protective Equipment. The lower areas of High Ham parish are at serious risk of flooding. A recent flood defence report identified the need for more equipment to enable the community to be more resilient.

## Looking to the future

As part as Building Local Resilience, Somerset Rivers Authority has been encouraging local people and organisations to co-operate and adapt to the water-related effects of climate change – flooding and drought. The Somerset Levels, particularly, are at the forefront of concerns about the effects of climate change and sea level rises. Several partners in the SRA – Somerset County Council, Mendip District Council, Sedgemoor District Council, South Somerset District Council, and the new Somerset West and Taunton Council – have all declared climate emergencies and pledged to take action. Members of the SRA Joint Scrutiny Panel, largely drawn from local councils, have raised climate change issues and the subject has regularly featured in debates in Parliament about the Rivers Authorities and Land Drainage Bill. The Environment Agency's new Draft National Flood and Coastal Risk Management Strategy also stresses that "climate change is the biggest challenge we face. It poses the greatest threat to our economy, environment, health, and way of life. The increased risk of flooding and coastal change that it brings is significant."

Notable SRA moves in 2018-19 have included funding for a new project called Co-Adapt, support for a new Environmental Land Management scheme on the Somerset Levels, and nurturing the formation of the West Moor Futures Group. A similar association of landowners is being encouraged on Wet Moor, and there are ongoing discussions about an SRA project devoted to Maintaining the Resilience of Wet Grassland. Also, as covered in the Workstream 2 section of this report, the SRA has match-funded Triple C schemes: the three Cs stand for Climate resilient, Community-based, and Catchment planning and management.

**Co-Adapt:** Support from Somerset Rivers Authority has helped Somerset to take part in a new project called Co-Adapt. The aim of Co-Adapt is to get local people and organisations co-operating and adapting to the water-related effects of climate change. Work began early in 2019.

The SRA's main interest is in flood protection and alleviation, but Co-Adapt will also help to encourage greater resilience to drought on nearly 10 square miles of the Somerset Levels. Recent Environment Agency predictions suggest that England could run short of water within 25 years. One of the aims of the Environment Agency's new draft national Flood and Coastal Risk Management Strategy is to "help communities better understand their risk and give them more control about how to adapt and respond".

In Somerset, Co-Adapt is part of the EU's Interreg 2 programme. Its main partners locally are FWAG SW, Somerset Wildlife Trust, Somerset County Council, the National Trust and Devon County Council (as the accountable body for the Blackdown Hills AONB Partnership). Great emphasis is placed on what the EU calls co-creation, which means people and organisations working together.

**Moor Associations, Farm Liaison and Maintaining the Resilience of Wet Grassland:**

One of the aims of Somerset's 20 Year Flood Action Plan is to facilitate "better management of the most vulnerable and challenging parts of the Somerset Levels, with the consent of owners and occupiers, with the intent of helping them to remain profitable and build greater resilience to climate and economic change." A first phase of SRA-funded exploratory works focused on the need for greater collaboration between farming, conservation and water management sectors, using a positive common goal as a tool for change. A second, more practical phase then helped to establish, in summer 2018, the new West Moor Futures Group. The Group has met twice, designed a logo and put signs out on the moor to discourage dog walkers from disturbing nesting birds.

Similar approaches have begun on Wet Moor and Tealham and Tadham Moor. One important topic is how engineering works could bring benefits to both farmers and wildlife. Such works could include better maintenance of existing water level management control features or the design and installation of new equipment.

Early in 2019, FWAG SW advertised for a Moor Associations Co-ordinator to continue with this work as part of Co-Adapt. FWAG SW also advertised for a Farm Liaison Officer. The SRA agreed to fund both posts for two years.

Discussions have also begun about linking Co-Adapt with the SRA's existing project on Maintaining the Resilience of Wet Grassland. The Wet Grassland project is led for the SRA by the Parrett IDB, working closely with Natural England. It has been investigating how water levels and land can be managed to enable flood-resilient farming and good environmental outcomes in flood-prone areas for the next 20 to 30 years. As one of the

main aims of Co-Adapt is to make 2500 hectares of the Levels better adapted for flooding and drought, there is an obvious and promising overlap.

