

Somerset Rivers Authority Strategy Questionnaire.

To be read in conjunction with the draft strategy document.

All information available at www.srastrategy.co.uk

Core Purpose

The SRA's core purpose as a partnership is to reduce the risks and impacts of flooding across Somerset.

Do you agree with this as the SRA's core purpose?

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
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If you disagree, why do you disagree?

Our Principles as a partnership are:

1. Doing extra
2. Working together
3. Acting on local priorities

These are the correct principles for the SRA?

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
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Do you have any further comments to make about our principles?

Please refer to the principle number when responding.

THEMES

1. Working with communities

The aim of working with communities is to get more done than would otherwise be possible, and done in better ways. We are open to working with all sorts of people, groups, and places. The only rule we insist upon is that to get SRA funding, schemes and activities must benefit communities.

The next most important thing is seeking to build a culture of mutual understanding and support, with people contributing and learning from each other in different ways. Then there are endless possibilities. Something that sets the SRA apart is its practical enthusiasm for and encouragement of ideas that bubble up from communities for dealing with flooding problems. We like to help people with good ideas but a lack of technical expertise and confidence turn them into action.

We also want to help more Somerset people learn about flood risks, so that even more may be motivated to get involved in suitable schemes and activities, through which they may help themselves and their neighbours to protect and strengthen the places where they live.

We will therefore continue to help create and reinforce groups and networks, through a range of practical measures. We will strengthen the SRA's position as a source of useful extra collated information, so that more people understand who is responsible for what as regards flood and water management, and people better understand flood risks.

Do you agree that this theme should be a key part of what the SRA does?

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
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2. Strengthening operations, boosting maintenance

In a changing world, some basic needs persist.

Flooding is disruptive and at times damaging. Summer deluges – as seen in 1997 and 2012 when some parts of the Somerset Levels and Moors were inundated for weeks – are especially damaging for farmland and protected wildlife sites, when crops are growing, and birds and animals are breeding. Flood risks are predicted to get worse, and the SRA and its partners cannot control the weather or promise to prevent flooding. But carefully-targeted efforts must still be made to protect people and places.

In many places across Somerset, effective management of water levels will continue to be crucial for residents, businesses including farmers, road users and wildlife. This is particularly true of the low-lying landscape of the Somerset Levels and Moors, criss-crossed with artificially-created drainage channels, and studded with a panoply of 15,000 water level control structures. Effective management includes having capacity to convey water away from troublesome areas.

Through the SRA, more funding can be given for maintenance and improvement works enabling greater operational flexibility, control and safety in the management of water systems. Types of work done may include dredging, riverbank-raising, repairs, replacements and upgrades, jetting, emptying, clearing and cleaning, and installations of new equipment.

More will need to be done to slow the flow of water down to vulnerable locations and to store water in suitable places, and people will need to adapt to a changing world. Such moves will be gradual and operational management, conveyance and maintenance will continue to be important.

Do you agree that this theme should be a key part of what the SRA does?

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
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3. Building resilience, encouraging adaptation

'Resilience' and 'adaptation' mean different things to different people, and frequently feature in glossaries with varying definitions. What is meant by them here?

Put very simply, in the context of flooding, ‘resilience’ is best taken to refer to a state of mind or a way of behaving that is one stage on from ‘resistance’.

‘Resistance’ would like to see flooding prevented by big, expensive, imposing measures - like a tidal barrier - which mean that life can still go on pretty much as it does now.

‘Resilience’ would also prefer to keep things as they are, but it accepts that flooding cannot be prevented. So, it is important to prepare for flooding in ways that mean people and places suffer as little damage as possible, and afterwards recover as quickly as possible. As part of recovering, ‘resilience’ learns some useful lessons for next time, then things largely go back to their previous state.

‘Adaptation’ accepts that keeping things as they are is no longer possible. Measures can still be taken to resist, and people and places can still become more resilient, but fundamentally different measures - perhaps even different ways of life and doing things - have to be seriously considered, and gradually and thoughtfully acted upon.

‘Adaptation’ is about people and places changing in ways that are going to mean their future is more successful, than it would be if they did not change.

Why are these ideas relevant to Somerset and the SRA? Because across our county levels of flood risk vary from place to place, and some places are more vulnerable than others, because of factors such as their geography and geology. Therefore mixes of different measures will be needed for different places at different times.

People and places cannot be ordered or forced to adapt. We will help communities better understand their flood risks, because better understanding will be essential for people wanting to make their own decisions about the future. As people make their own decisions, we will offer support, advice, information and practical help.

Do you agree that this theme should be a key part of what the SRA does?

