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MINUTES OF THE SDBC ANNUAL MEETING HELD AT JUNCTION 24 MARKET CENTRE AT 19.00 ON 12 MARCH 2024

Attendance: 28 Members			
Elected Members: Mr E Adams Mr W Barnard Mr A Betty Mr T Bradford (Chair) Mr B Bryer Mr T Bush Mr J Fear Mr A Gilling Mr J Harris Mr R Parsons Mr C Passmore Mr C Redding Mr D Vigar Mrs W Welland Mr T Whitcombe	**Appointed Members** Cllr A Bradford Cllr H Bruce Cllr P Burden Cllr M Caswell Mr J Cato Cllr B Filmer Cllr R Keen Mr S Kingham Cllr B Knickerbocker Mr C Riches Cllr M Stanton Cllr J Taylor Cllr R Wilkins	**Officers:** Mr I Sturdy Mrs M Hammond Mr P Brewin Mr R King Mr G Oliver Ms V Martin Mr N Stevens	**Public:** Mr A Dowden Mr D Mitchell SRA
Apologies:			
Mr R Barrington Mr D Bridge Mr B Clapp Mr N Cole Mr R Coombes Mr M Heywood Mr P Holms Ms R Horsington Mr S Hutchings Mr N Lukins Mr J Perrin Ms L Scott Mr J Stradling Mr D Tratt Mr J Winslade	Cllr M Bird Cllr N Cavill Cllr P Clayton Cllr N Cottle Cllr J Cousins Cllr C Gibbons Mr P Harris Cllr S Hart Cllr M Healey Cllr A Hendry Cllr C Hunt Cllr L Leavey Cllr R Morgan Cllr M Pepperall Cllr B Petty Cllr D Shopland Cllr D Thomas Cllr J Tonkin Mr R Westwood Cllr G Wren Ms D Yamanaka		
Non-Attendance:			
Mr G Atwell Mr A Franks Mr P Kingcott Mr B Letts Mr M Lunnon Mr A Mead	Cllr L Duddridge Cllr D Loveridge Ms S Hearne		

Mr R Mitchell Mr G Plaister Mr C Pyke Mr M Watts			

Agenda Item:	Detail:	Action:
1. Attendance and Apologies	1.1. The Chair welcomed everybody to the meeting. 1.2. The Chair announced the passing of an ex employee Mr Rob Kidson and provided a short eulogy on Rob's Board work. The Chair called for a minutes silence in respect. 1.3. Attendance & Apologies as per the above.	
2. Items additional to the Agenda	2.1. None	
3. Declarations of Interest	3.1. Chris Redding declared that one of the Boards were a building tenant of his daughter.	
4. Members of the Public	4.1 No members of the public wished to address the meeting.	
5. Approval of Minutes	5.1. The Chair advised that amendments had been made to the attendance list in the 14 March 2023 minutes following representation from Roger Barrington and Cllr Mike Stanton as well as staff members Giles Oliver and Virginie Martin who had attended but were not listed. **Cllr Caswell proposed and Stuart Kingham seconded 'to sign the updated minutes as a true and accurate reflection of the meeting held on 14 March 2023**.' **All in favour**	**RESOLUTION 01**
6. Matters Arising	6.1 Page 7 item 9.2 Anthony Betty (AB) asked about the arrangement for an SRA Scrutiny Committee which is absent following the establishment of the new Somerset Council. David Mitchell (DM) and Cllr Mike Stanton (MS) responded to say an SRA Scrutiny was not now justified and that scrutiny on SRA matters would fall within the remit of the Climate and Place Scrutiny Committee with SRA issues included in two meeting per year. The public are admitted to scrutiny so any IDB member can attend. Iain Sturdy (IS) suggested it would be possible for a Board Appointed Member Councillor to be a scrutiny member. MS agreed that such arrangements can be put in place to accommodate an IDB Somerset Councillor on the committee but there might need to be care over conflicts of interest. The next Scrutiny Committee meeting with the	