## **Environmental Land Management Innovation**

In addition to the initiatives outlined above, in June 2018 the SRA Board agreed to be part of developing a new Environmental Land Management scheme in the Somerset Levels. The Board also agreed to be involved in trialling how payments for land management on the Levels could be combined with flood risk management, agricultural production and the delivery of improvements for nature. Background:

**1 Brexit.** Payments to farmers and landowners have been under review as part of the Government's preparations for Brexit. Through EU-based subsidies, the floodplains of the Somerset Levels and Moors (7531 hectares) currently get over £3.7m of public funding every year. A further £2.5m is paid out every year to the hillier land in between the various moors. Some wetter floodplain areas can receive up to £650 per hectare annually. The farmed wetland of the Levels is very dependent on public payments. They underpin the Levels' special character and rural economy. There are currently 296 agri-environment farm agreements, of which 250 stop in 2022.

The Levels are very vulnerable to reductions. The Government has been stressing that future Environmental Land Management payments should be linked to the delivery of "public goods" that result in a cleaner, greener and healthier countryside. In the Levels, there is likely to be particular emphasis on flood risk management and wildlife.

**2 A Vision for the Somerset Levels and Moors Vision in 2030.** This Vision was agreed by the Somerset Levels and Moors Task Force during the floods of 2014. It helped to shape Somerset's 20 Flood Action Plan, which is now overseen by Somerset Rivers Authority. The Vision's headline statement was: "We see the Somerset Levels and Moors in 2030 as a thriving, nature-rich wetland landscape, with grassland farming taking place on the majority of the land. The impact of extreme weather events is being reduced by land and water management in both the upper catchments and the flood plain and by greater community resilience."

The SRA Board agreed it made sense for the Somerset Levels to seek to become a pilot area, so it could try to shape its own distinctive future, in much the same way as Somerset Rivers Authority has allowed the whole of Somerset to create its own unique and local ways of tackling flooding.



**ITEM 7**
**Somerset Rivers Authority Joint Scrutiny Panel Paper**
**Key projects update**
**RECOMMENDATION**

The SRA Joint Scrutiny Panel is asked to:

1. Review and comment on the latest position with key SRA projects.

**Purpose of the item**

The purpose of this paper is to provide the Panel with a summary update of each of the 'key' SRA projects as reported to the SRA Board. Key projects are generally those which are of larger scale and high value, and in receipt of a significant amount of Heart of the SW Local Enterprise Partnership (HotSWLEP) Growth Deal funding.

HotSWLEP allocated £13.049m of Growth Deal funding towards 'Somerset Flooding' in the aftermath of the 2013-14 Floods. The SRA Board is updated on key projects as they are important elements of Somerset's 20 Year Flood Action Plan.

Previously the Panel received individual reports on each project. All projects are now to be reported within one document to make the process more efficient and reduce the amount of information the Panel must review in advance of the meeting.

**Background and context**

The SRA currently receives regular updates on 6 projects that are classed as key projects which are in the process of being delivered and upon which the SRA Board gets quarterly update on at Board meetings.

Current key projects are:

Project Title	LEP Funding	SRA Funding	Total Estimated Cost
Bridgwater Tidal Barrier (BTB)	£2m	-	£100m
River Brue	£0.275m	£0.225m	£0.5m
Oath to Burrowbridge Pioneer Dredging	£1m	-	£1m
River Sowey – King's Sedgemoor Drain Enhancements	£4.193m	£2m	£6.193m

Taunton Strategic Flood Alleviation Improvements Scheme (TSFAIS)	£0.065m	£0.235m	£6.8m
Strategic Approach to Mitigation	£0.050m	-	£0.050m

Each project supports the delivery of Somerset’s 20 Year Flood Action Plan. Some projects, such as the BTB and TSFAIS, have been in development for many years and the SRA is supporting their further development as part of a much wider funding package. Some projects, such as dredging, are only possible as a direct result of the LEP & SRA funding and came to the fore as a priority during and after the floods of 2013-14.

An important point to note is that LEP funding must be spent by March 2021. This a deadline set by central government. SRA funding does not have any limitations on its use.

