

**MINUTES OF THE AXE BRUE FULL BOARD MEETING HELD AT BRADBURY HOUSE ON  
MONDAY 27 JANUARY 2025 AT 10.30AM**

<b>Attendance:</b>			
<b>Elected Members:</b> Mr A Franks Mr A Gilling (VC) Mr J Stradling Mrs W Welland Mr T Whitcombe Mr D Tratt Mr M Watts Mr M Lunnon	<b>Appointed Members:</b> Cllr R Filmer Cllr R Keen Cllr B Knickerbocker Mr J Cousins Mr N Cottle Ms D Gowler Mr J Grischeff Cllr P Clayton	<b>Officers:</b> Mr I Sturdy Mrs M Hammond Mrs J Farthing Mr R King Mr M Wall Mrs N Johnson Mrs C Murray Mrs V Martin	<b>Public:</b> Vanessa Becker- Hughes - SERP
<b>Approved Apologies:</b>			
Mr J Fear (C) Ms L Scott Mr N Lukins Mr B Clapp	Mr C Riches		
<b>Non-Approved Apologies:</b>			
	Cllr M Healey		

<b>Agenda Item:</b>	<b>Detail:</b>	<b>Action:</b>
1. Attendance & Apologies	1.1 As per the register.  1.2 The Chair told members that unfortunately Charlie Riches has had to resign from the Board due to a personal situation. IDS said that he has spoken to him to thank him for all his work and will write a letter of thanks and best wishes on behalf of the AB Board.	<b>AB/20250127 - 03</b>
2. Items additional to the agenda	2.1. Iain Sturdy (IDS) said he had received a letter from M Watts that he deemed serious enough to share with the board and wanted to add this item to the agenda. 2.2 IDS said that Vanessa from the Eel Recovery project was here to talk about their work.	

3. Declarations of Interest	3.1. None were made.	
4. Members of the public to address the Meeting	<p>4.1. Vanessa from Somerset Eel Recovery Project thanked members for allowing her time to speak at this meeting. She updated members on some of the projects SERP have been involved with recently such as DNA testing, community talks and classroom education sessions. She said it is vital we learn more about Eels in order to grow their numbers as they are in significant decline.</p> <p>4.2 Vanessa invited members to join the Eel Day on 18<sup>th</sup> February, there will be a chance to participate in constructing eel passes using a historic technique.</p> <p>4.3 Vanessa mentioned that she had submitted some questions to the Board. IDS confirmed he was in receipt of these and will gather the information and get back to Vanessa on this.</p> <p>4.4 The Chair thanked Vanessa for attending and encouraged members to attend the Eel Day if they were able to.</p>	AB/20250127 – 04
5. Letter from Mr Watts.	<p>5.1 IDS told members that he was in receipt of a letter from Mr Watts that he wanted to discuss with the Board and asked that we move to closed session.</p> <p>5.2 Vanessa left the meeting for the closed session.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">-----  <b>5.3 CONFIDENTIAL SESSION</b>  Members of the public were asked to leave the meeting  -----</p>	
6. Review of previous minutes and matters arising	<p>6.0 <i>'That the minutes were a true and accurate record of the meeting'</i></p> <p><b>Prop: Joe Stradling</b>  <b>Sec: James Grisceff</b>  <b>For: 12</b>  <b>Against 0</b>  <b>Abstain: 4</b></p> <p>6.1 The Chair went through the minutes page by page.</p> <p>6.2 P4 – Bob Filmer has now joined the Finance and Works committee and IDS wanted to thank him for this.</p> <p>6.3 IDS said that the Chairmans Allowance change is in progress and once the minutes have been signed Maggie will send the relevant information to DEFRA.</p> <p>6.4 MH said that resolution 6 was regarding court action and she went to court on Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> Jan, the court has now signed liability orders.</p> <p>6.7 IDS updated on resolution 7 – PSCA. Work on the River Cary (Main River) has started. Signed PSCA for AB board is in place</p>	RESOLUTION 02

meaning we can start working shortly on the River Axe and the Mark Yeo which are both Main Rivers. We are also near finalising the grant we have applied for which is good news.

6.8 P9 – Issue around Mr Watts declining to remove an obstruction along the maintenance strip, meaning we have had to take the long route and we will follow up on this as a breach of the bylaw.

Martin Watts asked about Beavers and if they build a dam is he allowed to remove it. IDS said there is a strategy in place on how to manage Beavers in the correct way and PB has been working on this. JG clarified that the strategy would be published in a few weeks. Any work of that nature will require proper authorisation and a licence.

6.9 P11 JG said he thought the minutes are accurate. He was concerned that there were however unanswered questions regarding the strategic approach to the maintenance of rivers. He stated that we don't have clarity on the long-term intentions of the EA.

