

**MINUTES OF THE SDBC MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE HELD AT BRADBURY HOUSE, 33-34 MARKET STREET, HIGHBRIDGE ON TUESDAY 22 JULY 2025 14.30**

<b>Attendance:</b>			
<b>Elected Members:</b> Tim Bush Tony Bradford (C) Andrew Gilling Colin Passmore Roger Coombes Alan Franks David Tratt	<b>Appointed Members</b> Mike Stanton Peter Burden Stuart Kingham Roger Keen	<b>Officers:</b> Iain Sturdy Katy Carleton Matthew Wall Phil Brewin	<b>Public:</b>
<b>Apologies:</b>			
Wendy Welland Barrie Bryer Alistair Mead	Cllr Alistair Hendry Cllr Peter Clayton	Mrs M Hammond	
<b>Non-Attendance:</b>			

<b>Agenda Item:</b>	<b>Detail:</b>	<b>Action:</b>
1. Attendance and Apologies	The meeting started at 14.34. Attendance & apologies as per above. The Chair noted that Maggie Hammond is unwell. The Consortium wish her a speedy and full recovery. KC to send a card on behalf of the Consortium.	<b>ACTION SDBC20250722-01</b>
2. Declarations of Interest	None	
3. Approval of Minutes	<b>“the minutes of the extraordinary SDBC Management Committee meeting held on 4 March 2025 are signed as a true and correct record of the meeting held”.</b> <b>PROPOSED: Roger Coombes</b> <b>SECONDED: Andrew Gilling</b> <b>All in favour</b> The Chair signed the minutes  <b>“the minutes of the Extraordinary SDBC Management Committee meeting held on 10 June 2025 are signed as a true and correct record of the meeting held”.</b> <b>PROPOSED: Mike Stanton</b> <b>SECONDED: Tim Bush</b> <b>All in favour</b> The Chair signed the minutes	<b>RESOLUTION 01</b>  <b>RESOLUTION 02</b>
4. Matters Arising & Updates	From the Minutes of 4 <sup>th</sup> March: <b>SDBC/20230727-04:</b> Water supply details to Gravity site are still not known <b>SDBC/20240724-1</b> Axe Brue and Parrett elections will include an induction for new members with a focus on attendance.	

	<p><b>SDBC/20241210-03</b> Amalgamation has been covered in recent meetings. There is a paper in progress but not ready to present. The Chair asked if, with Committee permission we could skip item 7. All agreed.</p> <p><b>SDBC/20250304 - 03</b> To circulate ADA Environment Day presentations on vegetation in ditches and mink control. Phil Brewin (PBr) will circulate.</p> <p>Peter Burden (PB) felt action is needed. This will be covered in the Environment Committee meeting.</p> <p>From the Minutes of 10<sup>th</sup> June:  <b>SDBC/20241210-03</b> Amalgamation – as above</p>	<p><b>ACTION</b>  <b>SDBC20250722-02</b></p>
5. Approval of Accounts 2024-2025	<p><b>To approve the SDBC accounts for 2024-2025</b>  <b>PROPOSED: Suart Kingham</b>  <b>SECONDED: David Tratt</b>  <b>All in favour</b></p>	<p><b>RESOLUTION</b>  <b>03</b></p>
6. Meetings Calendar 2026	<p>IDS noted that we need to reflect on this but are not currently aware of any need for changes.</p> <p>The present format to continue until any proposal on amalgamation.</p>	
7. Update on Amalgamation	<p>Skip as per Item 4.</p>	
8. Policies, Procedures & Risk Management	<p><b>Policies:</b> The Parrett &amp; North Somerset Boards have agreed to extend policy review dates.</p> <p><b>Progress update:</b> the Procurement Policy and procedures have been reviewed. New drafts have been produced on 5 others.</p>	
9. Staff Handbook Update	<p>None made since last meeting.</p> <p>Upcoming change: Legislation on neonatal care leave entitlement – to update Staff Handbook to reflect this.</p>	<p><b>ACTION</b>  <b>SDBC20250722-03</b></p>
10. EA Update	<p>IDS talked through his Briefing Note for Drainage Board Members on Main River Maintenance Withdrawal &amp; Flood Risk Funding Pressures:</p> <p>The paper was circulated at the meeting. We are being told by some ratepayers that the EA have advised them by letter of permanent withdrawal of maintenance in some main rivers. This is a significant change from previous reduced maintenance. They are not de-maining them and have advised they would maintain if funding were available.</p> <p>A map has been included in pack with lists of watercourses. Only watercourses marked in green and orange on the map will be maintained this year, and reds will not be maintained in the future.</p> <p>Concurrently we are now in prolonged dry weather conditions. The EA are suggesting maintenance of channels as the best way to mitigate this and allow water to flow around the system.</p> <p>Peter Burden (PB) noted Drove Rhyne and suggested this is the one that takes the motorway feed from the dock.</p> <p>IDS explained that officers have applied pence per metre meterage to identify the approximate cost for this work to be picked up elsewhere, which would be in the region of £1-1.5 million across all 3 boards.</p>	

