

# 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.

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### **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**