

**SOUTH WESTERN BRANCH
OF THE
ASSOCIATION OF DRAINAGE AUTHORITIES**

Chairman: J E Fear
Secretary: M Hammond

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**MINUTES OF THE SWADA MEETING HELD AT EASTWOOD PARK HOUSE, FALFIELD
08 MAY 2024 AT 14.00**

Attendance:			
Cllr M Riddle Mr T Bush Cllr J Taylor Mr D Tratt Mr I Sturdy Mr I Thomson Mr J Harris D Gowler S Hearne Mr P Holms Cllr C Hunt Cllr M Stanton	SWADA & LSIDB NSLIDB Parrett IDB Axe Brue IDB SDBC ADA NSLIDB Axe Brue & Parrett IDB NSLIDB Axe Brue IDB NSLIDB SRA and Parrett IDB	Cllr T Williams Mr S Kingham R Burden Mrs M Hammond Mr Matthew Wall C Wild Mr J Hore Mr M Williams V Bailey G Taute J Thomas J Mathews J Druett	LSIDB Parrett IDB EA SDBC SDBC LSIDB LSIDB LSIDB LSIDB LSIDB LSIDB LSIDB LSIDB
Apologies:			
Mr J Fear Mr Eric Adams Mr T Bradford Mr B Bryer Cllr H Bruce Mr B Clapp Cllr R Morgan C Newill J Perrin Mr M Watts R Westwood Cllr G Wren Mr P Hooper Mr N Stevens Mr A Betty	SWADA & Axe Brue IDB NSLIDB Parrett IDB Parrett IDB Parrett IDB Axe Brue IDB Parrett IDB Natural England Parrett IDB Axe Brue IDB NSLIDB Parrett IDB EA SDBC Parrett IDB	J Cato Braunton Marsh Members Mr R Edwards Cllr B Filmer Mr A Gilling Cllr L Leavey Mr D Mitchell Cllr M Pepperall Mr J Stradling Cllr D Thomas Mrs Wendy Welland Cllr Richard Wilkins Mr Trevor Whitcombe Cllr J Tonkin	NSLIDB EA Axe Brue IDB Axe Brue IDB Parrett IDB SRA NSLIDB Axe Brue IDB NSLIDB Axe Brue IDB Parrett IDB Axe Brue IDB NSLIDB

Agenda Item:	Detail:	Action:
1. Attendance and Apologies	1.1 As per the above registers 1.2 Matthew Riddle (MR), Vice Chairman of SWADA welcomed everyone to the meeting. The chairman Jeff Fear became suddenly ill a number of months ago. He is recovering slowly and will hopefully join us at future meetings. Our best wishes are sent to Jeff.	
2. Chair's introduction	2.1 The Chair welcomed everyone to Eastwood Park, an historic house and was the home	

	<p>of the Earl of Liverpool a Prime Minister of this country. One of the things he dealt with was the Corn Laws. We however are dealing with Climate Change.</p> <p>2.2 MR thanked Colin Taylor from the EA for today's visit that he hosted. The two big takeaways from the visit are if we are going to mitigate climate change, we need more partnership working and building structures with more than one purpose.</p> <p>2.3 MR introduced Cllr Mike Barnes – the chairman of the Lower Severn IDB and thanked him and the officers of LSIDB for organising the day.</p>	
3. Minutes of Previous Meeting	<p>3.1. Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held 29 November 2023 were accepted and signed by the Chair as a true and correct record of the Meetings held.</p> <p>Proposed Stuart Kingham, seconded Tim Bush 'that the minutes be signed as a true record of the meeting held on 29 November 2023' All agreed.</p>	RESOLUTION 01
4. Matters Arising	<p>4.1. Outstanding action 1 – revisit constitution and look at subscriptions in light of the new Unitary Authority for Somerset. Ian Moodie confirmed that there will be a revised model constitution in the Summer, which we can refine for local needs</p> <p>4.2 Outstanding Action 2 – David Mitchell to ask the new Unitary Authority about membership of SWADA . This action has been passed to the Flood and Water Service Manager to respond. . Maggie Hammond (MH) confirmed that Somerset Council would like to be members of SWADA.</p> <p>4.3 Outstanding Action 3 – to set up a meeting to scope out the role of SWADA. Iain Sturdy read out the current role of the branch. These will be used as a starting point for the meeting.</p> <p>4.4 At this point the Chaiman agreed to combine item 7 and 10.</p>	<p>ACTION 22/11/2022A01 Hold for later action</p> <p>ACTION 22/11/2022 A02 Closed</p> <p>ACTION 20230518 A01 outstanding</p>
5. Finance Update	<p>5.1 MH confirmed that the bank account balance is £2,349.99 and it has been fully reconciled.</p> <p>5.2 Income - Somerset Council is still to pay its subscription for last year. The Environment Agency has not paid their subscription.</p> <p>5.3 Expenditure – All invoices have been paid.</p> <p>5.4 Subscriptions for 2024/25. Maggie asked the members what they thought the level for the 24/25 subscriptions should be.</p>	

