

**MINUTES OF THE SDBC ANNUAL MEETING HELD AT THE GREEN WEMBDON AT 19.00 ON
10 MARCH 2025**

Attendance: 28 Members			
Elected Members: Mr T Bradford (Chair) Mrs W Welland (VC) Mr C Passmore Mr W Barnard Mr A Betty Mr B Bryer Mr P Burden Mr T Bush Mr A Gilling Mr S Kingham Mr A Franks Mr J Perrin Mr D Vigar Mr T Whitcombe	Appointed Members Cllr P Burden Cllr J Cousins Cllr M Caswell Cllr N Cavill Mr J Grischeff Mrs S Hearne Cllr C Hunt Cllr B Knickerbocker	Officers: Mr I Sturdy (CEO/Clerk) Mrs M Hammond Mr P Brewin Mr R King Mr G Oliver Ms V Martin Mr N Stevens Mrs K Carleton Mr M Wall	Public:
Apologies:			
Mr R Barrington Mr B Clapp Mr J Fear Mr J Harris Mrs R Horsington Mr P Holms Mr A Mead Mr R Parsons Mr C Redding Mr D Tratt	Cllr M Bird Mr J Cato Cllr A Bradford Cllr P Clayton Cllr N Cottle Cllr B Filmer Cllr C Gibbons Ms D Gowler Mr P Harris Cllr A Hendry Cllr R Keen Cllr L Leavy Cllr M Stanton Cllr D Thomas Mr R Westwood Cllr G Wren Cllr J Taylor		
Non-Attendance:			
Mr G Attwell Mr N Cole Mr R Coombes Mr M Heywood Mr S Hutchings Mr P Kingcott Mr B Letts Mr N Lukins Mr M Lunnon Mr R Mitchell Mr G Plaister Mrs L Scott Mr M Watts Mr J Stradling Mr J Winslade	Cllr H Bruce Cllr L Duddridge Cllr S Hart Cllr M Healey Cllr D Loveridge Cllr R Morgan Cllr B Petty Cllr M Pepperall Cllr D Shopland Cllr J Tonkin Mrs D Yamanaka		

Agenda Item:	Detail:	Action:
1. Attendance and Apologies	<p>1.1 The Chair welcomed everybody to the meeting.</p> <p>1.2 The Chair announced election of officers at Extraordinary SDBC Management Committee meeting on 04/03/2025. He welcomed Wendy Welland (WW) as the New Vice Chair, and thanked Jeff Fear for his service and excellent support.</p> <p>1.3 Attendance & Apologies as per the above.</p>	
2. Items additional to the Agenda	<p>2.1 The Chair explained that current levels of attendance are making it difficult for meetings to be quorate. Proposed changes to the meeting quorum for the SDBC: Management Committee to go from 4/3/2 for Axe Brue/Parrett/NSL to 3/2/1. Confirmed this will not change membership, just the requirements to continue business.</p> <p>‘a recommendation is made to the Management Committee that the quorum for a Management Committee Meeting be changed to 3 Axe Brue, 2 Parrett and 1 North Somerset’ to raise at the next Management Committee Meeting on 22.07.25, which will require 75% to approve.</p> <p>Proposed: Peter Burden Seconded: Stuart Kingham All in favour</p> <p>2.2 Iain Sturdy (CEO/Clerk) (IDS) advised the meeting to consider if a business case for amalgamation should be prepared. Inc in Item 10a.</p> <p>2.3 IDS also advised that blind copied emails to members may be delivered to the Junk/Spam files of the recipients, which means they may be missing calling notices.</p> <p>Do we continue as present or would members be happy that their email addresses are copied to all other board members when sending out papers and information thus reducing the risk of being filed in the Junk/Spam box.</p> <p>Maggie Hammond (MH) reminded members that the schedule of meetings is sent to all and is also on website, and that it is the responsibility of members to attend. Some hard copies of meeting papers are sent, but it is too costly to do this for all members.</p> <p>IDS/The Chair called for improvement in attendance. We need to ensure everyone has the opportunity to attend. As an example, last Management Committee required calling round on the afternoon for attendees in order for the meeting to proceed. It was noted that there were also Council and Parish Council meetings today that may have limited the attendance.</p> <p>Peter Burden (PB) noted local authority members all have publicly accessible emails.</p> <p>Colin Passmore (CP) suggested text prompts.</p> <p>Bryan Knickerbocker suggested the use of Mailchimp or mail merge to avoid such problems.</p>	<p>RESOLUTION 01</p> <p>2.3 Action: No consensus was reached. SDBC/20250310-01 Officers will review the matter and bring back to the Boards in April.</p>

