

## MINUTES OF THE AXE BRUE FINANCE AND WORKS SUB-COMMITTEE MEETING HELD AT BRADBURY HOUSE ON 13 JANUARY 2025

Attendance:			
<b>Elected Members:</b> Mr A Gilling (C) Mr D Tratt Mr M Watts Mrs L Scott	<b>Appointed Members:</b> Mr B Filmer Cllr R Keen	<b>Officers:</b> Mrs M Hammond Mr I Sturdy Mr M Wall Mrs J Farthing	<b>Public:</b>
Apologies:			
Mr J Fear	Mr C Riches Cllr N Cottle		
Non-Attendance:			

Agenda Item:	Detail:	Action:
1. Attendance and Apologies	1.1. Apologies as per the above Attendance List.	
2. Items Additional to the Agenda	2.1. No additional items requested.	
3. Declarations of Interest	3.1. None made.	
4. Approval of Minutes	4.1 <i>'That the minutes were a true and accurate record of the meeting held 21 October 2024'</i>  <b>Proposed: D Tratt</b> <b>Seconded: M Watts</b> <b>3 in favour (those that were in attendance on 21<sup>st</sup> October).</b>	<b>RESOLUTION 01</b>
5. Matters Arising/Review of Actions	5.1 The Chair went through the minutes from the last meeting page by page.  5.2 Martin Watts wanted to clarify his comments on p7. He said that the point he was trying to make was that there was agricultural land where owners are not paying drainage rates and this land is still subject to special levy, having previously been peat land. Peat is not dug here and now it is being	

farmed. He stated that Somerset Council therefore shouldn't be paying for this under special levy and it should be subject to drainage rates now.

IDS asked Martin Watts to inform us of the areas where he believes this to be the case so that this can be looked into.

5.3 IDS reviewed the actions from the last meeting.

AB/20230116-01 – This action is still ongoing due to time restraints this meeting hasn't yet been able to be rearranged.

AB/20240603-01 – Bob Filmer has now joined the committee and IDS thanked him. Action closed.

AB/20241021-01- This was previously discussed in this meeting and is ongoing.

5.3 Liz Scott asked for an update on EA funding. IDS responded that it has been a difficult time. He stated that the EA were unable to accept the loan offered from the IDB, further clarification since this proposal has shown that the process within the EA meant that a loan was unfortunately off the table. The EA have also said that even if they had been able to accept the loan, they don't have the resources/skills to carry out the work anyway.

The IDB have already started some Main River maintenance of the River Cary with a PSCA. There are others that we would like to do and these include Mark Yeo, River Axe, Land Yeo and a small section of the Blind Yeo. A PSCA is needed to do this – we are doing our best to meet the requirements to obtain PCSAs – however this is not straightforward and there is a lot of communication over polices and method statements.

IDS said he is hopeful in securing some funding from the DEFRA 23/24 Winter Flood Recovery fund, if we are successful in our bid we could receive up to £75,000 across the 3 Boards.

The Chair commented that he finds it bizarre that the EA are not deeming the IDB competent to complete these works without extra proof.

IDS agreed and added that we have already shown our competence with the Parrett works.

David Tratt asked if IDS was dealing with the EA nationally or locally?

IDS said that at a local level the EA are in agreement with us but aren't allowed to lobby and have to operate within EA policies and procedure. They are being helpful and supportive but cannot operate outside of policy. They too are feeling frustrated.

IDS added that at a national level the EA are very procedural indeed.

10.55am Roger Keen joined the meeting.

Martin Watts(MW) said that as IDS has a good working relationship with Piers Hopper at the EA, perhaps he could ask him why he has mis-spent EA money. MW explained that he had been told by a source in the EA, who he wouldn't name, that Piers Hooper had spent money outside of this remit and this was why main river maintenance hasn't been done.

IDS felt that this was a serious and unfortunate accusation but further explained

that the EA received 60% less funding than they needed, therefore they have had to prioritise their work. They have prioritised work according to legal and safety obligations and EA owned assets.