	SRA on the agenda is in June and the matter will be raised. 6.2 Peter Burden (PeB) advised that the North Somerset Levels IDB (NSLIDB) chair, Tim Bush (TB) had attended a North Somerset Council Scrutiny meeting by invitation. 6.3 There were no outstanding actions.	
7. Chair's Report	7.1 Tony Bradford, the Chair, commenced by saying that it had been a challenging year but that he was able to report that the Consortium now has in place engineering staff supplied by a grouping of Consulting Engineers called Calm. 7.2 The staff are all working well and all wanting to help each other out. The staff appear to be overloaded in winter by their accessibility to members of the public as phones are always answered by a person and calls receive prompt responses. Quite often calls to not relate to IDB matters however assistance is offered as far as it can be. 7.3 The Chair had unfortunately to report that he has had to issue a joint statement to the three Boards concerning some members poor approach to staff. He strongly reminded members to abide by the Code of Conduct and the Nolan Principles. There had been examples of correspondence to staff from members that did not abide by the code and principles. He asked members is approach contentious matters with the organisation in a constructive and not destructive manner. 7.4 The Chair announced that as from today all communication by members concerning staff matters must be addressed to himself as Chair of the Consortium. He would in combination with the vice chair deal with the matter. Any contentious communication directed straight to staff and not to the Chair would not receive a response. 7.5 With regards to the maintenance programme, the Chair believed that the programme had been completed everywhere that access allowed. He had identified that the current wet conditions commenced on 16 June 2023 and has created the 5th wettest winter in 40 years. Rainfall had been in in a series of intense storms. This wet period had lowered morale amongst the farming and rural community and he asked members to have regard to their neighbours' wellbeing. 7.6 The Chair noted that new agri-environment schemes are being rolled out, some involving payments for water storage. Flood water storage or flooding was currently happening in Burtle, Godney and Westhay and had flooded property and large areas of land. The smell from rotting grass due to flood water immersion was very noticeable and he advised anyone taking up water storage payments	

		to carefully ascertain where, when and for how long the storage would be required. He hoped that this current initiative to adapt to climate change by using storage would not be at the cost of reduced channel maintenance by the Environment Agency (EA). Storage is finite and conveyance to sea was his favoured solution. 7.7 On the topic of funding, the Chair compared the current problems in the Brue Valley with Parrett Catchment in 2012,13 and 14 and that funding now needs to be applied to the Brue Valley much as occurred in the Parrett Catchment 10 years ago. Alan Franks (Board member) who farms near Westhay has been receiving press coverage of his concerns and flooding impacts. 7.8 Climate change is an often heard topic but the Chair has not observed much action to combat the resulting problems. He observed that river channels are now in poorer condition than before climate change was a well recognised issue. Issues were particularly stark for east coast boards with soaring IDB pumping costs and failing EA assets. Pressure to make greater funding available for maintenance was a priority which could occur if Defra alter the capital/revenue spend ratio. There appears some willingness in Defra to consider it. 7.9 As always, the Chair reassured members that the IDBs will continue to make maintenance its top priority. Any incomplete and inaccessible watercourses this year will take priority next year.	
8	Comments on the January 2024 flooding	8.1 Jeff Fear (JF) queried the condition and readiness of the pumps at North Drain Pumping Station. IS reiterated the response given by the Agency at the SRA meeting on 8th March that there was more temporary pumping capacity available at North Drain than the fixed pump capacity. JF queried if the pumps were electrically powered. IS confirmed that they were electrically driven but the pumping equipment ie gearboxes and impellors also had a maintenance requirement. IS also advised that previously SRA funds had allowed critical building structure works to be undertaken to keep the site operational. Furthermore, IS and the Chairs will be meeting the EA on Thursday 14 March to review the Agency response to the current flooding problems. Andrew Gilling informed the meeting that he had also heard reports of lack of pump maintenance. IS reported local observations that the Brue flooding could be the worst ever or the worst for 10 years. In his view it's a bad event but not of the same magnitude as in the Parrett Catchment in 2013/14. Officers will continue to	