Tim Bush (TB) asked about riparian responsibility to carry out works themselves.

IDS confirmed that riparian owners would need EA consent to undertake work themselves. The letter sent has a link to guidance for riparian owners. This guidance is not very clear, and IDS has challenged it. Weed-cutting is not mentioned, so does not appear to need a permit or exemption, but each riparian owner needs this confirmed from the EA, and we should not be advising until this is clear.

The Chair noted that in light of all the calls received about the letters by Board members and officers, we need to send a response to the EA. He feels we should point out: we should have been notified as a courtesy as we have been bombarded; a watercourse has many owners so there can't be consistent maintenance; the longer it is left will turn the issue from maintenance to capital requiring more permitting; he feels ADA have missed this as it should have been handled in partnership; there should be a national policy (some East Anglian boards have rivers defined as critical); if money came to drainage boards direct from Defra, they would provide much better value work than the EA ever could; rivers are critical, and disrepair will cause large impacts; this is a pivotal moment for drainage boards.

Andrew Gilling (AG) asked if there is a statutory duty on the EA to prevent or minimise flooding.

IDS explained his paper covers this. The EA's powers are permissive which lets everyone off the hook. The language in the EA correspondence is misleading, the EA will use limited funding where the greatest benefit will be achieved, i.e. the greatest number of properties will be protected, to make it sound like a positive, but this does not reflect the reality. There is no statutory duty to protect everyone from flooding.

AG asked if this has given the expectation that the Parrett will not flood Bridgwater.

The Chair felt the only bright light is that if the IDB's had the finance, we would be in a better position to protect ratepayers.

IDS felt this would need time to build capability not just money as this type of work is not routine and on a much bigger scale to most of our works. Access routes are also an issue.

Colin Passmore (CP) noted that some watercourses have not been maintained in many years. We would need to carry out an assessment. We have experienced contractors, but would need to futureproof.

PB noted that this seems similar to the way councils are shedding work to parish councils as they are also not rate capped. He warned against running in to fill the gap as the task is too monumental where some watercourses have not been touched in years. It will also then be expected to be done by us in the future. Our approach needs to be careful and nuanced.

Mike Stanton (MS) explained that he asked about this at the WRFC. The EA story is that they haven't maintained in recent years, so there no need. Actually the reverse is true. His guess is that the EA is hoping that someone else will do it; possibly riparian owners and some by the IDB and other bits not at all until something breaks.

The Chair noted that this is already affecting the SSSI's.  
MS stated that the reality is managed retreat.

The Chair asked the committee members what they would like to do in response.

CP suggested an asset survey in the first instance.

IDS asked members to note his recommendations on the paper.  
IDS and the Chair confirmed that we are getting several calls a day from ratepayers threatening to withhold drainage rates.

Alan Franks (AF) noted that ratepayers expectation is for the IDB to get water away to the main river.

IDS clarified that we need to make sure we are doing the right works, possibly main river instead of viewed rhyne.

DT asked if this is a national issue or just Wessex.

IDS gave the example of Witham which obtained plant and recruited staff via a PCSA to do works. The EA have reduced spending and the IDB are carrying out works using reserves and still have the workforce and plant.

The Chair noted he had spoken to Peter Bateson who explained that they did the work because pumping would have cost more than the maintenance itself if the river overtopped.