3. Declarations of Interest	3.1 No new declarations of interest made.	
4. Members of the Public	4.1 None attending	
5. Approval of Minutes	5.1 The Chair called for the meeting to approve the minutes and sign them as a true and accurate record of the meeting held on 12 March 2024.' All in favour	RESOLUTION 02
6. Matters arising	6.1 Page 3 item 7.6 Stuart Kingham (SK) asked if there has been take-up by members of agri-environment schemes. Covered in Item 8 Chair's Report 6.2 Page 2 item 6.1 The Chair and Vice Chair (Anthony Betty) would like the SRA cross party Scrutiny Committee to be reinstated to ensure best use of taxpayer money. Appointed members advised that if there are 2 IDB Appointed members in agreement, they could propose this to the Council on behalf of the Board. Two Somerset Council Appointed members will recommend to Somerset Council that the Somerset Rivers Authority Scrutiny Committee be reinstated. Proposed: Colin Passmore Seconded: Jon Cousins All in favour.	RESOLUTION 03
7. American Mink Eradication in East Anglia	7.1 The Chair informed the meeting that following an environment event attended by some members in Peterborough where this topic was covered. Emily Wilkinson of the Waterlife Recovery Trust (WLRT) was invited to present. Emily began by advising that American Mink is an invasive predator brought over for fur farming. Escapes and animal rights releases mean they have entered our ecosystem. This has decimated water vole populations in particular seeing a 90% decline, and has had a profound effect on ground nesting birds, amphibians and fish. Focus has moved from control in the past to eradication. A WLRT viability study used updated control methods to make eradication possible. Mink have now been fully eradicated in the initial area in Norfolk, Suffolk & most of Cambridgeshire. The study helped the WLRT gain funding and interest to increase the buffer zone and they are now rolling the scheme out in other areas (39 English counties as well as Scotland and Wales). The scheme has built upon previous control methods, which used rafts/clay pads to detect mink, then added a cage/trap to capture. This method often detected mink which had then moved on before trapping and also needed checking daily. To be able to trap all the time, the WLRT installed remote monitoring devices so that the traps could be used all the time and only checked when triggered. Smart rafts have enabled the capture of 3500 mink, resulting in the return of native species, most notably water voles. Water vole	

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resurgence has hugely increased in areas where mink are eradicated.

Traps initially used food lure, but this also attracted non mink species. They now use anal gland scent as lure which is mink specific and has proven much more effective. Project Officers have recruited teams of volunteers and dispatchers to ensure traps can be open all the time. The mink carcasses are sent to science officers in Cambridge for analysis. There they are sized and sexed and anal gland scent is obtained. They also look at DNA and teeth to study mitochondrial DNA to study families/spread of mink. The teeth in particular indicate the age of the animals and the larger population. The scheme continues until they see fewer juveniles and no sign of breeding.

The WLRT currently have no traps in Somerset. Emily asked if any landowners are trapping. They would be able to move the initiative south west with funding to do this. Advice and anal gland scent lure are available from Emily in the meantime.

Phil Brewin (PB) advised that there are some traps in Somerset. He is keen to bring the scheme to Somerset. In 2000-2008 some work was done, but there was less available technology. The IDB's have limited resources, but can offer contact details for a scheme and we recognise the need to reduce the population of minks.

7.2 Questions:

The Chair asked if there is any data on recovery of nesting bird populations. Emily was unsure but can investigate the data on non-mink species caught in the traps, but thought this mainly showed non-bird species.

James Grischeff (JG) advised that they have used dumb traps in the Somerset Wildlife Trust (SWT). In new stewardship options if funding is available, can she help with specification and training. Emily advised they are currently discussing options, and hopefully will be in a position to help formally. Happy to offer advice in the meantime.

Sandra Hearne (SW) asked how officers/volunteers know they are not catching the same vole repeatedly. Emily advised that whilst this does definitely happen, they use excluders to stop most voles accessing traps, but they can still see the spread.

WW asked about the cost of traps. Emily advised that there are different options depending on the monitoring device which can vary, but that current ones are approx. £350 for raft, trap and remote monitoring device.

JC asked that if funding is limited, are skins sold for income. Emily advised that the mink carcasses are left as food for native raptors, and she doesn't believe that the sale of fur is legal.

IDS asked how much the scheme enlisted the involvement of their local IDB's in East Anglia. Emily advised that they worked closely in Lincolnshire as well as in other counties. She is also involved in initiatives in the south east with all IDB's. They have also helped secure funding and putting in traps.

