

**MINUTES OF THE NORTH SOMERSET LEVELS INTERNAL DRAINAGE BOARD FINANCE AND WORKS MEETING AT BRADBURY HOUSE 15 JANUARY 2025 AT 14:30**

<b>Attendance:</b>			
<b>Elected Members:</b> Mr T Bush (C) Mr J Harris Ms S Hearne Mr C Redding Mr R Mitchell	<b>Appointed Members:</b> Cllr J Tonkin	<b>Officers:</b> Mrs M Hammond Mr G Oliver Mr I Sturdy Mr M Wall	<b>Public:</b>
<b>Apologies:</b>			
	Cllr P Burden Cllr C Hunt		
<b>Non-Attendance</b>			

<b>Agenda Item:</b>	<b>Detail:</b>	<b>Action:</b>
1. Attendance and Apologies	<p>1.1 Election of Chairman. <b>Proposal to nominate Tim Bush as chair of the committee. Nominated by Bob Mitchell. Seconded by James Tonkin. All in favour</b></p> <p>1.2 Apologies as per the above Attendance List.</p> <p>1.3 It was noted the meeting clashes with Planning Meetings. Could change to Thursdays or morning meetings.</p> <p>1.4 Chris Redding (CR) joined the meeting at 14.35</p>	<b>RESOLUTION 01</b>
2. Items Additional to the Agenda	<p>2.1. Iain Sturdy (IDS) would like to add to the agenda to cover later in the meeting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EA Chairman visit</li> <li>• IDB Fund Application</li> <li>• PSCA</li> <li>• Pier to Pier Maintenance</li> <li>• ADA Environment Day attendance</li> <li>• Standards of Conduct for members</li> <li>• Salt Marshes</li> </ul> <p>To be covered in AOB if not covered within other items.</p>	
3. Declarations of Interest	3.1. No declarations at this time. To be declared if any arise.	
4. Approval of Minutes	4.1. Two changes: Clare had sent apologies for previous meeting.	

	P2, 7.3 should say underspend being used for Calm rather than spend.	<b>Action NSL/20250115-01</b>
5. Matters Arising	<p>8.3 EDF action, Salt Marsh consultation has been put on hold whilst they investigate other technical options CR asked about pennywort budget not spent last year and was asked to raise this in the Finance item.</p> <p>The Chair signed the minutes of the October meeting. Minutes from the June 24 Meeting had not been signed as the October meeting was not quorate. It was agreed to sign the minutes as true and accurate records.</p> <p><b>Proposed James Seconded Sandra All in favour Signed by Tim Bush</b></p>	<b>RESOLUTION 01</b>
6. Finance Report	<p>See Enclosure 2 Commentary to Budget</p> <p><b>6.1 Budget to end March 2025:</b> Budget figures were referred to by members and referring to commentary circulated in advance. Margaret Hammond (MH) advised that the requirement had gone down slightly from the details circulated prior to meeting.</p> <p>Bank accounts are reconciled up to 31/12/24 and have been countersigned.</p> <p><b>6.2 Finance Report:</b> Position as at 30/12/24; forecast for year-end using figures from the end of November 24; and proposed budget for next financial year.</p> <p>There is a surplus at end of November of £217k, is as expected as the special levy has been received but there are still 4 months of expenditure to go.</p> <p>The forecast figure is a deficit of £49k as at the end of November. There is an overspend on professional fees &amp; Board schemes, but that is caused by spending of funds raised in previous year. MH emphasised that this is a forecast which will change.</p> <p>CR asked about the spend and capability to deal with invasive weeds.</p> <p>Giles Oliver (GO) advised that this is carried out mechanically by annual maintenance contractor, but that spraying is usually done by Board staff but was not done this year, so was not as effective as hoped. We are looking for a specialist contractor. We have a new contractor on board, who is more focused on landscape and clearance work so we will focus him on pennywort.</p>	