	promote works in the Brue catchment but with no flooding in recent years there has been little appetite in the EA to undertake works. In addition to the messages about resilience and adaptation from the EA, the Board's officers are asking for proper consideration of keeping water in channel, minimising overtopping and maximising the evacuation of stored water as well as supporting slow the flow. The Board's officers had in the last ten years been able to make some progress on the Brue with Brue tree work, pinch point desilting and operational changes on the Diversion. IS postulated that although 9 houses had recently flooded, if maintenance deceases and rainfall increases due to climate change, the next event will see many more properties flooded at Godney. IS has also been listening to an EFRA Committee session and there is a strong theme about resilience and adaption but he notes little mention was made of funding for adaption measures. He is also encouraging local EA staff to push back to EA headquarters that current maintenance funding allocations are not sufficient. 8.2 Stuart Kingham (SK) commented that council tax payers will be receiving their demands and some will be asking why should they pay if this flooding if occurring. IS acknowledged this issue and had also experienced a similar response about drainage rate demands. Although he could sympathise, rates and council tax had to be paid and the Boards need to do the very best they can to minimise flooding problems. 8.3 Julian Taylor (JT) reported overtopping and severe leakage through the Parrett left bank between Huntworth and Northmoor Pumping Station of an evening in the last few days. He was concerned that EA were showing limited concern about this seepage. IS responded by reassuring JT that much of the Parrett left bank is piled and has a low risk of breaching. Seepage that runs very muddy is a high risk and should be repaired as soon as possible. 8.4 David Vigar enquired as to how far and how high should we be taking our concerns. IS advised that we must try to resolve problems locally first. We should persuade all Flood Risk Management (FRM) bodies to promote works and projects; adaption, resilience and works are all required. 8.5 The Chair advised that costs for east coast boards will amount to £38m whilst extra pumping will cost £8M. The Chair will be asking ADA to include the south west in any discussions with Defra about additional funding and	

		keeping the profile of problems in the south west at a high level. 8.6 Colin Passmore (CP) referred to a number of locations of poor channel maintenance. 8.7 Anthony Betty (AnB) also observed considerable seepage across roads and in excess of his previous observations. He queried if more SRA funding should be allocated to the IDB to do a greater extent of work. IS responded that would only be possible if the organisation expanded but our priority must be the IDB duties first. IS advised was that the FRM bodies with the legal powers should be promoting the work. The SRA has no powers and has to use the statutory bodies to undertake the work. Somerset Council FRM team are overwhelmed. AB observed that any works on main river have to conform to Agency standards which he views as burdensome. 8.8 Chris Redding (CR) asked if the financial trouble and possible insolvency affecting Somerset Council will impact local boards. Maggie Hammond replied that if a section 114 order is issued the Council will still have a statutory duty to pay the Special Levy so there is very limited risk.	
9	Somerset Rivers Authority new strategy	9.1 David Mitchell (DM) provided an update on the new SRA Strategy with the benefit of a slide presentation. 9.2 DM reminded the meeting of the origins of the organisation, who are party to it and what it does. His team are himself and 3 officers to administer the governance, organisation and expenditure of the £3M annual budget. 9.3 The SRA is a partnership in the form of an unincorporated association hosted by Somerset Council now (was SCC). Funds are raised by a Somerset Council levy on Council Tax. Projects are promoted and delivered by partners. To date about £29M of funding has been provided for 250 projects across Somerset as well as funding two community engagement officers. 9.4 The new strategy is an evolution of the 20 Year Flood Action Plan from 2014. The strategy has been an 18 month project to come to fruition. There has been wide engagement with bodies and more recently public consultation which received 10,500 website visits. The core task of the new strategy, much as the Action Plan is to reduce risks and impacts of flooding across Somerset. The strategy sets out a number of themes which resemble most of the 2014 Action Plan. The Strategy is designed to protect what we have and to bridge the gap to the ultimate objectives. 9.5 The Strategy will be delivered by a new action plan that will be the result of considering how to take forward the strategy on a catchment by catchment basis filling the gaps	