IDS asked MW for more information about his claim.

MW asked IDS to write to the EA asking for itemised details on what this money has been spent on.

IDS responded that we have asked for a programme in the future and so we will have more details going forward with regards to the spending. He added that we shouldn't make accusations about public bodies without proof.

MW stated that he had been told that the government had announced that they will be giving money to IDBs to carry out river maintenance. Liz Scott said she had heard something similar.

IDS clarified that Emma Hardy, the Flood Minister, had announced a flood recovery fund – tranche 1 will be made available to Eastern Boards only. But for Tranche 2 we have applied for some funding and if successful, it requires IDBs to deliver works by

	<p>March 2025. Tranche 3 - £19 million which won't be coming to Somerset.</p> <p>IDS emphasised the difference between Eastern Boards and Somerset. In the Eastern Boards they manage principal channels and pumping stations however, in Somerset the EA do this.</p> <p>In response to MW the Chair advised caution about acting on gossip and hearsay.</p> <p>MW said he had heard this information from an MP. IDS asked for that MP to contact him to discuss further.</p> <p>LS added that she was concerned about main river asset conditions, she said rivers could be cleaned but if pumps were not working then the water would not be conveyed. IDS assured members that he has shared these concerns at the highest authority possible and via ADA. LS thanked him for his work on this.</p>	
<p>6. Finance Report</p>	<p>6.1 MH drew attention to the Finance Report in the papers.</p> <p>6.2 MH advised that the bank reconciliations have been made up until November, Charlie Riches has countersigned these and there are no issues to report.</p> <p>6.3 MH advised there has been a change in the papers regarding the EA precept. This has been amended from 7% to 5% after information was communicated to IDS. This reduces the increase to the penny rate, which is now a 4.724 increase and less than Somerset Council have been advised we are setting - so they will be happy within this.</p> <p>6.4 MH discussed the Finance Report enclosure in the papers. She asked members to look at rows 1-25. Admin costs are up, the main reason for this is the SDBC charge for staff, vehicles and general administration charges. MH asked members to look at the commentary sheet for more information. MH has made an assumption of a 2% pay increase this year – this could be more or less. MH highlighted the increase to employers NI contributions as a result of the recent government budget. MH said bank interest rates are likely to be reducing and this has been reflected in the budget as well.</p>	

MW said that last year there was £100,000 increase for SDBC and a £200,000 increase in two years - this can't keep going on.

MH said if the SDBC management committee view this and don't agree they will need to look at the options available such as reducing staff etc. There is no slack in this budget.

MH mentioned the building costs. Last year the building needed a lot of work but this year that has been done and the budget has been reduced.

A new budget has been added for consultant fees to enable David Colbourne to investigate if DAMS computer system can be helpful for the wider business currently (only used by Development Control team).

LS asked why subscriptions have gone up. MH replied that the ADA subscription is going up by 6.5%.

#### 6.5 The Maintenance Budget

MH said this was going down. Routine Maintenance last year included 6% inflation assumption which was too high and has been reduced this year.

MH said the telemetry budget has increased by £5000. Phil Brewin has advised that this budget would need to be doubled over the next two years.

MW asked how many telemetry devices do we currently have?

Matthew Wall said on the Axe Brue approx. 20. MW advised we currently have an old system and that we are looking to upgrade and go with a new provider.

MW asked how much does each telemetry device cost?

IDS couldn't provide an exact figure but the components are installation, repairs and data collection. This is important as it gives us data to identify long term trends and ideas of how water levels can be managed better.

MW felt that if the rivers are up nothing can be done.

BF asked if the maintenance budget reduced because of capacity?

IDS said the figure is less due to the assumption of inflation, we aren't doing any less work.

MW asked Matthew Wall if all the maintenance has been done yet.

Matthew Wall replied that approx. 94% is now completed and more information will be communicated on this in the upcoming Full Board meeting.

DT asked about row 27, as there was an overspend last year, if this is kept the same are we then underestimating. What if we have an emergency project.

Matthew Wall replied that this is for an additional weed cut not for emergency works.