### Key Projects Summary and Latest Status

**Bridgwater Tidal Barrier:** The Environment Agency and Sedgemoor District Council (SDC) are working in Partnership to deliver the Bridgwater Tidal Barrier Scheme in 2024, subject to funding and statutory approvals. The project will reduce tidal flood risk to 11,300 homes and 1,500 businesses. The present value of benefits is £1,331 million. The current estimated cost of the Barrier and downstream banks work is £100 million. The benefits cost ratio is 13.

The barrier will be located between Express Park and Chilton Trinity village. It will have two vertical lift gates. The scheme includes improvements to the existing downstream primary flood defences along the River Parrett together with new secondary defences in the flood plain.

Because of the estimated cost of the BTB it must secure approvals from HM Treasury to proceed and must also secure permission through application for a Transport and Works Act Order, a detailed planning process which will put the project through a high degree of public scrutiny with the decision on approval ultimately taken by the Secretary of State.

**Latest Status:** The project is well into its design and planning stage and has undertaken public consultation. An outline business case has been prepared and been reviewed by the Environment Agency’s Large Project Review Group. Consultation with landowners is ongoing to secure temporary and permanent access for construction. Some objections have been received from the community of Chilton Trinity and these are being investigated further. Investigations are underway to identify potential sites for wetland habitat creation.

Work is progressing on the Environmental Impact Assessment and Environmental Statement which are key to ensuring the project is constructed in a way that minimises or mitigates the impact on the environment. The documentation required to be submitted as part of the Transport and Works Act Order process is being prepared. The intention is to complete preparation of these documents and submit them to the Secretary of State by the end of 2019.

**River Brue Projects:** In 2015 the SRA allocated £500,000 of its Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) Growth Deal funding towards delivering dredging on the River Brue. LEP funding must be spent by March 2021. The project was being led by the Axe-Brue Internal Drainage Board. Progress has been difficult, in part due to the environmentally sensitive nature of the area of works. In December 2019 it was reported to the SRA Board that the Axe-Brue Internal Drainage Board could no longer lead on the project due to financial risks associated with failing to spend Growth Deal funding by the 2021 deadline. In March 2019 the SRA Board agreed to set up a sub-group and to delegate responsibility for finding a way forward to that group.

**Latest Status:** The group met on 15 March 2019 at Wells Town Hall. It was agreed that in order to remove the risk associated with the use of LEP funding for the dredge, £225k of local partner funding would be switched from the Oath to Burrowbridge dredge with LEP funds from the Brue dredge. Local partner funding can then be used to develop a legally compliant dredging proposal for the Brue.

The remaining LEP funds (£275k) will be re-allocated to the following projects within the River Brue catchment.

- a. Field Way, Highbridge, match-funding contribution to Wessex Water scheme to protect 21 houses from surface water and foul sewer flooding (£100,000 contribution to a circa £1.5m scheme).
- b. North Drain Pumping Station (PS) capital refurbishment (£156,000) – the pumping station is an essential part of managing water in the River Brue. Investment will ensure that the benefits of other actions are maximised as a failure at the PS would negate benefits of other investments. North Drain pumping station reduces flood risk to 9700 acres of land.

**Oath to Burrowbridge Pioneer Dredging:** Additional dredging on the River Parrett was identified as a key action within the 20 Year Flood Action Plan. The Oath to Burrowbridge dredging project is the latest element of dredging to be taken forward by the Parrett Internal Drainage Board on behalf of the SRA. The project will deliver a carefully designed dredge along 2.2kms (1.4 miles) of the river between Stathe and Burrowbridge. Detailed design work has shown that the vast majority of benefits of the dredge are realised by removing silt from this location, hence the project no longer extending all the way to Oath.

Computer hydraulic modelling of the proposed design has indicated reduced flood risks to 65km<sup>2</sup> of land in the catchment of the River Parrett and to an additional 200 properties currently at direct risk of flooding. One result of dredging between Oath and Burrowbridge may be some minor increase in flood water on Curry Moor and North Moor. However, no properties are predicted to flood in North Moor as a result of this scheme, nor would any more properties in Curry Moor flood. Moreover, because of other 20 Year Flood Action Plan schemes carried out since the 2013-14 flood, the overall situation on Curry Moor and North Moor remains considerably improved, compared with how it was before the 2013-14 flood.