	<p>5.5 Proposed Chairman, seconded Vicky Bailey ‘that the subscription for 2024/25 remain the same as the previous year. All in favour</p> <p>5.6 The accounting year for SWADA was changed to end on 31st March. The constitution, item 7 says that the accounts will be reported to and approved at the Annual Meeting. These meetings are usually held in October/November which means the figures are over six months old.</p> <p>5.7 Proposed Stuart Kingham, seconded Peter Burden ‘to amend the constitution item 7 to read “.The accounts shall be drawn up by the Hon. Secretary / Treasurer and reported to and approved by the next available meeting following 31st March. All in favour</p>	<p>RESOLUTION 02</p> <p>RESOLUTION 03</p>
6. Membership by local authorities.	<p>6.1 The current membership of SWADA is made up of drainage boards within the south west, Somerset Council and the EA. The question is should we be inviting other authorities to join SWADA?</p> <p>6.2 Innes Thomson – We need to think about the overall concept of the branches. To be a branch member you are a member of ADA. So maybe ADA needs to be inviting those councils to think about ADA membership rather than SWADA.</p> <p>6.3 In the current financial climate for councils joining ADA at approximately £500 may be too much. Other District Council have rejoined as they see the power that ADA has representing them to DEFRA.</p> <p>6.4 Innes to work with Maggie to identify the councils we need to contact.</p> <p>6.5 Iain Sturdy – should we make these decisions after the executive meeting to discuss the future of SWADA?</p> <p>6.6 Innes Thomson – The RFCC for Lower Severn and the Wessex area are members of ADA. Each of those RFCC's there is a representative from each of the Councils. Those representatives are by default members of ADA. They could technically come to this meeting.</p>	
7. Report from ADA Board of Directors and ADA representative	7.1. Rebecca Horsington was online and Innes Thomson was at the meeting in person. The Chairman thanked Rebecca for all of her work for SWADA	