**IDS RECOMMENDATIONS:**

**1. Clarification at WRFC:** Request a formal agenda item or minute clarification noting withdrawal as a long-term change, not single-year prioritisation.

IDS challenged at RFCC to ascertain that this was permanent and when that decision had been made, as it was not communicated previously or mentioned in the meeting. This has now been confirmed as permanent withdrawal.

**2. Inclusive Consultation:** Advocate for IDBs to be included in all future engagement on drought, flood risk, and maintenance withdrawal decisions, and a review of actions taken so far.

IDS has asked to be included in future communications. Previously the EA have consulted LLFA's and MP's but not IDB's.

**3. Flooding, Land use and Environmental Safeguards:**

Identify at-risk locations and coordinate with EA and Natural England to seek temporary reinstatement of maintenance in key locations.

Ids EXPLAINED We have had expeditors in difficult situation to get water to SSSI's recently. We need to look at opportunities to

reinstate on environmental grounds. Phil Brewin (PBr) confirmed this was a problem last year. Critical feeds have not been maintained, and we are now in a dry year so there is a serious deficit. This has been an issue for several years. There are grave concerns on water quality and availability of movement of water, however Natural England are not responding to These concerns. This seems to be the opposite of what Defra are asking us to do. There may be an opportunity to challenge.

CP asked if there is any more money available from the SRA. IDS confirmed there is an SRA Technical Group tomorrow which will include discussion on bids for next years funding. If the EA don't make a bid, the IDB will. MS felt the EA will bid.

Matt Wall (MW) highlighted a small river feed on the Lower Axe into Rhynemoor rhyne. This is a key section of watercourse and very time sensitive. He feels this is the type of watercourse we need to look at taking on.

The Chair noted we will need to prioritise.

AF asked if there is any indication that Parish Councils will apply for funding to maintain EA rhynes or rivers, giving the examples of Panborough Drain, Godney/Sheppey etc.

IDS confirmed that some have applied for funding through Community Flood Action Fund. This gives the prospect of one-off maintenance but is not a permanent fix.

CP felt the IDB's should oversee what is going on and be funded. There is no time for sticking plasters. The peat is dry in many areas. He gave the example of Minehead since the IDB has withdrawn.

**Action Agreed:** to write strongly worded letters to Natural England and the EA about the lack of consultation, and the environmental impacts. To copy in more senior figures such as Alan Lovell, Ian Hodge, Steve Reed etc to raise the issue nationally.

**4. Funding Alignment:** Reassess GiA-funded maintenance commitments with EA and SRA and explore if alternate mechanisms (e.g., new Defra reforms) can offset the impact. Consider if the Boards can fund and/or deliver any of the withdrawn maintenance either permanently or temporarily Discuss use and targeted application of the precept with the EA.

IDS explained there is currently a consultation for flood risk funding underway, but we have learned that this will not deal with revenue funded maintenance, only covers capital or capital maintenance, and is not intended for channel maintenance.

We can ask ADA to respond asking for fundamental reform on funding for maintenance. The consultation ends on the 29<sup>th</sup>.

We may need to pick up some of the maintenance, but only once we have prioritised what will be the most impactful.

**ACTION**  
**SDBC20250722-**  
**04**

PB suggested stopping any of our maintenance that is not essential, as if the EA don't open the pipe, there is no practical benefit.

MS noted that if the IDB do this work, it would achieve more than the EA could. The SRA may need to consider saying no to giving funding to the EA if the IDB have the resource and capacity to do it more efficiently, which has been apparent from River Sowy and KSD works.

IDS felt this would take a few years, and could be a risk to the IDB.

The Chair agreed it would be a big and long-term commitment.

IDS explained that with regards the application of the precept, some ratepayers have asked us to withhold it. The EA have advised that none of the precept goes on weed-cutting, so withholding will make no difference. We can suggest the precept money is used better. We are withholding the precept until conversations have taken place, although the intention is to pay it in full.

**5. Public Communication:** Develop clear, consistent messaging to affected communities explaining the situation and the Boards' continued advocacy.

IDS has drafted a possible communication to ratepayers from the IDB in response to the high number of complaints we have received following the EA's letter.

Members are happy with the letter and that it goes out.

PB asked if it might mention environmental damage, and be tied into carbon reduction aims.