	<p>IDS asked if there are any other benefits to IDB's. Emily advised improved biodiversity and commitments to eradicating invasives in waterways. The excellent results and solid evidence of success show a good reason to get involved.</p> <p>Peter Burden (PBur) asked what is spacing of traps. Emily advised that they work on a minimum of one trap every 20km² which they estimate takes 5 years to eradicate. Mink on average disperse about 20km. In Lincolnshire they have implemented traps one every 16km², aiming for eradication within 3-4 years.</p> <p>It was suggested that when local rate demands go out in April, it may be useful to put information and WLRT contact details in the accompanying newsletter.</p> <p>The Chair thanked Emily for her time and excellent work.</p> <p>He suggested a working group. Phil Brewin acknowledged that he would like to push forward with such an initiative. The cost of this was queried. It would require a project officer to oversee. It was felt the evidence is there to justify. It was also acknowledged that the scheme would be more difficult in this landscape, but worth trying. He would also like to develop a Biodiversity Action Plan for water voles.</p> <p>John Perrin (JP) advised that some landowners he knows have previously trapped mink but have now stopped, as they think maintenance will stop if water voles return. The Chair advised that it needs to be made clearer that maintenance is still required to enhance wildlife and encouraged members to attend the SWADA meeting on 7th May. This matter will go on the agenda of the next Environment Committee meeting. PB commented that to take this forward a lead organisation will need to be found.</p>	
8. Chair's Report	<p>8.1 Staffing: the Chair welcomed Katy Carleton, Senior Governance Officer. He commented on the good working culture within SDBC. He thanked IDS and SDBC staff in general for their hard work and commitment.</p> <p>8.2 Behaviour: Last year there had been several special meetings about members behaviour. The Chair reminded members of the Code of Conduct and the requirement for courteous behaviour in meetings and when working with staff and each other. JC commented that in Councils members behaviour is subject to scrutiny - there is a Standards Committee. It was recognised that there is no similar scrutiny of elected members in IDB's and that available sanctions are weak on misbehaviour in Drainage Board Service IDS explained that there is a procedure and Code of Conduct in place. In addition to this the ADA are looking into this subject already and are lobbying government to bring forward a solution for IDB's. JC suggested that byelaws could be used as a mechanism to tie in to the Council procedures.</p> <p>8.3 Weather: The Chair commented on the longevity of wet weather and noted that the levels and moors are in a in bad state again. This is not got good for farming, or wildlife or flood risk. It was also noted that 97% of IDB planned maintenance has been completed which is good considering the conditions. It has been</p>	

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a challenging 2 years. He thanked Matthew and Rob for achieving this.

8.4 Main Rivers: The Chair was called in last September and advised by EA that certain main rivers will not be maintained by them due to limited funding. The Cary, Axe and Mark Yeo have undergone works by the IDB under public sector agreement with the EA. however the Chair felt they are quite bureaucratic and he preferred that it be done following de-maining which is reportedly back on the national agenda. IDB's will have to carry out more of this work in future if EA continue to withdraw. It is unclear how works will be funded, but IDB's are currently picking up the slack where we can.

8.5 RSPB Presentation on Greater Sedgemoor Landscape Recovery Project: The Chair feels this should be challenged as IDB's were not consulted despite the plan meaning they would have to alter water levels/work on structures. There is a need to include IDB's in these projects.

JG agreed they need to engage IDB's and this is a key part of the process. SWT also has a Landscape Recovery Plan in the Brue Valley and have engaged, and intend to continue engaging with the IDB's. He offered to help make this engagement happen however he did express some disagreement with the Chair on the principles he was describing.

CP raised concerns about raised water levels in the Parrett area, as there is no ditch maintenance in many of these areas, meaning there will be a cost to the Board in the end. He referenced a Lancaster University phosphate study suggesting a reduction of livestock however this was only one of the scenarios examined. Phosphates are coming from surrounding hills, rather than the farmland adjoining waterways.

IDS noted that the SRA presentation on the Greater Sedgemoor Project unsettled him as the ideas seemed well developed at this very early stage, with little consultation and that the IDB's could be the hub around which this develops if they are more involved. It was presented as a done deal, rather than as a first stage scoping interest. Landowners had actually signed up to see options and the impact on them rather than in agreement to it proceeding. The plans leave out the farming and land management aspects as explicitly as environmental factors. The Board needs to get involved and ensure the IDB is instrumental in outcomes. IDS reminded members that the Board had decided not to lead with the project at an early stage but to await requests from land occupiers for changes to the Water Level Management Plan.

David Vigar (DV) advised he has signed up, but mainly to get information. He sees it as a wish list rather than facts. There has been no mention of food production/security.

JG commented we could talk about principles, however if there is a group of farmers that sign up to something it does need to be supported by IDB. It is currently in a development stage.