	<p>7.2 Innes read Rebecca's notes from 5th March. The next meeting is July and the last meeting of the year is in October.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There was a question about if members would like the ADA Gazette in hard copy. It was agreed to keep hard copies. • ADA willing to support DEFRA with the Flood Recovery money. • Proposals to take DRS forward – Innes Thopson to discuss later. • Continued drive to come closer to the Associations of Suds Authorities. The next stage is crucial, the preparation of the business case to bring the two associations together as one. This will take some time and the final decision will be taken by members of ADA and ASA at their separate AGM's. <p>7.3 DEFRA update from Will Harrington was talking about the land value consultation (update to follow). Following the Prime Minister's announcement at NFU conference he spoke about the £75m funding to IDB's in 2024/25 (update to follow). Will also spoke about the National Flood Management project – more to follow</p> <p>7.4 EA update from Ian Hodge in the aftermath of the winter flooding, they have carried out around 48,000 inspections post flooding and 1,100 assets were damaged. The damaged assets amounted to around £135 million of damage. This is unlikely to attract additional funding and they need to understand how to fund these within the EA. They won't be able to repair everything.</p> <p>7.5 The EA have said that 98% of assets should be at target condition but only 89% are at target condition. The EA are aware that the assets are at a diminishing state of repair and billions of flood risk assets are near a tipping point where every time there is an emergency we are spending more on the emergency than in a pre-planned routine maintenance management of the assets.</p> <p>7.6 Next year the EA are expecting the same funding which is a cut due to inflation. DEFRA are saying they will have to hold fire until the next spending review period 2026-2031 where we are expecting to see a better balance between maintenance and operational spend and capital spend.</p> <p>7.7 There is a new framework agreement which has been announced in March due to difficulties with the EA frameworks that they operate with. This framework is called asset operate, maintain and response framework, designed for small to medium works.</p>	
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	<p>7.8 Ian Hodge said that there was a problem in Somerset and some works were being hampered by red tape. It is good that this is being recognised and talked about at a national EA level.</p> <p>7.9 Ian's last point was the use of PSCA's. EA senior management want to see these used more, linked to our help with process.</p> <p>7.10 ADA update - Innes Thomson stated that the past six months have been busy.</p> <p>7.11 Land Valuation Statutory Instrument – terribly technical piece of legislation that sits under the Environment Act 2021. It would allow drainage boards to step outside their district to operate sections of water ways outside their district and recuperate rates. It also allows for new drainage boards/water level management boards to be established. This can also be used if there is de-maining of main rivers. IDB's could take over de-mained rivers, add them to their district and raise drainage rates. The key to this is Local Agreement. This has been through consultation with no show stoppers. It now needs to go through an affirmative process in Parliament.</p> <p>7.12 Local Government Association special interest group has been set up to discuss concerns around the Special Levy payments. Sedgemoor Council was concerned about the special levy value. Another 15-20 councils have the same concern. For one council the special levy is 60% of their spend and for another council they had a 30% in the levy when councils are capped at a 4.99% council tax increase. This group of councils has agreed that the system is wrong and it is not the fault of IDB's. Special Levy used to be covered by the Rate Support Grant, which has gradually tapered to zero. Michael Gove MP has accepted that a solution is required.</p> <p>7.13 ADA have been lobbying Offgem on the electricity standing charges. They have agreed that there is an anomaly for IDB's. They are thinking about this.</p> <p>7.14 Drainage Rating System (DRS) operates on a very old platform which will shut down in March. We need to transfer to the new platform. Kings Lynn has already done this. Good news DEFRA has said that the cost of this transfer could qualify as a cost draw down on £75m funding to IDB's.</p> <p>7.15 There is a new documentary film on the ADA website. Innes asked for people to take a look and let others know it is there.</p>	
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	<p>7.16 ADA had a recent meeting with the Department of Housing & Levelling Up around audits. The smaller authority audit threshold is £6.5m. If turnover is more than this then a full audit is required. Four IDB's are above this and it costs a lot for a full audit (approximately £100,000). Ideally, we would like the threshold to be £10m.</p> <p>7.17 For information next week there will be an all-party parliamentary meeting, by invitation only to discuss sustainable flood and drought management.</p> <p>7.18 ADA new committees are in place. Policy committee sits on 22nd May 2024. The Advisory Committee will be a business advisory committee to ADA.</p> <p>7.19 Good Governance Guide update on its way in a couple of months.</p> <p>7.20 £75m funding pledged by the PM is progressing at pace. There are two strands to it. One = recovery strand which is more simple. It is for sunk costs for the IDB's that have been hit hard for the past six months and should be available in the next three to four months. Strand two is the difficult bit and is to be spent on equipment that is life expired and benefits the agricultural sector where you would not normally attract any GIA for that piece of equipment. The money will need to be spent by 31st March 2025 which will be a huge challenge.