

MINUTES OF THE AXE BRUE FINANCE AND WORKS SUB-COMMITTEE MEETING HELD AT BRADBURY HOUSE ON 21 OCTOBER 2024

Attendance:			
Elected Members: Mr A Gilling (C) Mr D Tratt Mr M Watts	Appointed Members: Mr C Riches Cllr R Keen	Officers: Mrs M Hammond Mr M Wall Mrs J Farthing	Public:
Apologies:			
Mr J Fear Mrs L Scott	Cllr J Cousins	Mr I Sturdy	
Non-Attendance:			
Nick Cottle			

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 The Committee members present agreed that the minutes from the meeting held on 3 rd June 2024 were a <i>'true and accurate record of the meeting'</i> . Proposed: C. Riches Seconded: D Tratt All in favour	RESOLUTION 1

<p>5. Matters Arising/Review of Actions</p>	<p>5.1 Maggie Hammond (MH) talked through the table of outstanding actions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>AB/20230116-01 Arrange a committee to discuss Investments.</u> MH said she was looking to arrange this for 28th October but it would be dependent on whether committee members could attend. • <u>AB/20210614-01 To Investigate County Court Small Claims.</u> MH said she has looked into this and we must follow the same route as the council do. • <u>AB/20230612-02 – Chairman’s Allowance.</u> MH said this was difficult as there are no figures published publicly on Chairman’s allowances. She advised that if the committee wishes she can contact other IDBs to ask, but they may not wish to share this information. MH clarified that the allowance is currently £1500 per annum. Charlie Riches (CR) suggested £2000 per annum felt like a reasonable figure. MH confirmed that whatever sum the committee decided it will still need to be agreed by DEFRA and also the Full Board. Martin Watts (MW) asked if DEFRA could change this so it rises every 3 or 5 years? MH responded that they are DEFRA’s rules and therefore they couldn’t change just for us but we could ask for this allowance to be raised and then review ourselves every 3 years. <p><i>‘It was proposed that a recommendation to the Full Board be made to increase the Chairman’s allowance to £2,000 per annum.’</i></p> <p>Proposed: Charlie Riches Seconded: Martin Watts For: 4 Abstained: 1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>AB/20240603-01 Refreshing membership of F&W committee</u> – MH advised that this action is being looked into by Iain Sturdy who was not present at this meeting so 	<p>RESOLUTION 2</p>
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	<p>she couldn't comment on the progress of this action.</p>	
6. Finance Report	<p>6.1 MH was pleased to report that all bank reconciliations have been done and all was ok with the Board accounts.</p> <p>She drew the members attention to her Finance report and Appendix A and B.</p> <p>MH stated that the AGAR has been signed off by the External Auditors and they have confirmed that it's ok, the only thing that they have noted is some of our policies are now out of date and they require updating. MH was hopeful she would have some updated policies ready for the January 2025 Full Board meetings.</p> <p>MH said that the budget forecast for SDBC shows an underspend of £19k largely due to staff vacancies, however that underspend will be used for CALM Engineering work.</p> <p>Martin watts (MW) asked if CALM have commenced any projects. Matthew Wall responded that projects are progressing well and an update will be given in the engineering report at full board.</p> <p>MH drew the members attention to Appendix B showing this biggest variant are the Board schemes, which was as expected.</p> <p>MH added that there is also likely to be an overspend on maintenance for Bradbury House. It's an old building and there have been many problems and repairs required.</p> <p>CR asked what DAMS development is? MH replied that it is a computer programme.</p> <p>MH told the committee that as the RFO she has no concerns with the Boards finances.</p> <p><u>6.2 Outstanding Drainage Rates</u></p> <p>MH moved onto Drainage rates and the amount still outstanding. MH had an up-to-date outstanding figure; as of the morning of this meeting it was £27,419.07. MH said looking at</p>	