	that other FRM bodies cannot fulfil. It will seek to achieve multiple benefits from better integrated solutions where possible. The challenge will be getting all the projects delivered. 9.6 The recent SRA meeting on 8th March approved next years enhanced programme which included a number of schemes that might be of particular interest to members. These included Parrett Dredging including shoulder removal, Kings Sedgemoor Bank raising, as well as a Syphons Appraisal Project and funding for Cobbs Leaze Clyce improvements. Further details are on the SRA website. 9.7 Questions and answers. Stuart Kingham wanted to know more about the responses that were received on the new strategy consultation. DM replied that responses came from all across Somerset with a larger representation from the higher age group. The online workshop received a limited response from the Levels and Moors area. DM wished to emphasise that this should not be considered a presentative sample but the views of those who responded to a general invitation. Alan Bradford asked DM to comment on the funding issues for the Bridgwater Barrier as he believed there was a reduced contribution from CIL payments (Council Infrastructure Levy) due to a downturn in housebuilding locally. DM responded that funding is primarily an Environment Agency matter but further details may be available from Somerset Council. The SRA had made limited contributions to project development work. The Chair noted that we had previously received updates from Sedgemoor Council. Will Barnard (WB) noted that with such a diversity and fragmentation of views in Somerset, it is rewarding to see a document with an overarching overview and is to be welcomed. Mike Stanton identified Will Barnard work on Moor Associations and the need to continue with such joined up arrangements. Andrew Gilling (AG) asked if other locations were looking at similar arrangements to Somerset, he was aware Gloucestershire might be interested.DM responded that he did not believe there was such a funded body but is contacted now and again by other groups. IS added that there are many water partnerships across the country but none have the uniqueness of being funded as is the SRA. We are advised by ADA to treasure it. The Chair commented that he is often contacted about the Somerset situation and issues concerning main river conveyance. Anthony Betty (AnB) asked if an increasing number of locally funded partnerships would result in the Agency spending less on FRM works. IS explained that from discussions with the Environment Agency, it is clear they are fully utilising all their funding on highly worthwhile works spending money where there is the most benefit and	

	that they also have a shortfall in funding. AB concerns are not an issue. John Harris (JH) commented on the original 20 Year flood action plan and the new 10 year strategy and enquired about thinking beyond this new 10 year strategy. DM advised the new strategy was needed as much of the original 20 year Action Plan was completed, in progress or reviewed out. Thinking is occurring beyond 10 years and the document should not be thought of being of limited timescale as the issues of adaptation and mitigation will continue beyond and the SRA will continue to support FRM colleagues in their work. DM also added that in relation to the EA undertaking additional works, his information from the EA is that they have no further capacity in this respect.	
10 North Somerset Peat Discovery Project	10.1 Phil Brewin (PB) provided a presentation on the North Somerset Council's Peat Discovery project entitled Revitalising North Somerset's Peatlands. PB apologised for the absence of Simon Bunn North Somerset Council's FRM manager who is the Project Manager but unfortunately was unable to attend due to illness. 10.2 PB commenced by saying that UK Peat Policy is a rapidly evolving topic linked to the government's ambitions for net zero and reducing carbon emissions from peatlands. Defra recently published a report from the Lowland Agricultural Peat Task Force. SWADA received a talk by the Chair of the Taskforce, Robert Caudwell last year. Government has accepted the 14 recommendations of the Taskforce and is building on the recommendations by grant aid funding 13 projects around the country that investigate how peat can be returned to a healthy condition by rewetting. This North Somerset project is one of them with an allocation of £450k. 10.3 The Taskforce report recognises the importance of water level management in the conservation of peat and reduction of carbon emissions. There is a government expectation on IDBs that water level management for peat conservation will be incorporated in future updates to water level management plans. The Taskforce report also emphasises the importance of any changes in water levels for peat conservation must also be safe and not put local communities at additional risk of flooding. 10.4 Government is also supporting the science of peat management with a revised peat mapping exercise which is in progress to properly identify peat soils and soils with high organic content. 10.5 North Somerset Council has taken the lead, along with the North Somerset Levels and Moors Partnership (of which North Somerset Levels IDB is an active member) to apply for this funding. The investigation will be across all the North Somerset Moors in Gordano Valley, Tickenham, Nailsea and Puxton. 10.6 There are 6 workstreams in the project; Workstream 1 is survey Workstream 2 is an hydrological investigation	