</p> <p>7.21 The following questions were asked</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the £75m going to happen? – The PM has promised it. • What is the preferred method for changing the names of IDB's to WLM Boards? ADA are interested in minor legislative changes in the Land Drainage Act to recognise that IDB's don't just drain water they are also water resource managers. You can only raise rates for drainage, technically you cannot charge for bringing water to landowners. • The LGA special interest group, what is the follow on from that meeting? Once a month that group meet. There are 31 members. They are jointly applying pressure on ministers to take action. At the meeting last week, the Chairman agreed to prepare a letter from all to the Secretary of State. • The 10% cut in budgets for maintenance is a cut on last year's budget. In Wessex 40% of what was asked for was given. The revenue budget will only be about 36% of what is needed. • Regards to Iain Hodge's red tape – we have a project to test this on, the EA SOWY project. There is a challenging piece left to be done and Iain Sturdy would welcome any 	
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	<p>influence to help local teams with red tape with this work using a PSCA or IDB powers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The new drainage board valuation tool – SDBC looked at with some information from Ian Moodie. If it is applied to an existing drainage board area it does not bring in any extra income, it is just the balance between special levy and rates that could change and it is not compulsory. • The all-party parliamentary group – Iain Sturdy was interested on how people were invited and got onto the group. Invites go out to all MPs and all members of the Upper House. If we are lucky, we will get a dozen from that group. Next week there will be three speakers; one talking about catchment style farming, Innes talking about legislation requirements and Steve Thompson talking about strategic drought and flood management. There was a plea from Iain Sturdy that the discussion doesn't go down the route of abandonment = rewinding = low cost flood risk management. <p>7.21 The Chairman thanked Innes and Rebecca and the team at ADA</p>	
8. LSIDB Pumping Station Refurbishment Programme	<p>8.1 James Thomas LSIDB shared his slides on the pumping stations refurbishment programme</p> <p>8.2 There are six pumping stations on this programme. Two have been completed and four are still to be done. Two of these should be completed this year.</p> <p>8.2 Comments have been invited from stakeholders. Organisational capabilities have been expanded.</p> <p>8.3 Funding sources – grant funding has been exhausted. Public Works Loan Board approval has been received which will partially fund the refurbishment along with rate rises along with the liquidation of all the Boards investments. If the claim to the £75m fund is successful it will lessen the impact on the rate payers.</p> <p>8.4 James shared the reasons for the need to refurbish the pumping stations;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1970's build with old tech • Replacement parts are difficult to source • Bespoke parts have been made • Automated weed screen cleaning benefit • Telemetry systems • Public safety • New design will be fish friendly • Eel regulations compliant • The pumping stations cover many hectares <p>8.5 Some of the challenges are;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lead in times for equipment have increased significantly 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inflation pressures • Resourcing people as well as parts <p>8.6 The following questions were asked;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are the pumps discharging into the tidal estuary? All the stations discharge into an open channel. • Eel access and hydraulic flaps were discussed earlier in the day. James said that they close slower and allow elvers the chance to pass through the flap valves. <p>8.7 There being no other questions the Chairman thanked James for his presentation.</p>	
9. Updates from member organisations	<p>9.1 Iain Sturdy gave an update from the Somerset Drainage Boards Consortium.</p> <p>9.2 It has been a long, wet winter. Some landowners have not seen their grass since October. There has been a new focus of flood risk activities in the Brue catchment area. The duration and extent of flooding is large. Quite a bit of the flooding was due to Main River flood banks and assets which were not up to scratch.</p> <p>9.3 It has been a wet Spring. Summer pen was a challenge as we still have standing water. Normally summer pen comes in on 1st April but we are still not there in some places</p> <p>9.4 We have had some successes throughout the year. All maintenance completed despite all of the difficulties. We considered bidding for some of the Flood Recovery Funds but our costs were standby and callout as the pumping stations are EA assets and therefore won't be making a bid.</p> <p>9.5 Working in Partnership through the SRA. We have a PSCA with EA to undertake maintenance dredging on the River Parrett Main River (Water Injection Dredging). This year we will re-tender the work. We did some trials on how to enhance the dredging and will take those results to the new contract.</p> <p>9.6 Regarding recruitment we are struggling to recruit engineers. We are using Calm Engineering (External Suppliers) for our detailed technical engineering. We have filled some posts and still have a vacancy for a deputy clerk.</p> <p>9.7 The Boards have settled down nicely and we nearly have full membership. NSLIDB have elections this year</p> <p>9.8 The £75m – we have been working with the EA re asset condition. The statistics show a</p>	