	<p>John Perrin (JP) has signed up with the RSPB recovery plan. He feels we need to see it as 3-way negotiation between IDB/Farmer/RSPB. He thinks it will be brought to the Board by the RSPB.</p> <p>AG commented that the Council/RSPB/SWT have conflicting aims. It needs a minister to look after the industry.</p>	
9. Comments on the winter 2024/25 water management	<p>8.1 IDS noted that as the meeting was running over, if there are specific operational matters, they could be bullet pointed now, or raised with CEO later. What has/hasn't worked and what needs doing can be noted for future investigation.</p> <p>8.2 Alan Franks (AF) raised a point about the maintenance in vulnerable areas near rivers. He asked that vulnerable area channel work be done earlier rather than later in the Autumn, i.e. to do outlets first not last. Matthew Wall to follow up with AF</p> <p>8.3 DV asked about progress on trigger points. He expressed concern about the operation of the River Sowey. It seems to be operated more regularly to protect Moorland. The Chair reminded the meeting that the operation will change when the banks on KSD are done and banks raised.</p> <p>IDS advised that the Trigger Points are not under review but the Agency do consult him when they want to vary normal operational practice. He agreed that the situation will improve a bit when the KSD bank works are completed. The Sowey needs to be used to optimise the balance between the Tone and the Parrett and for it to be used as best as we can. The EA's priority is the protection of housing/property/infrastructure first. He noted that there is a misconception in some places that moor areas are paid to store water, which is incorrect. Thinking is around future land use.</p> <p>8.4 Barrie Bryer (BB) noted that the IDB's have done a good job in light of this wet year. He also asked what happens when increased water level gets to the end of the newly raised banks? Has the priority changed?</p> <p>IDS acknowledge that there may still be some increased wetness in the 18 Foot Rhyme area. IDS went on to highlight that the Parrett Pumping Stations and North Barrier may be operated differently in different events and that thinking within the Agency may change with time and circumstances. The dynamic is changing and the priority is to protect the most vulnerable.</p> <p>8.5 Will Barnard (WB) commented that the reservoir designation for Baltmoor Wall has led to a perception that Currymoor is a reservoir and landowners have been compensated. Currymoor is an historic flood storage area and land owners are not compensated.</p>	<p>SDBC/20250310-02</p>
10. Main River work - CEO	<p>10.1 Main river work has not previously been done by IDB's. The funding offered to the EA by the IDB was rejected, so officers applied to Defra for funding. The IDB were awarded £75k from the Defra Recovery Fund to undertake work.</p> <p>IDS showed a series of slides of the work done.</p>	

	<p>The River Cary is a main river previously 'maintained by EA'. IDS showed some of the before and after work completed by the IDB under this scheme.</p> <p>River Axe, was less challenging but still important. Mainly weed cutting.</p> <p>On the Mark Yeo work has started clearing vegetation. The IDB has capability to do some main river work, but expectation needs to be managed within IDB capability.</p> <p>It was expressed by many how well the IDB had done to get this important work done</p>	
<p>Local and national initiatives - CEO</p>	<p>10.2 Flood risk funding successes. The "IDB fund" is extra money for main river or other work from DEFRA.</p> <p>In North Somerset, the Board planned to draw money from reserves to replace a structure called Crossmans Hatch however they have actually received £365k to cover this in grant from the Defra Recovery Fund. Tim Bush offered formal thanks and recognition of work done by Giles and the team to obtain this funding.</p> <p>10.3 There has been engagement with local MP's for them to make the case to government for increased main river maintenance funding rather than on capital projects</p> <p>EA maintenance budgets have been increased. They have been shifted towards maintenance rather than capital projects. But due to rising costs it has not resulted in additional maintenance</p> <p>SRA have also awarded the EA an additional £500k for Main River maintenance in the coming year.</p> <p>Anthony Betty (ABe) asked how we ensure this money used in Somerset. It was explained that it was a detailed bid, and the SRA only pay on completion of work.</p> <p>IDS also advised that in the ADA response to the Environmental Audit (Select) Committee also focused on a maintenance/capital programme imbalance.</p> <p>The ADA want to grow IDB functions and recommend amalgamation to achieve this.</p> <p>10.4 The Chair followed up on ADAs position over amalgamation. He referred to the reconstitutions in 2018 and the expectation then that amalgamations would have to follow in the future. It is now over 5 years ago and now further amalgamation needs to be considered. The topic needs to go to individual boards to gauge the appetite. Given the frustration with attendance on the 3 current boards, this needs to be driven by the boards. There is a feeling that the Consortium is overburdened with meetings – each is repeat of the other two. There is scope to save time and the workload of running 3 boards. Resources would be freed up to be able to take on more main river work. The main change would be in the large reduction in the number of board meetings.</p> <p>Peter Burden noted that that the Boards have already been through lots of changes and are now stable. Perhaps this would be more appropriate a couple of years down the line, and it may happen organically.</p>	

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Sandra Hearne asked if we go to one board, where do you hold the meetings, where is convenient? The Chair thought these questions come later once appetite is established.