	Workstream 3 is an hydraulic modelling exercise Workstream 4 is looking at infrastructure Work stream 5 is an economic assessment and landowner guidance Workstream 6 is the final report. The project must be completed by 31 January 2025. 10.7 The hydraulic investigation will assess the availability of water in summer droughts and examine the potential impact of changing water levels on impacts on communities and infrastructure. It will look to see if changes can be made to water levels without increasing flood risk. The project will also explore how developing new approaches and new technologies for water level management could lead to better outcomes. Increasing demands on water level management are likely to require more intensive operation in the future and so investment in new technology will be required which could possibly be provided with grant aided funding. 10.8 PB identified the demand on Board Member and IDB Officer time to work on the project as a concern. 10.9 JH took the view that tight timescales can help to focus the mind. WB commented that there will be a wealth of information which may provide insights relevant to other areas. Barrie Bryer (BB) commented that the current physical status of Somerset Peatlands was very much what east coast boards were hoping to achieve.	
11. Pawlett Hams : EDF Managed Realignment Site	11.1 No representative of EDF was able to attend so the Chair asked if attending members were able to provide information to the meeting. 11.2 IS provided information to the meeting based on the current written consultation received from EDF. He believed the changes will have a major impact on the Hams as well as an impact on the size of the Board's area. The Development Consent Order (DCO) for the site proposed a fish deterrence system at the intake to limit fish mortality from pump impellor damage. EDF are now looking to vary the DCO by not installing a deterrence device and looking to achieve environmental gain from the establishment of a managed realignment site on Pawlett Hams. The tidal bank would be breached and a tidal saltmarsh allowed to form on a majority of the Hams. The Board has sent in an interim consultation response but no decision has yet been reached. The decision will be made by the Secretary of State. 11.3 WB as a landowner/manager in the Hams advised that 930 acres of the Hams will revert to saltmarsh under the proposal. There is some lack of clarity as to why there is a realignment proposal. There will be impacts for managing floodwater as well as the fresh water feed route. WB has spent 10 years creating	

	and leading on the provision of a freshwater habitat on the Hams and reflects a similar negativity towards the project as is held by many of his neighbours. 11.4 Further comments were made by other attendees. Colin Passmore (CP) compared this proposal with the Steart Realignment site and the less favourable gain there would be by realigning on the Hams. Most of the Hams tidal bank is in good condition. Julian Taylor (JT) asked if the DCO had been varied yet as he understood there is be other factors at work. He was assured the changes had yet to be approved. Peter Burden (PB) expressed some concern that there could be 3 realignment sites on this part of the coast if the Bristol Port proposal also goes ahead. IS responded that the Steart site provides compensatory habitat for saltmarsh losses caused by coastal squeeze and would allow sites that 'hold the line' to proceed elsewhere in the Severn Estuary.	
12 CEO and RFO Overview	12.1 The CEO, Iain Sturdy (IS) provided an overview of the current staffing structure and roles with the aid of slides. Posts were colour coded to identify filled, recently filled and vacant posts. Maggie Hammond had taken the post of Business Support Manager, Nicky Cornish had moved into a role as Rates Assistant, Jody Farthing had joined as a receptionist. There is now an Operations Assistant Charlie Ford as well as two Deputy Supervisors Ben Harris and Justin Lockyer. Unfortunately we have lost a new recruit to the North Somerset Area. A number of engineering posts remain vacant however we have external consultants undertaking these roles including work on any peat projects. There has unfortunately been difficulty in recruiting a Clerk's Assistant as it is a very unusual position with a very limited workforce pool. WB suggested a title change may be required. 12.2 IS recapped on the 1400 km extent of maintenance work undertaken by the three boards annually as well as the operation of the 700 water level control structures that also are located in the Boards' areas and operated by staff. 12.3 IS made particular mention of software the Board has developed to record asset and operational information by staff in the field. This provides all staff with up to date information as well as an historic record of past actions available for reference when the Board receives external enquiries or disputes. IS requested that members call in when structures need adjusting so records can be kept and levels monitored. WB commented that he has always had a good response to requests when made.	