The project must meet strict regulatory standards to ensure the project is delivered in a legally compliant way that, where possible, enhances the environment or mitigates any negative impacts.

**Latest Status:** On 1 May 2019, a public consultation exercise commenced, which ended on 31 May. Two public drop-in events were held, one at Burrowbridge, the other in Langport. In addition, the project was covered in local newspapers, websites and on local radio.

Further work from the team will now take place to complete the Environmental Statement (ES) such that it can be advertised on 3rd July with a 30 day statutory consultation exercise running until 31<sup>st</sup> July. This will allow the scheme to gain formal sign off by the Parrett Internal Drainage Board (PIDB) members in early August.

It is hoped that, subject to regulatory compliance on environmental matters, a contractor can be appointed in early August to commence works in September. It is expected that the works will take 8 to 10 weeks (subject to good weather).

**River Sowy – King’s Sedgemoor Drain Enhancements:** The River Sowy was originally known as the Parrett Flood Relief Channel. It is a man-made river conceived after floods deluged 50,000 acres of Somerset in October 1960. The Sowy is used by the Environment Agency to take excess water away from the River Parrett near Aller. Water flows down via Beer Wall to King’s Sedgemoor Drain (KSD) near Greylake, then re-joins the Parrett at Dunball. Providing more capacity in the Sowy-KSD system, so that it can be used more effectively, is a key aim of Somerset’s 20 Year Flood Action Plan, which is overseen by Somerset Rivers Authority.

**Latest Status:** Following the successful completion of the de-silting works at Parchey and Dunball Bridge in Autumn 2018, re-instatement of the dredged material (reseeded of the bank) will take place this autumn.

Development of the first phase of in-channel works is ongoing for the channel bank restoration improvements on the Sowy/KSD. Ecological surveys are currently being undertaken; these will inform the environmental assessment activities. Early discussions have been held with Historic England and site visit/discussions with South West Heritage Trust to ensure that the project does not damage any sensitive archaeological sites.

There have been several successful workshops with Natural England and the Internal Drainage Board to discuss water level control to mitigate the combined impacts for both the Sowy/KSD improvements and the Oath to Burrowbridge dredging. The outcome of these being that a package of potential mitigation works has been identified. These works will be supplemented by a package of 'operational changes' across a number of areas along with any eventual revisions required for the Water Level Management Plans.

The intention is to deliver required mitigation works in late 2019-20 with the main in-channel works being delivered towards the end of the 2020-21 Financial Year.

**Taunton Strategic Flood Alleviation Improvements Scheme (TSFAIS):** Somerset West and Taunton Council and the Environment Agency are working together to provide a long-term strategic solution to reducing flood risk to Taunton and where possible to the wider catchment. It is recognised that the risk to the town will get worse as climate change is predicted to increase maximum flood flows over time. The risk comes not just from the River Tone, but also from three other tributaries that flow into the town centre.

Previous studies, including Phase 1 of the TSFAIS, have pointed towards the need for a combination of (i) improved flood defence walls in the town and (ii) an area for storing flood water upstream, to provide capacity for the long term (100 years). This work formed the basis for Phase 2 of the TSFAIS.

**Latest Status:** Work completed to date on Phase 2 has shown the major engineering work that would be required, both in the town and in the flood storage area upstream, to provide the desired level of protection for the next 100 years. If the major components of flood defence were constructed at the same time the capital cost would be in the order of £50M+. It is recognised that the capital cost of this overall strategic scheme is unlikely to be found in the short term. The Phase 2 works to date have identified a number of lower cost local intervention options that could provide a useful increase in flood capacity pending the longer-term delivery of the larger scheme.