	<p>CR asked if it can be mechanised, perhaps with a lightweight digger with sprayer. IDS advised that we have the capability and intend to do better with pennywort this year.</p> <p>CR then asked about the EA and the Banwell River. IDS reiterated that we won't be doing the main river, CR said this affects us if they don't maintain it. IDS acknowledged this but despite our best efforts to ask them to maintain it, it is unlikely to change. We are keeping the pressure on Regionally and Nationally at the highest levels of management and decision making.</p> <p>CR asked if there is any legislation on invasive species. IDS explained that EA stance is that they are not usually riparian owner so they only use their permissive powers where they are able to do so with greatest benefits.</p> <p>It's a difficult discussion both on invasive species and routine maintenance, but we continue to try to bring in extra funding. We have more success if we try to be helpful and need to keep that effort up.</p> <p>CR advised that in Lincolnshire there are efforts by EA to withdraw from Main River maintenance where funding is unavailable and the benefits are limited.</p> <p>IDS advised that the Lincs partnership are visiting next week so that can be discussed. However there is a general dissatisfaction with EA maintenance operations, but the reality is that they don't have funding/resources for all of the work. We are pushing with this issue with MP's and IDS is pursuing a meeting with Phil Duffy, EA CEO when he visits the area shortly.</p> <p>TB said that Mr Duffy is quick to defend the EA in his letter in the Telegraph, rebutting claims that they were careless in flood defence in Cambridgeshire. John Harris (JH) stated that pennywort has an exponential impact, and is becoming serious. GO advised that the hard frost will have helped a little bit as it is susceptible. JH asked if as a Finance Committee are we going to spend these unspent funds. MH explained that this is just a forecast at the end of November.</p> <p>IDS said it can be spent in future years if it is ringfenced and carried forward.</p> <p><b>JH propose recommendation to full board to ringfence and make available for future years. Second Chris All in favour</b></p> <p><b>6.3 Proposed Budget for 2025/26:</b></p>	<p><b>RESOLUTION 02</b></p>
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Admin total up by £26k, this is mostly the administration charge from the Somerset Drainage Boards Consortium which has increased by £27,235 which is an 8.97% increase on the 2024/25 charge. This is made up of the following: £14k salary costs (including an assumption of a 2% cost of living pay award); £7k increased employer NI; £4k pension costs; £2k increased depreciation charges

Saving on telephone budget into Cider Barn. After consultation with David Colbourne SDBC phone system and Broadband provided by BT no longer required as the connection supplied by the landlord is sufficient, saving £2,455.

Subscriptions going up (ADA & SWADA), and insurances as expected.

The Board have also approved an increase to the Chairman's allowance.

Premises costs: Rent & service charge for the Cider Barn are not going up. Added allowance for business rates increase. Office cleaning dropped as this is not needed as regularly as when the office was occupied daily

Maintenance Budget: Increased by £5857. Routine maintenance & cleaning budget has gone down, but last years budget assumed 6% CPI which did not happen and has been offset this year. Matthew Wall has advised these figures are known as contracts have been extended for another 2 years. Dredging budget is staying the same. Tree & vegetation budget is going down by £2k. Repairs and Renewal budget has been increased by £5,000 reflecting the number of assets that need to be repaired. The telemetry budget has increased by £5,000 due to extending the network and a change in the way we manage the data.

CR member asked if the staff look after telemetry. IDS explained that yes it is mostly. Our new system also includes a support service. The new equipment is easier to install and maintain.

A member asked about the progress on installing the equipment. They were advised that Sampsons Sluice telemetry is installed and working and providing benefits. We are making good progress installing the remaining sites on the levels and peat projects in north and south areas.

A member asked if we ever resolved whether we will be able to share data with the EA. IDS advised this is ongoing, EA

	<p>seem more open about sharing data both ways. EA webcams are also visible to the public.</p> <p>John Harris (JH) raised item 8.2 of previous minutes asking what had become of spending on gauge boards and elver passes. GO advised gauge boards have been purchased for south area. Currently sourcing contractor for installation, so moving forward. Elver passes – we approached Fishtech but despite promising early conversations their prices were too high. We have now contacted and been to site with Aquito on 2 south area elver passes and we await prices. Will continue to north area. It is in hand and progressing. There will also be a training day in February for members and staff. Elver ropes are also being looked into.</p> <p>A member asked if there is any grant funding? IDS advised this is not being done as part of the peat project. Lower Severn IDB have obtained funding towards refurbishment/replacement of pumping stations through the elver project combined with Public Work Loan. But we have not explored this as it is low tech/low spend.</p> <p>Environment total: The BAP, WLMP and EIA budgets have been reduced to zero.</p> <p>Proposal to the Full Board is asked to ringfence the underspent budget from 2024/25 for these items, therefore removing the requirement to raise a budget in 2025/26</p> <p><b>Proposed by Sandra Hearne</b>  <b>Seconded by John Harris</b>  <b>All in favour</b></p> <p>JH asked GO if there is a reason why it hasn't been spent. He responded that local management plans need to be updated with partners. There is lots of potential change, demand and requirement coming and we need to act when most effective Operational procedures are up to date. We are not breaking any legislation. All 3 boards are in the same position on this.</p> <p>EA precept will be a 5% increase based on EA indications (£6,000). RFCC will meet to finalise shortly.</p> <p>A member asked if we currently have a board member from any of the 3 boards on the RFCC? IDS advised that we don't currently but that he attends as a technical adviser. He did write to all chairs before Christmas to advise there were 3 vacancies on the RFCC. Tony Bradford has applied to be reappointed. IDS often sits on interview panels so would</p>	<p><b>RESOLUTION 03</b></p>
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need to declare his interest if he were shortlisted. The RFCC is also currently without a chair. David Jenkins has stepped back in as interim chair. There was discussion around the age profile of the vacancies, however IDS advised there is a spectrum.