	12.4 IS also provide some slides of the Parrett Dredging work undertaken by a water injection methodology known by the acronym WID. This January a trial was also conducted to remove bank shoulder siltation berms in the Parrett and agitate the arisings into suspension after their deposit in the channel bed. This trial had been fully successful as monitoring equipment showed all deposits to have been removed. 12.5 The Business Support Manager, Maggie Hammond, (MH) provided a brief summary of the activities of the Business Support Team and clarified the telephone responses were concentrated into certain times of the year and day. 12.6 MH also provided an update of the Board's overall income sources but also highlighted that 18.4% is straightaway paid to the Environment Agency as the statutory precept. 12.7 Members generally commented that having the phone answered by a person was preferred as well as the personal response provided by a receptionist. The Chair also congratulated the Business Support Manager on the clear, precise and well presented information that she provides for the Board.	
13 AOB	13.1 JH asked if there will be an impact locally from the lobbying on government by Local Government Association's Special Interest Group for authorities with IDBs and the desire to have a funding mechanism that does not affect local authorities funding. The Chair and the CEO explained that the issues had arisen from the electricity and pump damage costs that had occurred to east coast IDBs from this winter's flood events and changes in electricity charges. These costs were falling on ratepayers and special levy authorities and causing great hardship. IS took the view that locally the IDBs have few mechanical and electrical assets and so our special increase to Somerset Council was single figures and in line with index rises. This may help to reduce concerns in both Somerset councils. IS also reported that he had asked ADA to remember that asset infrastructure damage costs were also at elevated levels in Somerset from this winter's flooding and also needed to be flagged to Defra. 13.2 The Chair advised that some Boards were seeking to increase their revenue base by rating of an expanded board area. IS commented that in relation to this topic, there is currently a Defra consultation seeking views on the adoption of a modified land valuation system that would facilitate the expansion of IDB areas or the creation of new	

	ones. IS will be responding to this consultation by its close on 19 April. 13.3 Anthony Betty wished to offer his thanks to the Chair for all that he does for the Board and the help he provides to members. 13.4 The Chair and members wish to offer their appreciation for Jeff Fear's return to board activities and wished him well. The Chair paid particular thanks to Jeff Fear for his support and counsel in dealing with issues. 13.5 The Chair also wished to alert the meeting to the lack of any landowning representative now on the Wessex Regional Flood and Coastal Committee and advised members to watch for adverts of vacancies in the press and Farmers Weekly. The Chair stated that he was no longer a member as he had served the maximum term of nine years. Furthermore, he wished to thank all appointed and elected members for keeping the Boards running and their continued attendance.	
14. Date of Next Meeting	March 2025	
	The meeting closed at 21.40.	

Annex:

A. SDBC AGM – Table of Outstanding Actions.

CHAIRMAN.. Date ……………………………………..

ANNEX A TO
SDBC ANNUAL MEETING MINUTES
DATED 12 MAR 24

SDBC AGM – TABLE OF OUTSTANDING ACTIONS

Action Number:	Action:	Actionee: