

A LETTER FROM THE CHAIRMAN, JEFF FEAR

The proverb states that lightning doesn't strike in the same place twice but rainfall and floodwater capacity certainly does so say the ratepayers of much of the Parrett catchment. How fortunate we have been in the Axe Brue catchment by comparison apart, perhaps, in East and West waste and either side of the Godney to Glastonbury Road where floodwater has remained for far too long. The amalgamation of the four Boards has now completed its second year and from this coming financial year the whole Board area will be paying a common drainage rate.



Last year we completed all the maintenance on our programme except some rhynes in the Common Moor area of Glastonbury which were finished late due to poor performance by the contractor. Our goal for the coming year is to see improved standards of maintenance on main rivers and we will be using the 20 year Flood Action Plan as a vehicle to try and bring such changes into place. Although the Plan contains many references to the Parrett area, I can assure you that officers and I are repeating the message about works in the Axe and Brue Catchments on a very regular basis.

With the winding down of the Favourable Conditions Project Team the Board is planning to reduce overheads by vacating our leased office in Alpha House in Highbridge and selling our offices at 1 Church Street and concentrating our staff in the recently purchased Bradbury House in Market Street (the old Lloyds Bank). The changeover is planned to take place in September after refurbishment.

Within the office Nancy Collins continues as Senior Project Engineer working on Favourable Conditions, Peter Struck has taken over as Project Engineer from Sophie Jones, who has taken up a similar post in New Zealand. Giles Oliver has been contracted as Project Engineer to North Somerset Levels IDB and Danielle Charlton left the IDB at the end of March, having worked with Andy Sherwood in the Planning Department, to take a PhD at the University College London.

Left: Results of dredging Forge Rhyne

A 20 YEAR FLOOD ACTION PLAN - NICK STEVENS, CLERK

The widespread flooding in Somerset in 2012, 2013 and now 2014 produced extremely difficult conditions for many people living and running businesses across the Levels and Moors. The duration has made it something that sets this area apart from other areas and locations where flooding has also occurred. The plight of those people whose homes have flooded or have been marooned for many weeks has brought our area into the centre of national attention on many occasions and resulted in visits by the Minister, the Secretary of State, Prince Charles and even the Prime Minister. Very astutely the Secretary of State, Owen Paterson, has set a challenge that provides us with a way out of a repeat cycle of rain and flood. He asked that a 20 year Flood Action Plan be produced and presented to him that sets out how we might tackle the causes that we see as having led to the extensive problems. This was presented to him in March and the organisations and groups which deal with flood risk are now working out how we deliver those actions that we see as reducing flood risk.

The cost of the plan over its life is high and many people will have seen the figure of £100m mentioned in the press. Unfortunately Somerset is not the only location where flooding has been experienced this year or in recent years and the demands being placed on government funds are mounting dramatically. We must therefore bear in mind that whatever we wish to see done in Somerset will be closely looked at not only by Defra and the Treasury but also by other flooded communities in England, so what money we are able to obtain for works and improvements must stack up and be fair. Defra will be funding immediate repairs, upgrades and works such as dredging on 8km of the Parrett and Tone however governments never give blank cheques, whatever we think may have been said. The key to drawing in more central government funding and to undertaking more and better maintenance is to seek a fair contribution of funds from all the land and property owners across all of the river catchments of Somerset and nearby Dorset.

Earlier in the year the Boards set out a Ten Point Action Plan for combating the flooding. Most people seemed to agree with what we were saying and much of that Plan has been incorporated in the 20 year Plan which is why we are fully supportive of the Plan.

Mr Paterson's challenge, which is taken up in the Plan, is to see if, as the community of Somerset, we can find a way to demonstrate our commitment to supporting improvements in Somerset that sets us apart as an area requiring special attention.

If you haven't yet seen or read the 20 Year Flood Action Plan it can be downloaded, either in plain text or in a glossy format (but more difficult to print) by using the key words 'Flood Action Plan' from the Defra website:

www.gov.uk/defra

If the downloading option is not possible for you then please call the office as we have a limited number available for collection or posting out.

If, after having read the Plan, you wish to make comment on it then please pass your comments on to me or discuss them with your local IDB representative who will make me aware of your views. I am especially interested to hear how you think we might be able to raise funds for all the actions that the Plan sees as important in reducing flood risk.



WORKING TOGETHER by EDWIN WHITE ROYAL BATH & WEST SOCIETY

At the end of the 18th century forefathers of the Royal Bath & West Society were involved in the drainage of the Somerset Levels. Here we are in the early 21st century and we are at it again.

After the awful floods of the summer of 2012 and the winter of 2012/13, the RB&W Society decided that enough was enough and started to raise funds for dredging and water management. Glastonbury Festival founder and future RB&W President, Michael Eavis helped launch the Somerset Levels Relief Fund.

