

**Minutes of a meeting of SWADA held at the Oaktree Arena, Highbridge at 10.30am
on Wednesday 10 December 2014**

Chairman: AED Bradford

1. **Attendance and Apologies:** as recorded in the attendance book. Additional apologies from M Young, G Littleton, J Drewett and C Williams.
2. **Chairman's Introduction:** The Chairman welcomed guests including Henry Cator, Rachel Burden, Ian Russell, Martin Buckle, Phil Holms, Tim Farr and Alan Lovell. Members were advised that Wessex RFCC will announce its new Chairman shortly. Dr J Venables retires as Chief Executive of ADA at the end of March; SWADA conveys thanks to Dr Venables for her dedication and hard work. Welcome Ian Moodie back to ADA from the NFU; he will undertake the role of Operations Manager from March. Gratitude was conveyed to Jeff Fear for his support, assistance and advice as Vice Chairman and Brian Watkis for services and continued support as Secretary of SWADA. Somerset Rivers Authority: gratitude was conveyed to Peter Maltby, Jeff Fear and Ray Adlam for their support with the formation of the SRA, which at times involved attending meetings with very short notice. All members have given their time voluntarily. The Chairman opined that he would like the IDBs to remain unchanged and intact, working alongside the SRA. Gratitude was conveyed to Rachel Burden and the Environment Agency (the Agency) team for the river dredging, which was completed ahead of schedule; dredging should continue for the conveyance of water. The Chairman opined that consideration should be given to changing 'accommodating water' to 'evacuating water'.
3. **Minutes of the meeting held 18 June 2014:** (appended) having previously been circulated the minutes were signed by the Chairman as a true and correct record of the meeting held.
4. **Matters Arising:** B Watkis (BW) advised that the Branch Constitution has been in formulation since March 2014; the Trent Branch of the Association has finalised a copy which Clerks are to review and finalise. One point to note with the Trent model is Trent opt for a three year elections, whereas SWADA has a bi-annual election. Carrie-Anne Porter was thanked for the assistance provided to the Secretary throughout the year.
5. **Annual Business:** a) **Election of Officers – term 2014/16:** **Chairman:** D Spicer proposed, M Winslade Seconded 'that Tony Bradford be elected Chairman of the South Western Branch of ADA for the term 2014-16'. There being no other nominations, this motion was agreed unanimously **RESOLUTION 1** **Vice-Chairman:** D Spicer proposed, J Healey seconded 'that Jeff Fear be elected Vice-Chairman of the South Western Branch of ADA for the term 2014-16.' There being no other nomination, this motion was agreed unanimously **RESOLUTION 2** **Secretary:** M Winslade proposed, J Fear seconded 'that Brian Watkis be elected Secretary of the South Western Branch of ADA for the term 2014-16.' There being no other nominations this motion was agreed unanimously **RESOLUTION 3** Mr Bradford thanked members for the support of the officers and confirmed that all appointments are accepted on a two year term.
b) **Financial Report:** (appended) having previously been circulated BW provided a brief overview of the report, which was duly noted by those present.
c) **Subscriptions for ensuing year:** (appended) BW advised that a review of membership will be undertaken through the forthcoming year, encouraging associate membership following formation of the Somerset Rivers Authority. C Redding proposed, P Thorne seconded 'that subscriptions for 2015/16 remain unchanged to achieve an income of £2,900.' Vote: majority **RESOLUTION 4**
6. **Secretary's Report:** see item 4
7. **Report of ADA Conference 12 November 2014:** The conference opening address was by **Albert Vermuë (AV)**, EUWMA and Dutch Association of Regional Water Authorities (DWA). The Dutch have a very interesting system; the organisation also works with water quality and quantity. Awareness amongst the general population is a problem for the DWA, as the public are very aware of flooding matters etc. The challenge for the SRA is there are approx. 30,000 people involved in IDB areas, not all of whom know of the works of the Drainage Boards. DWR sometimes get frustrated by the limitations of the bureaucracy involved with drainage, much in the same way as in Somerset. Approx. 5% of funding is from local government, 15% national government, the remainder is collected from local taxes. Policy coherence; there is no direct link between planning and DWA. Consent is given for housing and water management has to be provided. **David Porter OBE (DP)**, Director of Operations, Rivers Agency Northern Ireland. The RANI has approx. 680km of maintenance designated watercourses and sea defences; 26km of sea defences. They consider themselves to be a civil engineering organisation rather than an environmental body. They have moved from drainage to flood management engineers. Guest Speaker was **Professor Brian Collins**, Professor of Engineering Policy at University College London, addressed members at lunch, advising that the strategic approach is facing climate change problems with the impact of increased rainfall.

NWS advised that the **National Audit Office** has produced a report (November 2014) and that Somerset appears as a case study; N Stevens and colleagues were interviewed (by telephone) as well as colleagues within the Agency. National Audit Office review; key points to note (this list is not exhaustive):

- funding was a key issue, local flood groups are crucial in taking control of the events using strategic emergency response plans
- Local community flood plans are essential to avoiding panic and anxiety, and to check that vulnerable people are identified and assisted
- Flood warnings are also important to help co-ordinate flood response across different agencies
- Regular communication with communities both before, during and after flood events through a range of channels, not watercourses is important from all flood risk management authorities

Recommendations from the report include:

- Information received and the balance between capital and revenue, noting that emergency expenditure is not an efficient way of improving flood risk management
- Lengthening the planning cycle, i.e. bringing greater certainty to the funding cycle so that there are 5 or 6 year plans to allow future planning with schemes and works on the ground
- A review of the partnership funding approach
- Making strategies more transparent and clear to people, allowing communities to understand; also to review the number of strategies, including Water Level Management Plans
- More modelling around asset management, which the IDB would agree with if it was understood that watercourses are also assets
- Flood modelling data should be more widely available to businesses and the public

8. Reports from SWADA Representatives on ADA Board and other Bodies on which SWADA has been represented:

TB advised that he voiced concerns for operations within Somerset at the ADA Executive meeting, which will be summarised by Henry Cator in Item 10.

M Winslade, Somerset Water Management Partnership (SWMP): M Winslade will continue as representative on the SWMP, however at this time there is nothing to report due to working towards the Somerset Rivers Authority.

Cllr A Fraser advised that the SWMP Chairman has changed from A Gibson to Cllr David Hall.

S Foyle advised that the SWMP will become the communication link for the SRA.

9. Guest Speakers: Dr Rachel Burden, EA Somerset Levels and Moors 20 Year Plan Action Manager advised that she is responsible for delivering the FAP actions including dredging and flood maintenance. A presentation was made with the following points of note (this list is not exhaustive):

Issues and concerns expressed during the flooding of 2013 are being addressed through the FAP with additional funding. Special projects within the 20 year FAP include dredging and river maintenance; dredging began with funding from central Government. Ten teams were deployed in total to achieve a dredge of 8km to a satisfactory standard, 100m³ of material was removed during the dredge. The material was returned to the land to act as a natural soil improver to approx. 150hc of land. The work completed will benefit 4 main communities: Northmoor, Currymoor, the A361 and the railway line. Weekly drop-in sessions were arranged for the public to address the Environment Agency directly.

Other achievements from the FAP include:

- Aller Drove: improvement works in this area have been completed
- Westonzoyland: improvement works are currently being undertaken
- Dunbal: a platform at I is currently being constructed to hold pumps as required in a safe and efficient manner.

Parrett and Tone areas have received extensive asset repairs i.e. riverbanks, spillways and pumping stations damaged due to the extent and duration of flooding.

Works have also been completed within the Axe Brue area as part of a multi-£m programme of works completed by 31 October 2014, to create a pre-flood level of protection for all assets that were damaged during the flooding of 2013/14.

Improving the capacity of the Sowy/King Sedgemoor Drain is the next major project within the FAP, to take water from the Parrett through the Sowy. The Somerset Partners have been awarded £6m from Local Growth Funding, to look at increasing the capacity of the Sowy/KSD; a public consultation will be held at 2pm this afternoon for views on how this funding should be utilised.

A372: Somerset County Council is undertaking a project to raise the road and install culverts under the road to enable the road to remain open during a flood event as experienced in 2013/14.

Somerset County Council are leading a feasibility study into the A38 road bridge; a large lump of concrete acts as a restriction however it now is scouring out the foundations of the bridge.

A Lovell, RFCC Chairman, advised that the public consultations that have taken place hosted by the Environment Agency as a result of the FAP were very important in raising awareness and allowing the public to become involved in the flood relief process.

Martin Buckle, Project Manager Somerset Flood Action Plan, advised that development of proposals for the Somerset Rivers Authority have come a long way, but there are still challenges ahead. In summary:

- Key requirement for the SRA is to ensure that the key partners are in agreement with proposals. Key partners include SCC, District Councils, the Drainage Boards, Environment Agency, Natural England and Defra.
- Identifying what is needed in Somerset with regard to flood risk.
- It is envisaged that the SRA will empower the existing Flood Risk Authorities to take on a broader role, however it is not the intention of the SRA to diminish the responsibilities of the partners, nor those of the riparian owners who will always have a key role in flood risk management and drainage within the future.
- The scope and role of the SRA is the delivery of a co-ordinated business plan that will deliver enhanced maintenance of river channels, important ordinary watercourses and river flow banks across the whole of Somerset to include dredging, maintenance of dredged profiles, as well as overseeing an associated common works programme that will pull together the activity of the partners.
- It is intended the SRA will include an overview of planning, land management and building local resilience.
- In Lincolnshire the strategic partnership has a very high level of integration between planning and flood risk management, which could be built on as the SRA is implemented in Somerset.
- Potential for precepting to raise local funds.
- It is intended that the drainage boards would continue to set budgets for work programmes, however Special Levy would be placed on SRA for funding via precepting mechanism. The work that has been delivered to date has been possible due to additional Government funding. The proposition for future works is dependent on local funding rather than Government funding.
- All proposals have been heard by Somerset County Council cabinet as well as the local partners; a Memorandum of Understanding has been signed by the local partners as well as Defra and DCLG. The government has agreed to make £1.9m available on condition that £800k is made available by local partners. There is a commitment from the government to review funding with local partners in July 2015.
- There is no intention for works to be undertaken by bodies other than those currently i.e. IDB's, EA and local councils. Mechanisms for additional funding are required as there is a limited level of funding to allow necessary works to be completed.
- The level of funding available locally is not going to be sufficient to meet expectations of local communities and businesses, giving them the confidence that they will not be exposed to the same events that they have been exposed to in previous years.