The Chair suggested this should form part of a discussion with NE, RSPB, EA and other nature recovery schemes to form a statement on the impact.

Roger Keen left the meeting at 15.52.

David Tratt (DT) suggested that the pack be circulated to all Board members, particularly appointed members.

Members felt this should happen.

**The proposed letter to ratepayers to be sent, and the meeting pack be sent to all Board members**

**Proposed: Peter Burden**

**Seconded: Davis Tratt**

**All in favour.**

The Chair explained he has spoken to other IDB chairs who would like us to share our plans/actions and a Chairs Forum has been suggested.

A letter will be sent to the Environment Agency to say how unhappy we are with the situation and the lack of communication prior to it.

**RESOLUTION  
04**

	<p>A letter to also be sent to the EA and Natural England highlighting the detrimental environmental impact. IDS has sent the meeting pack to Innes Thompson at ADA who is meeting with the minister tomorrow. The feeling is however that there revenue has flatlined into the future, and diminishing in impact with inflation.</p> <p>Peter Burden wondered if there is any other region where lack of maintenance is damaging to the environment.</p> <p>Colin Passmore suggested action on areas we know haven't been maintained for years. Can we make an emergency decision to do these most urgent/critical watercourses from reserves.</p> <p>The Chair noted this would require an emergency Board meeting.</p> <p>IDS explained there are PSCA's in place for Parrett and Axe Brue and one is not far from completion for North Somerset. We would need to make sure we know where to draw the line as we would have to take off existing works due to capacity.</p> <p>Tim Bush (TB) suggested that once PSCA's are in place, could the IDB's act as a 'fire brigade' and respond to emergencies.</p> <p>Members discussed using existing contractors and pulling them from routine works where needed in an emergency as long as they are on the approved suppliers list.</p> <p>The Chair asked for MW to assess and highlight across all 3 boards what would give most short-term benefit in terms of critical works, and provide a cost as a one-off exercise. This could then be brought to the boards to see if any could be done from reserves.</p> <p>The Chair also suggested PBr to contact Natural England/RSPB etc to help us apply pressure.</p> <p>He also suggested contacting James Divall from Somerset County.</p> <p>MW noted this is positive, but we do need to consider risks such as low oxygen, high temperatures etc which could cause fish kill.</p> <p>DT queried looking forward, and wondered if we will we get a map with more red lines next year.</p> <p>IDS confirmed this is likely.</p> <p><b>Tim Bush's suggestion</b>  <b>For the IDB's to act as a provider of last resort, where we can.</b>  <b>Proposed: Andrew Gilling</b>  <b>Sec Tim Bush</b>  <b>All in favour</b></p> <p><b>Officers to draw up a prioritised list of where we think we need to act most urgently within our ability to do so.</b>  <b>Proposed : Andrew Gilling</b>  <b>Seconded: Colin Passmore</b>  <b>All in favour</b></p>	<p><b>ACTION</b>  <b>SDBC20250722-05</b></p> <p><b>RESOLUTION</b>  <b>05</b></p> <p><b>RESOLUTION</b>  <b>06</b></p>
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	<p>The Chair felt that funding from Defra would need to be addressed and wondered if maintenance funding could be redirected to IDB from EA. We will need to consider how we approach this.</p> <p>IDS confirmed that we are asking the EA to engage properly with us before making decisions. We could then look to work with Defra through ADA to influence mechanisms for funding.</p> <p>The Chair suggested inviting James Perkins head of SW Defra to meet with environmental meeting proposed. IDS thought this could be looked at.</p> <p>It was also suggested that Floods Minister Emma Hardy be copied into our response to the EA.</p> <p>The Chair suggested we share the issues raised with boards across the country. IDS felt this should be done via ADA. The Chair felt the message should be stronger and not diluted. IDS/TB to write to Innes and push to act MS confirmed he has already drafted a letter to Emma Hardy. He supported the idea of approaching Defra regionally rather than going via the EA. He feels the Defra investment into the Bridgwater Barrier is a point to mention, ensuring we tell ADA that this is our plan. He also suggested we approach MP's especially labour ones. He has support for his letter from Sarah Dyke and suggested also Sadik Al-Hassan. IDS confirmed we have already suggested non-party MP discussions on flood risk, but will pursue this further.</p>	<p><b>ACTION</b> <b>SDBC20250722-06</b></p> <p><b>ACTION</b> <b>SDBC20250722-07</b></p>
11. ADA Update	<p>IDS asked members to note the contents of his paper summarising ADA current priorities:</p> <p><b>Funding &amp; Consultations</b> ADA have prepared a draft response to the FCERM funding consultation expressing disappointment not covering maintenance. The Government has advised ADA that revenue budgets have flatlined. An IDB funding study has been commissioned by Defra and MHCLG around the precept/levy. ADA will participate and have encouraged engagement from IDB's. The Chair noted use of the Flood Recovery Fund last year and wondered if we could request some for drought. IDS explained there has to be funding made available, this is not a policy change.</p> <p><b>Maintenance &amp; Capital Investment</b> Main river maintenance reduction concerns. Innes is meeting with Emma Hardy today to raise this and will report back. Flood recovery mechanism is being pursued to make permanent. Capital refurbishment programme has been pledged money, but won't cover desilting.</p> <p><b>Legislative &amp; Governance Developments</b> ADA is involved in the Cunliffe report and advocating for IDB's to be recognised at water resources management.</p>	