During last summer, the Society formed a working party made up of your drainage boards, the Environment Agency, Somerset County Council, local farmers, conservation bodies, NFU, CLA and others. The aim was to get a consensus for our plan in order to reassure RB&W trustees and contributors that our fund was totally robust.

When the floods returned in 2013/14 causing even greater devastation than before, the RB&W working party came into considerable prominence. We had a plan, that was to resurrect a Somerset Rivers Authority, that would be wholly responsible for the water management throughout this man-made tract of land.

The Secretary of State, Owen Paterson, had been alerted to our working party and, on his first and subsequent visits to Somerset, consulted with us. He listened to our assertions on the importance of dredging, upper and lower catchment water management and ultimately a barrage at the mouth of the River Parrett, and would appear to have agreed with us. With Somerset in the long term having much greater control over its own water management, the future of our Levels looks far brighter and we should take just a little pride that the Royal Bath & West working party had some input into that.

Although government has committed money to dredge 8km of the Rivers Tone and Parrett, this still leaves 100km in need of restoration. The Somerset Levels Relief Fund will be making crucial contributions towards drainage over the next few years and we will be able to work alongside a Somerset Rivers Board that will be able to contribute to the job in hand.



We have much to do; we are determined to reach our target of £3-4m. The help from all our members and friends, both financial and otherwise, has been amazing.

MEETINGS CALENDAR 2014/15

Dates of the Full Board meetings are:

Fri 13 June 10.30am

Tues 11 November 10.30am

Tues 20 January 2015 10.30am

All meetings will take place at Cossington Village Hall unless stated. Please visit the website for the complete meetings calendar
www.somersetdrainageboards.gov.uk



Above: Pill Road

1 Church Street, Highbridge, TA9 3AE
Tel: 01278 789906
Fax: 01278 793443
Em: drainage.boards@btconnect.com

RIPARIAN MAINTENANCE

It is important for landowners and tenants to maintain their own channels and gateway culverts. This not only improves the drainage and water feed to your land and neighbouring fields, it is also part of the farm payment requirements. Private ditches and rhynes are often neglected and will not function properly, which will result in the land not benefiting from the Board's annually maintained system. This leads to wet or dry areas, poor crops and damaged soils.

Bridges and gateway culverts are a constant problem, mainly because agricultural machinery weight has increased over the last couple of decades and the existing accesses were not built to accommodate these loads.

On viewed rhynes any replacement culverts should be at least 900mm (3 ft) diameter or a minimum of 450mm (18") on other ordinary watercourses.

If you are planning to replace any culverts please ensure you apply to the Board for consent so that we can ensure these are constructed properly; these applications are free. If the Board needs to use gateways over viewed rhynes for access then a contribution to the culvert works may be available.

MEMBERSHIP

(all elected members are unpaid volunteers)

District

Brean & Berrow
Brent Knoll/ East Brent
Lympham
Burtle/Polden

Cheddar & Axbridge

Glastonbury

Highbridge & Burnham
Hunstpill

Mark

Meare to Street

Wedmore

Wookey

Member

W Welland
E Champion
D Tratt
C Pople
P Thorne
R Cook
J Lukins
B Stitch
G Chinnock
R Clapp
M Watts
J Reason
N Lukins
M Wall
D Watts
C Durston
J Fear
R Wilcox
R Adlam
M Churches
A Franks
A Neale
C Ainge
T Tincknell
R Frost
M Smith
C Dennis

Appointed Members

E Badman, D Baker, D Banwell, H Case,
A Chidgey, Cllr N Cottle, P Duckett,
Cllr A Gilling, Cllr P Ham,
Cllr A Hamlin, J Healey, Cllr D Hill,
P Holms, S Hughes, Cllr N Jones, P Judah, Cllr T
Killen, C Mowat, Cllr J Parham, Cllr D Poole,
Cllr J Savage, Cllr K Smout,
Cllr E Scott, R Shaw, Cllr G Steer,
Cllr N Turner, M Tibbs and Cllr C Williams.

EXPENDITURE

The Board has resolved to set the rate for the current financial year:

Axe Brue Drainage Board: 6.608p in the £

This year the Board will maintain approximately 592,000m (368miles) of watercourse as part of the annual cleaning programme.

ENQUIRIES

For general enquiries please call:
01278 789906 (09.00hrs – 17.00hrs Mon-Fri)

Out of hours: 07887 687746

Email: drainage.boards@btconnect.com

www.somersetdrainageboards.gov.uk

**Flooding incidents out of hours should be reported to the Environment Agency on:
0800 807060**

For enquiries please contact:

Clerk/Legal: Nick Stevens
Engineering: Iain Sturdy
Finance: Stephen Gee
Rate Collection: Carrie-Anne Porter
Kendra Kingston
Environment: Phil Brewin