Ian Russell, EA/ADA Partnership Manager, Lincolnshire. Some issues faced in Lincs in 2007 are similar to those affecting Somerset; key issues to addressing the problems included funding.

- The way forward was communities talking to each other and County Councils, EA and IDB's working together with joint funding to enable works to be undertaken both post-flood and pro-actively.
- Public meetings were held, although organisations were not working collaboratively which was recognised in the Pitt Review to be addressed.
- Guidance from Legal and Procurement teams of EA stated that the IDB would need to apply for works as any other supplier; however this was not acceptable to the IDB. The way forward, legally was to use the Flood and Water Management Act 2010.
- Partnership working is about getting the most out of working resources to benefit local communities.
- PSCA is an enabling document that states that one risk management authority may perform a flood risk function for another risk management authority. Risk M A are identified as EA, IDBs, Lead local flood authority, District Council, Water Company and Highways authorities.
- Key benefits are a legal basis to practice and deliver in a partnership manner, all maintenance works, to achieve value for money.
- The PSCA allows flexibility for all maintenance works and incident response

Phil Holms, Trustee of the Hawk & Owl Trust and Axe Brue IDB member, provided a presentation on the works of the Hawk & Owl Trust at Shapwick Moor which included the following (this list is not exhaustive):

- Approx. 140 acres of land, one field is identified within an SSSI area
- HLS target is for wintering birds; land purchased in 2007 – previously arable land
- The site is managed throughout the year due to crushed stone being laid on terra sheeting
- To increase the botany of the SSSI area, the H&OT work closely with Natural England
- The facilities include two new hides on a sand burtle
- Water Level enhancement works with under-draining
- Volunteers are important to the working of the H&OT for tasks such as hedge planting
- Education programme is being devised by an Education Officer for works with school children, to enable them to undertake practical work for enhanced understanding

- Monitoring and survey works are important to understand how the site evolves as well as monitoring other wildlife on the site including vulnerable wildlife i.e. water voles and otters
- Ditching work has been undertaken with removal of trees and other obstructions to the watercourses
- In the future the H&OT would like to see increased wildlife covering the site

Nick Stevens, CEO Somerset Drainage Boards Consortium: see item 7.

10. Address by Henry Cator, Chairman ADA: a summary of the meeting was presented with the following points of note (this list is not exhaustive):

- ADA has expressed to Government that maintenance will not look after itself, it has to be done regularly. The Treasury fails to understand this, Defra does not ask for more funding for this infrastructure for the country, the Environment Agency are in the position of operating authority for Defra. Lord Smith, last Chairman of EA, was convinced that the policies being adopted were fit for purpose; unfortunately local authorities could not find the match funding required for the EA to undertake the necessary work programme on the Somerset Levels.
- The problems experienced in Somerset are not local, they are national, which is why ADA has chosen to write a new business plan.
- Jean Venables will retire in April; gratitude was expressed for her hard work in increasing the profile of ADA and opening important lines of communication.
- Innis Thompson will become the new Chief Exec of ADA with Ian Moodie as Technical Manager.
- Executive and Strategic function of ADA is better served by the incorporation, with a smaller Board.
- ADA will continue to be critical, yet constructive for the future.
- EA congratulated on the dredging works undertaken in the Parrett IDB area.
- Anything over 40mm of rain within a 24 hour period will identify weakness in the systems; this becoming the norm for rainfall. Systems, and the conveyance need to be maintained regularly.
- ADA is not convinced that formation of the Somerset Rivers Authority is necessary; it may be that to reinforce the links between the IDB and the Environment Agency, to then persuade Treasury that proper money needs to be invested in the systems. There is concern that control of IDB's will be removed. Structure and funding will need to be ring-fenced for the importance of maintenance on all watercourses, even those labelled as low priority.
- Local expertise and knowledge should not be taken away by the SRA.
- The one thing that anyone who has been flooded does not want is to be flooded again.

The Chairman thanked all guest speakers for their presentations.

11. Any Other Business: None

12. Date of next meetings: Wednesday April 29 2015 Oaktree Arena, Highbridge and Wednesday 25 November 2015 – venue to be confirmed.

It was agreed unanimously that this SWADA branch would make a presentation to Dr Venables at the Executive meeting to be held in March.

The Chairman thanked all present for their attendance, extending thoughts to residents who have experienced flooding and not yet been able to return to their homes.

With wishes for a Healthy and Happy Christmas, the Chairman closed the meeting at 13.05pm.

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Chairman

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Date