6.10 IDS said that the position is that the EA only have 60% of funding that they have asked for. The EA is promoting this as a small cut. There is either denial at senior levels at the EA and the ministry or there is an undeclared Policy of maintenance withdrawal and reduced flood risk standards

Emma Hardy perpetuates the usual response re: 92% of EA assets being at target condition. Which continues to be a frustration as it only considers high consequence systems and doesn't take into account that many assets have a "poor" target condition.

IDS advised that the EA have now bid for £500,000 from the SRA to deliver more Main River maintenance this year with encouragement from the Boards.

The Chair echoed that its vital that water channels are maintained as a flood defence network.

AF said that things can't carry on like this it's a huge flood risk, especially in the Brue area. As a Drainage Board we should be trying to mitigate these issues on the main river. We need to not just talk about it, we have the money - we should do something.

IDS replied that we now have PSCA in place and a one off grant from DEFRA so will be doing some of the Main River Work that has been neglected by EA.. If we were to do more main river work, we would need to raise funding or use reserves, also we would need to stop work elsewhere in order to do this. We have PSCA for Mark Yeo and Axe but we need to be careful we don't over commit and fail as a consequence. We need to chose areas where we do Main River work carefully and do it successfully and then build on this. He said there is an upcoming meeting about Panborough drain.

AF felt that were more important rivers that needed sorting out such as the Brue and the Sheppey.

	<p>IDS said that SRA are working on the Brue modelling project. IDS shared his opinion with the SRA that he was disappointed in the time this is taking, depending on the model it could be another 12 months before anything is actually done with this. He agreed it's a huge challenge at the moment. IDS urged members to make their opinions known, not just at the IDB but with local MPs and organisations who have influence.</p> <p>AF said that there is a lot in the media about the Parrett, but no mention of the Brue area and it seems to be losing attention. SRA money should be looked at more closely to ensure that this area is being supported too.</p> <p>BK said he'd recently been at a multi-agency meeting and said the surprising facts he took from the meeting was that there was no overruling body to oversee the SRA, EA, IDB, NE and that the EAs mandate is to protect property not the land. He shared concerns that the Brue is under resourced and has been for a number of years. IDS advised that these bodies are overseen by the relevant Government department.</p> <p>Nick Cottle agreed with Alan Franks and said the Sheppey needs seriously looking at. Years ago, farmers used to maintain their own ditches more than now. There is not enough investment in the Brue area, we need to look holistically and work out a way forward. He said that he's now on the SRA and will be discussing with Mike Stanton, he emphasised we need to make progress.</p> <p>The Chair emphasised that the SRA is very valuable and other counties are looking at the SRA and are keen to have the same.</p> <p>TW said that farmers are hindered with doing their own maintenance now, as SSSI sites mean they can miss time slots when its possible to do the work. When the land is saturated there is a need for tracked vehicles particularly with the Boards maintenance. Wetter conditions will make the Boards work even more difficult</p> <p>6.11 M Watts asked what's happening about Tor Rugby club. Virgine Martin (VM) said there is no response from them when contacted. She said it's now the Board's decision if it remains unconsented or removed. MW said it seems to him that officers are picking and choosing what they dealt with.</p> <p>IDS said we will make a technical decision and if its difficult we will bring back to the board. VM will look into in more detail and bring back to the next meeting to update the board.</p> <p>6.12 MH advised that there is still no date made for the investment meeting.</p> <p>6.13 Stoke Moor pumping station action now complete – to summarise IDS said the IDB appointed Ashford solicitors to advise. And the owners were advised that the covenant allows the maintenance they have said they want to complete. But any improvement or change in purpose will require further consideration.</p>	<p><b>Action</b> <b>AB/20250127 - 01</b></p> <p><b>AB/20220411 - 1</b></p>
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	ML asked how much has been spent on solicitors fees? IDS said a few thousand has been spent.	
7. Health & Safety Report	<p>7.1 Naomi Johnson(NJ) asked to take her report as read.</p> <p>7.2 Advised that as Charlie Riches is no longer on the board there will be a vacancy on the H&amp;S Committee. She asked if there was any interest from the board. Nick Cottle said he would volunteer. Everybody in agreement.</p> <p>7.3 JG left the meeting at 12.30pm.</p>	
8. Finance	<p>8.1 Maggie Hammond Reported that Bank reconciliations done and are correct and signed off by Charlie Riches.</p> <p>8.2 MH recommended that in order to get a better interest rate on the Boards finances it is suggested 'The AB IDB gives permission for a 90-day notice investment account to be set up and managed by Business services.'</p> <p><b>Prop: Joe Stradling</b> <b>Sec: Bob Filmer</b> <b>All in Favour</b></p> <p>8.3 'It is recommended that a ringfenced reserve be set up for the environmental underspend in 24/25. '</p> <p><b>Prop: Peter</b> <b>Sec Bob Filmer</b> <b>14 in Favour</b> <b>1 against</b></p> <p>Motion carried</p> <p>8.4 MH asked the Board to approve the Budget for 25/26.</p> <p>8.5 MW asked MH why £130,000 more is being asked for admin costs. He said it seems to him that it's a bottomless pit. He advised that the councillors in the room should be questioning this.</p> <p>MH advised that the costs were agreed by the SDBC Management committee and the F &amp; W committee and they have agreed the budget.</p> <p>IDS advised that the precept that we have to pay to the Environment Agency has now been set by the Regional Flood and Coastal Committee at 5%</p> <p>MW said when is admin costs going to be cut? He said maintenance has been cut previously.</p> <p>MH said that the maintenance budget has not been cut. Last year's budget was set against a presumed increase in CPI which in the fullness of time had been seen to be an over estimate. Matthew Wall clarified that inflation has calmed down and our budgets for the coming year reflect that IDS clarified that it's a saving not a cut.</p> <p>JC said it's the same work but costing less.</p>	<p><b>RESOLUTION 03</b></p> <p><b>RESOLUTION 04</b></p>