The list of potential local interventions identified to date is set out below:

1. Bradford on Tone Storage Area;
2. Raised or new flood defences in Taunton Town Centre;
3. Vivary Park, Sherford Stream Improvements;
4. Raising bridges on Mill Stream by Castle Street;
5. Mill Stream flow diversions by French Weir;
6. Optimisation of Long Run meadow storage, upstream of French Weir;
7. Conveyance improvements on Galmington Stream (particularly consideration of culverts) near Parkfield Drive;
8. Bathpool options;
  - a) Closing Canal Route at Firepool;
  - b) Railway Culverts between Obridge and Bathpool;

- c) Flood Relief Channel at Bathpool parallel to Hyde Lane area;
- d) Over pumping at Old River Tone Outfall by Bathpool Bridge;
- e) Old River Tone Flap Valve Bund by Bathpool Bridge.

The intention is that the local interventions will be complementary to the larger strategic scheme (upstream storage and flood walls) and are 'quick wins' which can be delivered in the short term to buy the town additional years' protection whilst work continues on the longer-term strategy and funding is hopefully secured for its delivery.

The Project Delivery Plan technical report is expected to be finalised this Summer, which will describe a suite of measures incorporating a combination of flood defences and storage. It will include information on:

- Recommended order of delivery of the components
- Recommended timing of delivery or "triggers" for delivery (short, medium or long term)
- The benefits of the components, individually and together
- Estimated costs and possible funding sources
- Potential alignment with other programmes/development
- Authority best placed to deliver each component

A key part of the work will be to seek to produce solutions that minimise any adverse impact upon third-party land. The final report will draw out if there is a flood risk change downstream of the M5.

The aim is to have final draft documents by summer 2019 for targeted discussions with key stakeholders that will then allow an agreed approach by autumn 2019. This will be reported to the new SWT Full Council in November 2019 for them to consider how they wish to proceed.

**Strategic Approach to Mitigation:** The SRA board commissioned Natural England to coordinate the development and implementation of a strategic approach to mitigation for the environmental impact of SRA works. The aim of the strategic approach to mitigation is:

- To develop positive solutions enabling delivery of schemes to reduce flood risk whilst making appropriate use of the flood plain to convey and temporarily store flood water and maintaining the special characteristics of Somerset.
- To provide greater certainty and clarity to Flood Action Plan project developers/deliverers, reducing costs and time spent, and provide a positive solution that works for flood risk, people and nature.
- To ensure compliance with relevant legislation.



Modelling work to confirm the hydraulic changes associated with the proposed dredging and Sowy works has now been completed and progress is being made on finalising mitigation requirements

**Latest Status:** The immediate priority is to provide strategic mitigation to enable the delivery of the Oath to Burrowbridge (OTBB) dredge and Sowy flood management schemes. Mitigation is required to maintain existing appropriate water levels and splash conditions during the winter period (December to February). This is to ensure no detrimental change to the environmental conditions from the projects thereby enabling legally compliant schemes to be promoted.

Modelling indicates

- **Flood extent** for small low risk floods that are environmentally beneficial reduces by approximately 600ha in the combined **full**<sup>1</sup> OTBB and Sowy scheme scenario. However, this will be significantly less due to the reduced scope of the projects now possible. 500ha of this change in flood extent is outside Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and existing Raised Water Level Areas.
- **Flood duration** for OTBB & Sowy, approximately half of the flood area will have a reduced flood duration between -12hours & -7 days (other half indicates no difference).

The modelling therefore indicates that without mitigation there will be a detrimental effect on suitable habitat available for wintering bird populations within the Somerset Levels and Moors. Much of the area effected outside of the designated area is known as 'functionally-linked land' and, given its importance, must be treated the same under the Habitats Regulations. As a result of the findings of combined scheme modelling it is agreed that mitigation is required.

### Mitigation Options being considered

- **Replacement or new water control structures.** Replacement of failing structures required to maintain splash conditions in winter. Identify where new structures are required to hold water.
- **Operational Protocol.** Operating the pumping stations or other assets to effect 'no change' to existing favourable conditions during winter months (December to February). This could be achieved by evacuating flood water in accordance with existing protocols but suspending evacuation for a short period of time once an agreed level is achieved to ensure the splash condition that would otherwise be lost,

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<sup>1</sup> Initial project planning was for more significant lengths of dredging and river widening. Subsequent detailed planning has shown this to be unaffordable and projects have been scaled back. Mitigation requirements are being calculated based upon the original full scheme proposals.

continue to be achieved. This will be proposed in small winter floods that pose no increased flood risk.

- **Water Level Management Plan (WLMP) changes.** Operational Protocols will be required to be incorporated in the WLMPs.
- **Maintain a depth of water (minimum of 300mm) in ditches through the winter period.** This will include the ditch network within and outside the designated sites.
- **Monitor and Mitigate.** In areas where there is high confidence that condition will not be affected, new or existing telemetry will be used to monitor splash conditions. Mitigation will be agreed before final implementation of the schemes, and implemented only if monitoring shows an effect.
- **Creation of in-field wet features.** To maintain habitat condition for wintering waterfowls, such as creation of shallow water scrapes and field gutters.

Project teams are working to finalise Strategic Mitigation proposals including costing and timetable for implementation.

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

The SRA Joint Scrutiny Panel is asked to:

1. Review and comment on the latest position with key SRA projects.

**Date: 1 July 2019**

**Author: David Mitchell, Senior Manager, Somerset Rivers Authority**



## Somerset Rivers Authority Joint Scrutiny Panel paper

### SRA Precepting Legislation update

#### RECOMMENDATION

The SRA Joint Scrutiny Panel is asked to:

1. Consider and comment on the latest position in relation to progress of the Rivers Authorities and Land Drainage Bill.

#### Purpose of the item

To update the Panel on progress towards securing the passing of legislation enabling the SRA to be put on a sound legal and financial footing to become a precepting authority.

#### Background and context

Since the inception of the Somerset Rivers Authority as an unincorporated association, it was always the aim of the SRA partners to secure the long-term future of the SRA by putting it on a sound legal and financial basis. The Government committed itself to passing legislation necessary to secure the future of the SRA; the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) drafted the Rivers Authorities and Land Drainage (RALD) Bill<sup>1</sup>.

This Bill would give the Secretary of State the power to create Rivers Authorities (RA) as major precepting and flood risk management authorities. Defra was unable to secure government time to take the Bill through Parliament. The decision was therefore taken to move the Bill as a Private Members' Bill rather than a government Bill.

David Warburton MP presented the Rivers Authorities and Land Drainage Bill to the House of Commons (HofC) on 6 March 2018 (First Reading). The Bill eventually completed all stages<sup>2</sup> in the HofC on 15 March 2019 and moved to the House of Lords (HofL).

The Bill was presented to the Lords by Lord Bethell on 18 March and passed its 2<sup>nd</sup> Reading on 16 May. The Bill received support from all parties and cross-benchers. There were several detailed interventions in the debate. Themes emerged around ensuring appropriate accountability, consultation, environmental responsibilities and climate change amongst others.

#### Current Status

The next stage will be Committee Stage in HofL. On 4 June the Delegated Powers and Regulatory Reform Committee (DPRRC) published a report challenging whether the Private

<sup>1</sup> [Detailed RALD Bill Information](#)

<sup>2</sup> Diagram of stages of a Bill's progress shown at the end of this document.

Members' Bill is the correct approach for the RALD Bill. This has resulted in a date for committee stage being delayed. The report conclusion is set out below:

***We were not only surprised but concerned at the proposals in this Bill. It is an attempt, upon flimsy grounds, to set aside the procedures which Parliament has put in place to protect the interests of citizens who would be unfairly affected by legislation. It would authorise the issuing of precepts—in effect, taxation—in a way which would be unaccountable and unscrutinised. It would allow the framing of Ministerial guidance in a way which would have legislative effect, without Parliamentary scrutiny. It would allow rules in primary legislation about the valuation of agricultural property to be replaced wholesale by statutory instrument with no requirement for consultation or other procedures for protecting private interests. And in order to set up one rivers authority in one part of England it would make provision for this approach to be replicated in every part of the country.***

### Next Steps

The DPRRC offers 'advice to the House' and does not in itself dictate whether legislation should or should not proceed. The committee's report has raised some important points which will need to be addressed to give Peers the comfort they need to support the Bill progressing in its current form. David Warburton MP is currently working with Defra officials to respond to the DPRRC report.