DV – Does the board become smaller? Do we lose local knowledge? It would need to be a manageable size. Same rules would apply.

IDS advised that with one boards at the current size, less members would be required however those people if interested/affected can still be involved/share knowledge. Staff will still have access to those people and there is a strong body of local knowledge that sits with the Supervisors and their assistants. An amalgamated Board may be a bigger more consistent entity. Time and resource freed up could be used to benefit rate payers rather than the duplication that 3 separate boards and a consortium bring. There would also be more capacity to do work and bid for more external funding.

It was noted that 2-3 years would coincide with elections. JG felt there was a need for a full analysis of benefits and what is lost/gained. It was acknowledged that there is a need for younger people on boards.

TBU believed there needs to be a plan to take to boards with some answers. Local knowledge has already been lost. Offer a plan to the Boards on how to keep committed board members.

The Chair asked if it's legal for all 3 boards to have a trial meeting all on same day. NS/IDS suggested this would be difficult to manage as different interests are being represented. Some members thought that the recent Somerset move to a unitary council has caused scepticism and inefficiency. JC took the view that planning in Mendip DC and Somerset Council shows no difference so there is no issue with some amalgamations.

CP advised it was unanimous at the recent Management Committee that we need to consider amalgamation at this time and to bring it to this meeting. Need to take it forward before we lose the time we have. He proposed to investigate the implications and

Will Barnard – suggested that Governance and Operations are separate issues. It is only governance that is being altered by amalgamation.

Sandra Hearne suggested splitting room into 3 in any trial meeting.

The Chair asked if members want a timeline/plan to take to board? A number of members agreed with the Chair that a plan needs to be developed and that it should include cost/benefit.

PBur feels both Somerset Councils should take a view.
Go to boards for initial view.

'Appointed members to take back the issue of amalgamation to their local authorities.'

Proposed: Peter Burden
Seconded: Anthony Betty
25 in favour: 1 Against, 2 abstentions . Motion carried.

**RESOLUTION
04**

11. CEO and RFO Overview	<p>11.1 Staff update: IDS showed the SDBC structure. Explained that all staff work for all 3 boards. This has given much greater consistency. JC commented that the staff structure would be no different with amalgamation. IDS agreed and highlighted the benefits for freeing up resources that one board meeting as opposed to three would bring.</p> <p>11.2 IDS presented an engineering overview showing completed, underway and pending works and a slide showing types of works carried out. Scanned though projects.</p> <p>11.3 Maggie Hammonds (MH) finance update went through the tasks undertaken by her team which is much as previous year. She confirmed that the Special Levy is largest part of funding, and agricultural rates are the smaller part.</p> <p>She ran through the budget for 2025/26 and impact of legislation changes. NI additional to pay is in the budget and has been accounted for. Vehicle tax changes do not impact as the SDBC don't buy new vehicles, or high value ones.</p> <p>BB asked about double cabs taxation. MH not aware of changes, but will look into.</p> <p>She confirmed that funds in reserves were now held in higher interest accounts.</p>	SDBC/20250310-03
12. AOB	<p>IDS has been written to by EDF as they have paused the habitat creation set back project as part of the Hinkley Point project however they will complete wildlife surveys</p> <p>ABet thanked Chairman for his good work as Chair.</p> <p>Chair apologised for running over and wished all members and officers a safe journey home.</p>	
13. Date and venue of next meeting	<p>SWADA Wednesday 7 May 2025</p> <p>A visit to the Tidal Barrier is planned as well as a talk from the Fenland Flora team.</p>	
	The meeting closed at 21.40	

CHAIR.....DATE

**ANNEX A TO
SDBC ANNUAL MEETING MINUTES
DATED 10 March 2025**

SDBC AGM – TABLE OF OUTSTANDING ACTIONS

Action Number:	Action:	Actionee:
SDBC/20250310-01	Officers to review the matter of calling notices by text and bring back to the Boards in April.	KC
SDBC/20250310-02	Look at feasibility of vulnerable area channel work being done earlier rather than later in the Autumn, i.e. to do outlets first not last.	MW
SDBC/20250310-03	Look into whether double cabs taxation affects SDBC vehicles and report back to April boards	MH

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