	<p>Donna Gowler asked if the Environment budget is the same and is there a plan of how that many will be spent. MH said yes and she would need to ask Phil with regards to a spending plan.</p> <p>8.4 'To approve the Budget for 25/26'</p> <p><b>Prop B Filmer</b> <b>Sec Wendy Welland</b> <b>All in Favour</b></p> <p>8.5 MH advised that the Penny Rate will be is 10.588 pence. This needs to be agreed with the Board.</p> <p><b>Prop: B Filmer</b> <b>Sec:W Welland</b> <b>All in Favour</b></p> <p>MW asked how much Somerset Council pay in special levy. MH said this is over a million pounds.</p> <p>8.6 MH asked to 'release £30,000 from reserves to provide additional funding for Board Schemes' for the coming year</p> <p><b>Prop: D Tratt</b> <b>Sec: T Whitcombe</b> <b>All in Favour</b></p> <p>8.7 MH advised that the outstanding rate position is not quite as good as last year. She said that with the court signed liability orders money will be coming in via the Bailiffs.</p> <p>Nick Cottle asked if we have a scheme in place to help people who are struggling financially to pay. MH clarified that there is an option to pay in instalments but people need to talk to us if they have struggles and then we can work with them.</p> <p>AF asked if there are some people that are withholding their rate payments due to lack of EA maintenance and MH confirmed there have been a few yes. AF felt this will only get worse in the coming years.</p> <p>8.8 Martin Watts said that some fields on his rate bill don't belong to him and said that they belong to someone else in his area.</p> <p>The Chair said this was getting too personal and David Tratt suggested this is a private issue and should be discussed outside of the meeting.</p>	<p><b>RESOLUTION 05</b></p> <p><b>RESOLUTION 06</b></p> <p><b>RESOLUTION 07.</b></p>
<p>9. Operations/ Engineering/Dev Control</p>	<p>9.1. Matthew Wall said it's been an extremely wet period since the last meeting. He showed a plan of maintenance on the completed so far. He said 97% complete on planned maintenance, and considering the wet weather he was please with the work that has been done. He acknowledges a query from Martin Watts regarding an area not done in Queens Sedgemoor and said he will go to site and take a look at this next week. AF and TW also mentioned</p>	

some areas not done and Matthew Wall said he would get more details from them after this meeting so he could inspect it.

9.2 Matthew Wall said that he would now be sharing some tender papers with the Board and reminded members these are commercially sensitive and confidential. He asked to go into closed session.

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**9.3 CONFIDENTIAL SESSION**  
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**Members of the public were asked to leave the room**  
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9.10 Rob King thanked members for their support in the decision to go early on winter penning, it made a huge difference.

9.11 Rob King shared photos of recent works to show progress on non-planned maintenance projects.

AF asked if there is an update on the Goodwins negotiations. RK replied that there is an SRA meeting to 3<sup>rd</sup> Feb to discuss this further. CM added that the meeting will provide a chance to discuss next steps and agree long term solutions.

AF said that he hasn't been contacted to be involved in this and he should have done as it's his area. CM said she would speak to John Rowlands to forward the meeting information onto AF and make sure he can attend

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Martin Watts asked if Godwins have funded any works and RCK said no but they are involved in the conversation.

9.12 TW said that its odd in Godney there is a metre in difference on water levels from one side of the road to the other it is bizarre. There is a sluice there that the water could go in.