Professional Fees: this has increased for the continued development of DAMS, which should bring about efficiencies in work processes, particularly in the Development Control team.

There is no requirement for a Schemes budget for 2025/26 saving £50,000.

A member asked about reserves needing to be used for main rivers maintenance in the future.

IDS spoke about an Emma Hardy (Floods Minister) announcement on funding. EA position is that the announcement was too late and they have neither the resources or ability to deliver the intended work in the timescales available.

However IDS spoke with grant team and is likely to secure £75k across the consortium for main river maintenance. A new Public sector cooperation agreement will be needed. We have also made an application for grant to fund Crossmans Hatch replacement. If successful this will remove the need for the project to be funded from reserves.

GO advised that the EA fund co-ordinator feels we stand a good chance, but work has to be complete by March 2026.

Application by 31.01.25, could be £225k for the whole structure or more.

MH advised they will be prudent and not assume so continue to build up reserves.

Budget is down by .79%. MH is reducing bank interest receivable, as things stand unlikely to hit this years target and MH is expecting interest rates to drop. Budget has been dropped by nearly £2k, There is no grant money so balancing figure is drainage rates so to meet £40k penny rate increase is 4.569%. Below Council's 5% cap.

CR queried money invested in N Somerset and asked if they are going bankrupt. MH advised she is confident this won't happen.

TB asked if we can say what the drainage rate will be. MH advised it will be 10.833 penny rate.

	<p>Insurance is now in place for Sampson's Sluice. This will show as an increase in the budget. Not high risk, as structure is relatively sound.</p> <p>Drainage Rates Position: As of the morning of 15/01/25 the outstanding position was £6468.37. Last year it was £5397. however £1134 of this is court costs for those being pursued.</p> <p>A member asked if there are serial offenders. MH unsure, but wants to send the message. The threshold is £50 to proceed to court. If court grant liability order this is handed to bailiffs to pursue. Court fees are liable by the debtor.</p>	
<p>7. Any Other Business</p>	<p>IDS:</p> <p>7.1 The EA Chairman, Philip Duffy is visiting the local area. He has been asked for a meeting with IDBs but has declined IDS has asked for his direct email and copied in the Chair as well as Mike Stanton from the SRA and Innes Thompson from ADA to ask for some time. Innes from ADA is keen to engage.</p> <p>7.2 IDB fund application and PSCA already covered.</p> <p>7.3 There is a current Consultation on Standards &amp; Conduct in Public Life being undertaken by the MHCLG. Background of few sanctions to councillors, doesn't relate specifically to IDB's. However ADA have picked this up and highlighted the similarities so they are conducting their own survey and will supply results MHLCG. Our hope is to develop similar sanctions as there is very little in place at the moment.</p> <p>7.4 EDF Salt Marsh consultation has been delayed. TB felt we need to keep lines of communication open. IDS advised that Andrew Cockroft from EDF has Iain's direct contact details.</p> <p>CR asked if we have an opinion. TB advised we are trying not to have too much opinion beyond the scope of IDB responsibilities</p> <p>IDS explained that this affects a large number of landowners who may expect the IDB to object on their behalf. We will consult on our areas of responsibility however not broader community issues. CR thought you could challenge the mitigation shutting 2 existing reactors down, new one causes less problems</p> <p>TB said there are personal opinions and we shouldn't be seen to take sides.</p> <p>GO there was no formal consultation yet. There was one at Pawlett Hams to which we did put in a response on IDB matters.</p>	

	<p>Sandra Hearne (SH) did we receive the information from EDF that they said they would send.</p> <p>IDS they have not provided any more evidence since their last visit. However we have now received a letter advise they have delayed consultation and are looking at other alternatives.</p> <p>James Tonkin (JT) have the Board had any dealings with development east of Clevedon. Hallam Developments. Very close to the peat. IDS will ask Virginie if we have had anything and to let James know.</p> <p>7.5 ADA Environment Day 05/02/25 Taking place at Michael Sly's farm, 5 places 3 x chairman Oversubscribed @ 7 people</p> <p><b>Voting to Recommend budget to the full board Proposed by Sandra Hearne Seconded by James Tonkin All in favour</b></p>	<p><b>NSL/20250115-02</b></p> <p><b>RESOLUTION 04</b></p>
8. Date of Next Meeting	Full Board Meeting 29/01/2025 The Chair thanks everyone for coming and the meeting was closed at 15.50	

Annex:

A. NSLIDB F&W Meeting – Table of Outstanding Actions

CHAIRMAN.....DATE .....

**NSLIDB F&W MEETING – TABLE OF OUTSTANDING ACTIONS**

Action Number:	Action:	Actionee:
<b>NSL/20250115-01</b>	To make corrections to minutes for publication	<b>KC</b>
<b>NSL/20250115-02</b>	To check with Dev Control if we have any awareness of/dealings with development east of Clevedon (Hallam Developments)	<b>IDS/VM</b>