	<p>the same time last year, there is approx. £20,000 more outstanding this year, which shows there is an issue. She clarified that this year there are more accounts that owe £1,000 or over.</p> <p>MH advised that the committee should recommend to the Full Board that anyone owing over £100 should be taken to court. Rate payers have had a first demand, 1st reminder and second reminder and the next step would be court action.</p> <p>Martin Watts said that he owes money on his drainage rates and said that as the Board was a corporation and not a public body, he couldn't be taken to court.</p> <p>MH replied that under the Drainage Act individuals can be taken to court and that we are a public body.</p> <p>MW said that he would go to court in front of a judge. MW asked about other landowners owing money.</p> <p>MH said she can't discuss individual cases in the meeting.</p> <p><i>'To recommend to Full Board that anyone with £100 and over owing on Drainage Rates be taken to court'</i></p> <p>Proposed: Roger Keen Seconded: David Tratt For: 4 Against: 1 Motion passed.</p> <p>Martin Watts' interest in this vote was noted.</p> <p><u>6.3 Investments</u></p> <p>MH advised that she is trying to keep as little in the current account as possible in order to earn interest. Interest is currently 1.6%, but a meeting with the Investments Committee hopefully next Monday will look at opportunities to get a better return.</p>	<p>RESOLUTION 3</p>
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	<p>The Chairman referred back to the Drainage rate discussion, and asked if we could encourage more people to pay by direct debit.</p> <p>MH said a lot of people already do, and every year a form and prepaid envelope is sent to people to be paid this way – however we can encourage but can't force individuals to pay this way.</p> <p>DT asked if rate payers can split payments across the year. MH said she would be happy to do this if people contact her to inform her of issues paying. MH said she would prefer to make payment plans than rate payers end up in court and incur additional court costs.</p> <p>The Chairman thanked MH for her excellent work.</p> <p>DT asked about the new rating system costs, MH responded that this would be covered during the Clerk briefing section later in the meeting.</p>	
<p>8. IDB Funding for Main River Maintenance</p>	<p>8.1 Matthew Wall (MSW) gave an update on the current situation as the Clerk wasn't present at the meeting.</p> <p>MSW said the EA have given us a list of rivers that will be cut and those that will not be cut – this is a concerning situation. It is already causing issues in the Boards areas.</p> <p>The IDB are undertaking works under a PCSA in the Parrett area and would like to do the same for the Mark Yeo, Blind Pill and Axe; as this will help land owners.</p> <p>Unfortunately, we were only given this information in early September but we have a contractor lined up who can deliver the work and the estimated cost is £10,000 per river therefore approx. £20,000 for the Axe Brue area in total.</p> <p>As this is urgent it was felt that it can't wait to be agreed at the Full Board meeting, it is unbudgeted and therefore will be funded through underspend and reserves.</p>	