IDS said he understands TWs point. There are some difficult problems on Godwins side at the moment as the bank has failed. There are a number of properties flooding. In terms of decision making, we need to be careful we don't relieve one problem and pass it onto someone else. There is a need to plan in the long term how the water is managed in the Godwins area. We don't want to do the work until we know that the water level management is suitable on the Godwins site and all are in agreement

AF asked if there is a plan of reinstating banks from Godwins?

RCK said he hopes for more information in the next meeting.

JS said that the work looks good, it seems to him that a lot of problems arise from riparian owners not doing their own work.

Will we recover our expenditure at some point and will Godwins contribute?

He was advised that it will depend on what work gets done and by whom.

9.13 Caroline Murray shared a plan of works across the Boards area showing those projects in progress and those complete. She asked that her engineering report is taken a read. She said that projects are progressing well although wet weather has caused some delay.

	<p>9.14 Photos of Burton Row project were shown and highlighted that it has made a great improvement and feedback has been very positive. IDS added that this demonstrates a great piece of work with a great outcome and we worked well with Highways to achieve this.</p> <p>9.15 Virginie Martin updated the members on development control work. She said the team are currently keeping a close eye on Oak Tree Arena in terms of the consents. There are also some issues at Isle port which they are keeping a close eye on.</p> <p>9.16 Jon Cousins made a declaration of interest as he is a director of a community company that wishes to instal solar panels at Glastonbury (9.1 of Development Control report).</p>	
<p>10. SRA update</p>	<p>10.1. IDS said that the SRA full board meeting was held that past Friday, visitors from Lincolnshire were in attendance. They have an interest in the SRA as they currently don't have this in their area and it could be beneficial to them. They were suitably encouraged and they also went onsite to look at the River Parrett dredging which was impressive.</p> <p>10.2 25/26 enhanced programme has no new projects in the AB area as we are working through the backlog and focussing on repairs and defects. IDS emphasised that they are pushing the importance of the Brue as hard as they can do at SRA. AF felt that until there is another huge flood nothing will happen.</p> <p>10.3 The EA have with our encouragement bid for £500,000 from SRA, some which will be used for maintenance in the AB area.</p> <p>10.4 IDS shared a plan with members showing areas where maintenance will be done as funded by the SRA. Therefore, the good news is that more work will be done as a result of SRA funding.</p> <p>10.5 Martin Watts said that SRA are funded by council tax payers, would it be better in future if the IDBs were fully funded by the council.</p> <p>Nick Cottle asked where would the money come from, there is no money.</p> <p>IDS said there is some new legislation coming forward around how IDBs are funded. It would enable boundaries to be extended and new IDBs to be formed. However, if you owned land in a IDB area you would still be liable for drainage rates as is the case now – that will not change. That would also require a whole new assessment on values previously formed from 1991 values. IDS said it's not likely we would move to this and would caution the effects of unintended consequences.</p> <p>10.6 Julian Taylor from the Parrett Board has recently written to Emma Hardy and had received a response that IDS shared with members. In summary he said it wasn't a helpful response.</p>	

<p>11. AOB</p>	<p>11. TW asked the councillor members to help with the dangerous railings at back ditch. He said someone will get killed if this is not sorted. Nick Cottle asked him to send an email with all the information and he will take this forward.</p> <p>11.1 Donna Gowler gave a brief update on Beavers in the area (Avalon marshes). They are being monitored and are not causing harm, but she wanted to clarify they were not put in by Natural England.</p> <p>11.2 Martin Watts said that as there is now a vacancy on the Board, from Charlie Riches resignation who makes the decision about who replaces him? IDS said that Mr Riches was an appointed member and therefore the local authority will decide although they would probably consult with the CEO first.</p> <p>11.3 Brian Knickerbocker wanted to ensure that Charlie Riches was thanked for his valuable contribution to the board and that was agreed by all.</p> <p>11.4 The Chair thanked members for their attendance. The meeting was closed at 2pm.</p>	
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CHAIR.....DATE .....

**AXE BRUE BOARD – TABLE OF OUTSTANDING ACTIONS**

Action Number:	Action:	Actionee:
<b>AB/20220411 - 1</b>	To carry forward to a later date the investment group meeting – Information with the Clerk to review.	MH/IDS
<b>AB/20250127 - 01</b>	Tor Rugby club consent issue will be investigated and an update given to the Board at the next FB meeting	VM
<b>AB/20250127 - 02</b>	To write to contractors reminding them of the importance of adhering to bylaws in their non drainage board work	MW
<b>AB/20250127 - 03</b>	To write letter of thanks and best wishes to Charlie Riches on behalf of the AB Board.	IDS
<b>AB/20250127 – 04</b>	Vanessa from SERP questions to the Board. IDS gathering the information to feed back to Vanessa – delegated to Phil Brewin	PB
<b>AB/20250127 – 05</b>	Check if the Confidential Minutes had been published	IDS