The RALD Bill is the Primary Legislation that empowers the SoS to create Rivers Authorities. However, secondary legislation is required to create individual RAs. It will be necessary to submit a detailed proposal to the SoS which must then be approved by Parliament for the SRA to be formally constituted with the powers of a Rivers Authority as per the Bill. The proposal will need to set out exactly how the SRA will fulfil its legal functions and comply with all pertinent legislation.

Preparing a proposal will require extensive input from various subject specialists e.g. local government legislation, organisational governance, employment, finance, procurement, communications, consultation, etc. SRA Board Members were asked at their June meeting to approve the allocation of up to £100,000 from SRA contingency funding for use in 2019-20 to commission the necessary expertise to prepare a proposal. A high-level timeline for the work – which assumes that Royal Assent is secured during this Parliamentary session – is set out below.

June 2019 to March 2020	Develop future governance, staffing arrangements and operational structures. Finalise updated Flood Action Plan / future strategy.
April 2020 – June 2020	Undertake public consultation on creation of SRA.

July to September 2020	Review and respond to public consultation.
October 2020	Submit scheme proposal to the SoS.
March 2021	Approval by the SoS (SRA formally established in law).
April 2021 – March 2022	SRA initial period – (continue with current SCC hosting arrangements, monitoring officer, S151 etc whilst planning and implementing any changes necessary).
April 2022	SRA fully operational as separate legal body.

## RECOMMENDATION

The SRA Joint Scrutiny Panel is asked to:

1. Consider and comment on the latest position in relation to progress of the Rivers Authorities and Land Drainage Bill.

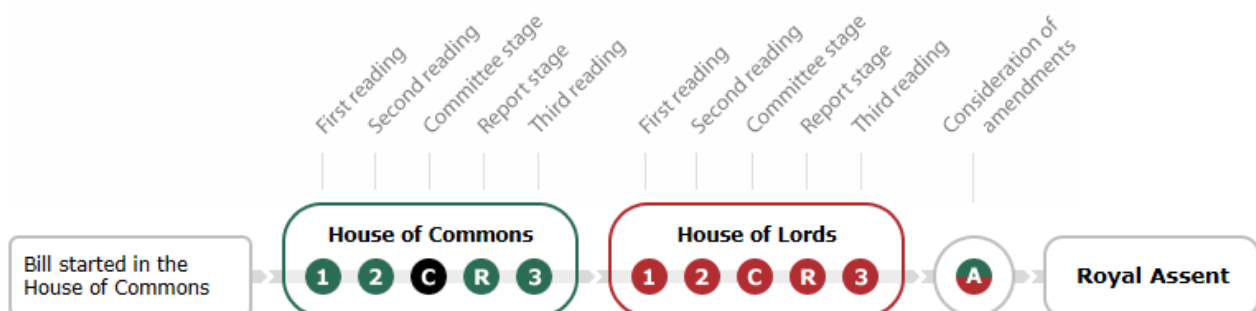
**Date: 28 June 2019**

**Author: David Mitchell, Senior Manager, Somerset Rivers Authority**

## Stages of a Bill through parliament

**Type of Bill:** Private Members' Bill (Presentation Bill)  
**Sponsor:** David Warburton

### Progress of the Bill



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**Somerset Rivers Authority Joint Scrutiny Panel**

<b>Agenda item</b>	<b>Meeting Date</b>	<b>Lead Officer</b>
	<b>01 Feb 2019 (looking forward)</b>	
Election of Chair & Vice-Chair		Lindsey Tawse
2018/19 Progress Update (Smaller Projects)		Jonathan Hudston
Key Projects Update		Tim Burton/Iain Sturdy
2019/20 Enhanced Programme		David Mitchell
County Flooding Network		Nicola Dawson
Review of Flood Action Plan & Future Strategy		David Mitchell
Precepting Legislation Update		David Mitchell
	<b>Summer 2019 (looking back)</b>	
Terms of Reference		Lindsey Tawse
End of Year Report & Finance Report		Jonathan Hudston
Precepting Legislation Update		David Mitchell
Key Projects Update		Tim Burton/Iain Sturdy
Annual Finance Report		David Mitchell

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