MW said at the last meeting it was agreed to spend £20,000 on the Mark Yeo.

IDS said that he was hoping to get this money from the Flood recovery fund and not to take this from reserves.

#### 6.6 Environment Budget

As there is a saving, the underspend will be ringfenced and we will not set a budget next year. IDS explained that there would be a need to renew the water level management plans and DEFRA changes will drive this. At this time as things are so uncertain it wouldn't be right to be raising large funds of money until we have more information.

#### 6.7 EA precept

5 % increase as discussed.

#### 6.8 Board Schemes

MH said that as there is a shortfall a request will be made to take £30000 out of free reserves to put into schemes.

#### 6.8 SRA

This has gone up however we do the work for the SRA and we claim this back from the SRA.

#### 6.9 Income

MH suggested the bank interest is kept the same.

MW asked if we get new commuted sums now. MH said no.

#### 6.9 Rates and Levies.

	<p>MH advised that the new penny rate increase is 10.588.</p> <p>MW asked if the depreciation figure needs to be that high.</p> <p>MH explained the different ways that depreciation can be calculated. MH advised that this is just an accounting entry and rate payers aren't paying for this.</p> <p>MH advised that there is £1,160,000 in reserves and that is currently more than the policy says therefore the Board can afford to put some of this into Board schemes as discussed.</p> <p>RK thanked MH for her hard work and proposed that the budget be accepted.</p> <p><b><u>'To recommend to the full board that the budget is accepted'</u></b></p> <p><b>Prop: Roger Keen</b>  <b>Seconded: David Tratt</b>  <b>All in favour</b></p> <p>David Tratt said the balance of special levy and rates is changing all the time and we must be mindful of this. He suggested that the work we do with regards to this is flagged up in the newsletter. He mentioned how effective the recent work at Burton Row has been and we should show how this is giving flood relief to special levy payers. IDS agreed this was a good point.</p> <p>MW asked MH about interest rates and MH advised that this is currently 1.6% with NatWest.  MW asked if the money could be tied in to achieve better interest rates.  RK asked if we can use building societies.  MH agreed she would look into this and will bring recommendations to the Full Board.</p> <p><b>'Recommend to Full Board that the shortfall of £30,000 for Board Schemes be paid for with reserves'</b></p> <p><b>Prop: Bob Filmer</b>  <b>Sec: Liz Scott</b>  <b>All in Favour</b></p>	<p><b>RESOLUTION 02</b></p> <p><b><i>Action: AB/20250113 - 01</i></b></p> <p><b>RESOLUTION 03</b></p>
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7 AOB	<p>7.1 Martin Watts asked Matthew Wall for information relating to Rousell's maintenance tender and subsequent payment. He asked who signed off the payment.</p> <p>Matthew Wall advised that payment for invoices is made once the Area Supervisor has confirmed work has been done, in this case Martin Andrews has confirmed work has been done.</p> <p>Martin Watts said that not all of the work has been done.</p> <p>Matthew Wall suggested that he and Mr Watts meet up on site to check and Mr Watts can show Matthew what areas he has concerns about.</p>	<p><b>Action</b> <b>AB/20241021-02</b></p>
8. Date of Next Meeting	<p>10.1. The Date of the next Finance &amp; Works meeting is 2 June 2025 at 10.30am.</p> <p>10.2. The Chair thanked members for their attendance and closed the meeting.</p>	

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

**ANNEX A TO  
AXE BRUE F&W COMMITTEE MINUTES  
DATED 13 JANUARY 2025**

**AXE BRUE F&W MEETING – TABLE OF OUTSTANDING ACTIONS**

Action Number:	Action:	Actionee:
AB/20230116-01	Arrange a committee to discuss investments	MH - Ongoing
AB/20241021-01	To investigate cases of land being treated as agricultural when it should be subject to special levy.	MH
AB/20250113 - 01	To investigate ways of achieving better interest rates	MH
AB/20250113 – 02	To visit site with Martin Watts regarding Rousell Works.	MW