	<p>target for asset condition is to have 98% in target condition and 94% is the currently reported figure. What is the target condition? Some have no target others have a target of poor or very poor. Meeting with EA colleagues tomorrow to draw up a list of assets that might be eligible for this funding.</p> <p>9.9 We have two bids for Peat Projects. Phil Brewin is leading on these. NSLIDB and Parrett IDB for better management of water levels for peat.</p> <p>9.10 Phil Brewin shared his presentation on the North Somerset Peat Discovery Project. The main points are;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is about the water level management plans and what we should do with them. • Make plans work for current situation. • Peat Task Force focus on climate change and net zero • 2% of UK emission from peat soil • A lot of lowland peat • A used landscape – not abandoned <p>9.11 Recommendations from the report fall into four categories;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water for peat and more water level management control • Enabling more sustainable ways of farming • Supporting people, partnerships and economies • Driving forward science and innovation <p>9.12 Working with North Somerset Council in an active partnership looking at water management in the whole area. There are six work streams</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topographical survey • Hydrogeological survey • Hydraulic modelling • Adaptive water level management plan (key bit) • Land use economic assessment and plain English guidance for landowners • Reporting, opportunity mapping, carbon assessment <p>9.13 Must get this done by January 2025 before the spending review.</p> <p>9.14 The following questions were asked;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lots of things introduced which are reasonable but the best thing we can do for lowland peat is to stop ploughing it. If you are oxidising the upper level of peat all the time you won't get anywhere. Phil added that we do okay in the most part in Somerset with our grassland. There is evidence to show that what you are describing does effect peat. • What is paludiculture? It is looking at alternative crops that might be more suitable 	
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	<p>for wet peat areas other than paying farmers to do nothing.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is not a common understanding of how water transfers through a peat landscape works. If we try to maintain high water tables through the summer, how are we going to do that? Will we need to pump water onto the land? Phil said this is an important question and will be answered through this work <p>9.15 An update from LSIDB was given.</p> <p>9.16 We have discussed the weather conditions for the last six months has been atrocious. There have been four floods on the LSIDB chairman's farm since October which is unprecedented. Most neighbouring farms are having to re-seed and the cost of seed has gone through the roof Lambing is having to be done inside this year.</p> <p>9.17 The CEO Manjit Pope has moved on. She made some positive changes and we wish her all the best. Glenn Taute has taken over as interim CEO</p> <p>9.18 The board has an excellent workforce and have hardly any staff changes. There are a lot of staff coming up to retirement. The staff have 'up to date' equipment which has been an excellent investment for the board. There has been an increase in rates to pay for pumps 8% this year with an estimated 10% for next year and 10% for the following year.</p> <p>9.19 Cllr M Barnes thanked everyone for coming.</p>	
10. AOB	10.1 No other item had been notified.	
11. Date of Next meetings	<p>11.1 The date of the next meeting including venue is to be confirmed.</p> <p>11.2 The Chairman thanked everyone for coming along and Innes Thomson for coming along. Iain and Maggie were thanked for their work for the branch and he wished everyone a safe journey home.</p>	

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Chairman

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Date

TABLE OF OUTSTANDING ACTIONS

Action 1	Iain Sturdy agreed to revisit the constitution and look at subscription in light of the new Unitary Authority for Somerset.	22/11/2022 A01
Action 2	Iain Sturdy to set up a meeting of the management group to scope out the role of SWADA.	20230518 A01