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
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4. Protecting the economy from flooding

An Economic Impact Assessment produced following the floods of 2013-14 found the economic cost to Somerset was up to £147.5 million, with the South West region also suffering. Among the main findings were that half of all Somerset businesses were badly affected by the floods, and that the closure of 80 roads cost the local economy up to £15 million. The impact on residential property was up to £20 million, and the impact on public mental health was “devastating”. Response costs for the Environment Agency, emergency services and local government were up to £19.3 million.

The flash floods that hit towns and villages across Somerset in 2020-23 and the Major Incident declared in January 2023 on the Somerset Levels and Moors reminded us of the impacts, disruptions and economic costs of flooding.

Through our actions and our ways of working together in the SRA, we will help to reassure businesses that Somerset is somewhere they can invest and expand. Our track record includes contributions towards the Bridgwater Tidal Barrier, which will help to protect more than 1,500 businesses; support for the development of the Taunton Strategic Flood Alleviation Improvements Scheme; and funding for drainage upgrades and extra maintenance activities which have helped to

reduce costly delays and disruption on hundreds of roads including the A38 between Taunton and Wellington, the A358 near Combe Florey and the A39 at Carhampton.

We will help to generate confidence in the exploration of new opportunities. We are particularly interested in possibilities for growth that may arise from climate change and moves towards Net Zero, from national policy ambitions for farming and the natural environment, and from the inter-relationships of house-building and Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS).

Furthermore, flooding should not necessarily always be treated only as a threat. Every flood presents new facts which could spur innovation and growth, in many areas including architecture, water-related technology and storage. Somerset could augment its burgeoning reputation as Britain's green powerhouse by leading the way with transformative possibilities.

Do you agree that this theme should be a key part of what the SRA does?

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
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5. Conserving and enhancing Somerset's special environments

'Special environments' refers to habitats such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and Ramsar sites, which are wetlands of international importance designated under the Ramsar Convention and protected by law. Especially when working in sensitive areas of the Somerset Levels and Moors, SRA partners aim to get the right balance between land being too wet and land being too dry. The ideal sought is right amounts of water in right places at right times. That could mean large volumes of water being conveyed out to sea; it could mean the 'splashy conditions' favoured by over-wintering birds; it could mean peaty ground not drying out and releasing carbon into the atmosphere; it could mean farmers and landowners being paid to store water to help avoid flooding; and a myriad of other localised possibilities, relating to SRA themes and principles and to helping nature to recover and flourish.

'Special environments' also includes Protected Landscapes, such as Exmoor National Park and the Quantock Hills, Mendip Hills and Blackdown Hills Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs). It includes archaeology, ancient monuments, listed buildings, cultural history, and other distinctive elements of places (like the drangs of Porlock, the goyles of Crowcombe, the Somerset Levels' rhynes and the Mendip Hills' swallets) which infuse their character and give people pride and pleasure.

We respect the emotional connections that people across Somerset feel for their natural, built, social and historic environments. As part of SRA-funded works, local environments will be conserved and where possible enhanced, and different approaches will be taken at different times in different places to reflect different circumstances, including working with natural processes where possible.

Do you agree that this theme should be a key part of what the SRA does?

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
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If you had to put these themes in order of importance to you, how would you rank them (1 being most important and 5 being least important)?

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Do you have any comments you would like to add about our Themes?

Please refer to the relevant theme number when responding.

Objectives

1. Reduce the risks and impacts of flooding across Somerset.

Do you agree with this as an objective for the SRA?

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
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2. Maintain access and connections during times of flood for communities and businesses across Somerset.

Do you agree with this as an objective for the SRA?

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
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3. Increase the resilience of people, places and the environment to flooding, while adapting to climate change.

Do you agree with this as an objective for the SRA?

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
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4. Protect Somerset's economy from the impacts of flooding, promote business confidence and encourage new opportunities.

Do you agree with this as an objective for the SRA?

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
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5. While doing the above, conserve and enhance Somerset's special environments (natural, built, social, cultural) for all who live and work in Somerset and visit.

Do you agree with this as an objective for the SRA?

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
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If you had to put these objectives in order of importance to you, how would you rank them? (1 being most important and 5 being least important)

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Please add any further comments you have on the above proposed objectives, refer to the relevant objective number(s) you are commenting on.

About you

What is your name?

First name

Surname

What is your email address?

What is your postcode?

Are you responding...

Please state

What is the name of your organisation (if applicable)?

The following questions are asked as part of our commitment to equalities monitoring and will help us to ensure that we are reaching a wide range of people with different backgrounds and experiences. They are not used to identify individuals but may be used within the Somerset Rivers Authority (hosted by Somerset Council) for statistical, monitoring and service improvement purposes. Please answer as many questions as you feel comfortable with.

What is your age?

What gender do you identify as?

What is your ethnicity?