	<p>Martin Watts reported that the EA are letting riparian owners do the work themselves.</p> <p>MSW agreed that this is happenng in certain areas but the problem is that unless everyone agrees, only sections of the rivers will get done. He emphasised that we are running out of time and need to prepare urgently for winter.</p> <p>DT noted that the Mark Yeo was at winter pen already and MSW said this was at the IDBs request. We can either sit back and watch or try and help this situation. He added that this will be a one off this year.</p> <p>MSW stated that there have been lots of complaints from land owners regarding flooding, most of those relate back to the lack of maintenance on main rivers.</p> <p>MSW advised that if we maintain the top half of the Mark Yeo this will be about 8.5 km. The Cary is about 14.5km but the issue on the Cary is that it hasn't been maintained in the last 2 years.</p> <p>The Mark Yeo was previously maintained 3 times a year and now is not being maintained at all. It's an important channel and one that the IDB is keen to get cleaned.</p> <p>The Chairman asked if there had been any progress with the white house bridge collapse? MSW replied that this is a highways issue.</p> <p>CR said that he understood the urgency of the situation and mentioned that during the extra ordinary board meeting where the lack of EA funding was discussed, Board members felt that MP pressure was needed. He asked about the progress of MP meetings?</p> <p>MH advised that MPs have been contacted and we are in the process of arranging a suitable date to meet. MH said that the EA unfortunately couldn't accept a loan as proposed in the extra ordinary meeting.</p> <p>DT asked what the percentage of main rivers were in each Board area.</p>	
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	<p>MSW replied that this is hard to determine as the EA split their areas differently to us. He advised that watercourses that have been cut by EA in the Axe Brue area are the Shipham, Hickam, Blind Yeo, a section of the North Drain, South drain Street to Gold corner, and Glastonbury canal.</p> <p>They have confirmed that they are not doing the Axe, Mark Yeo, Banwell Cheddar Yeo, Land Yeo, Drove Rhyne, Blind pill, White lake, Red lake, Hart lake, Glastonbury Millstream, Panbourough, Coxbridge brook, Cripps division Rhyne, Sheppey. They are clear about what they plan to do and what they aren't doing.</p> <p>Martin Watts asked if the EA will ever maintain these in the future.</p> <p>MSW said it was unclear and dependant on future budgets.</p> <p>The Chairman said that maintenance is critical, with regards to the Cheddar Yeo he understands that the local MP is involved with this.</p> <p>CR said that pressure is rising and recently there was an article in the Farmers Weekly publication calling for responsibility to be taken away from the EA due to incompetence.</p> <p>MSW clarified the high level decision making. EA colleagues on the ground are frustrated and working hard to do what they can. The issues are with higher levels, not those on the ground.</p> <p>Martin Watts asked how much money the SRA raise and how much do they spend?</p> <p>MH said she wasn't sure of those figures and would have to look at the SRA reports.</p> <p>MSW said that the EA may be able to apply for funding from the SRA.</p> <p>The Chairman said the issue is many groups are applying for funds from the SRA currently.</p>	
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	<p>The Chairman asked the committee members to vote on <i>'approval to go ahead with the PSCA for work in the Axe Brue area.'</i></p> <p>Proposed: David Tratt Seconded: Charlie Riches All in Favour</p>	RESOLUTION 4
9. Precept Increase	<p>9.1 MH asked the members to look at the paper showing the information regarding the precept. She advised that this could increase as much as 5%.</p> <p>It's clear we need to know how the money is being spent and would need a detailed programme of works to have confidence that the money is being spent wisely.</p> <p>DT asked is there a % cap? MH said she doesn't believe so.</p> <p>DT asked who the EA is answerable to and where does the RFCC sit in this situation?</p> <p>The Chairman advised that this topic is being debated today at a RFCC meeting.</p> <p>CR asked if the EA can raise the precept and IDBs have no say in this? MH replied it's a demand and we don't have any say. We cannot add conditions to this.</p>	
10. New Rating System	<p>10.1 Water Alliance gave notice some time ago that they were not going to support the platform for the current rating system. At this point ADA said they would look to support this instead. In September MH was told that ADA would no longer be supporting this.</p> <p>Therefore, we need a system in place for 1st April 2025 and there are some options we can consider. We could look to continue with an unsupported platform which would be a risk. We could look to market to investigate alternative products. Water Alliance will have a new platform that would be accessible to us but there would be a cost and then an increased yearly maintenance cost.</p>	

	<p>MH said she wanted to highlight in advance of another cost coming before April 2025.</p> <p>10.2 Martin Watts asked about when agricultural land becomes eligible for special levy.</p> <p>MH replied that when agricultural land is no longer being used for that purpose i.e. in cases of development, then an officer is sent out to check and then once verified, we can update the system to reflect this change.</p> <p>Martin Watts advised that he knows of several instances where it has not been changed, he asked why it wasn't picked up at the planning notification stage.</p> <p>MSW suggested that this is something that can be brought up with Development Control team and see if the DAMS system can help us to monitor this.</p> <p>MH agreed that this can be investigated further and asked Martin Watts to provide information on those cases so that we can look into this further.</p> <p>Martin Watts said it's important to keep this up to date as otherwise the Agricultural Levy is subsidising the Special Levy.</p> <p>The Chairman suggested when the first shovel goes in the ground on development land it should be changed to special levy.</p> <p>Martin Watts said he knew of an area of peat land of which no drainage rates or special levy is being paid.</p> <p>MH asked Martin Watts to provide the evidence in writing so that she can start investigating.</p> <p>The Chairman asked if there was any other business and there was none raised.</p>	<p>Action 20241021 - 01</p>
<p>8. Date of Next Meeting</p>	<p>10.1. The Date of the next Finance & Works meeting is 13 January 2024.</p> <p>10.2. The meeting was closed at 11.30am.</p>	

CHAIRMAN.....DATE

**ANNEX A TO
AXE BRUE F&W COMMITTEE MINUTES
DATED 21 OCTOBER 2024**

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/20240603-01	To look into refreshing the membership of this Committee.	IDS
AB/20241021-01	To investigate cases of land being treated as agricultural when it should be subject to special levy.	MH