	<p><b>Strategic Engagement &amp; Collaboration</b> The NFU are holding a water summit in Yorkshire. The Chair wondered if we should attend. Defra is considering commissioning ADA for further support on lowland peat restoration projects.</p> <p><b>Structural &amp; Operational Updates</b> ADA continues to monitor IDB amalgamation proposals. Several are in place. Our frustration is that our issues result in more discussion rather than action.</p>	
12. SRA Update	<p>IDS gave an update on current activity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Completed outfalls on KSD</li> <li>• Currently on-site with KSD bank raising. This has been challenging, but good progress and outcomes are being achieved.</li> <li>• WID tenders are due back within a week.</li> </ul> <p>The Chair queried reed cutting which the EA should be doing. IDS explained we have drone footage of all which confirms that work is needed but we don't think the EA will do it. We must not take on works beyond our capability.</p> <p>MS confirmed he is writing to the minister to advise of his concerns regarding withdrawal of maintenance, and also will suggest funding direct to IDB. The EA role has conflict of interest, not consistent with being responsible for the environment.</p>	
13. External Policy & Procedure Consultations	Consultation of future funding has been covered	
14. Communications with MP's & Local Authorities	<p>Meeting has taken place with Ashley Fox Meeting planned with Sadik Al-Hassan IDS will contact Sarah Dyke. MS confirmed that the Council are meeting regularly with all MP's.</p>	<b>ACTION</b> <b>SDBC20250722-08</b>
15. Any Other Business	<p>AG asked about the safety of an EA structure. He has seen teens on the tilting weir at Rooksbridge diving. MW will report to EA.</p> <p>IDB Precept</p>	<b>ACTION</b> <b>SDBC20250722-09</b>
5. Date of Next Meetings	<p>Dates of next meetings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SDBC Management Committee, Tues 9 December 2025</li> <li>• SWADA AGM Nov 26<sup>th</sup> suggest TB meet with Matthew Riddle prior.</li> <li>• The Chair feels there is change afoot. We need to play a more important role as we are best equipped. We need to be prepared, resourced and funded.</li> <li>• MS agreed and feels we need a new name.</li> <li>• CP congratulated the boards for articles in ADA Gazette</li> <li>• The Chair thanked members for their attendance</li> <li>• Meeting closed at 16.50</li> </ul>	

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

**ANNEX A TO**

**SDBC MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE MINUTES  
DATED 22 JULY 2025**

**SDBC – TABLE OF OUTSTANDING ACTIONS**

Action Number:	Action:	Actionee:
<b>SDBC/20241210-03</b>	Clerk to prepare a paper on options for amalgamation	Clerk – Ongoing
<b>SDBC20250722-01</b>	Send get-well card to MH	KC
<b>SDBC20250722-02</b>	Circulate ADA Env Day presentations to Board members	PB
<b>SDBC20250722-03</b>	Update Staff Handbook to reflect Neonatal Care Leave Entitlement	KC/MH
<b>SDBC20250722-04</b>	Strongly worded letters to Natural England and the EA about the lack of consultation, and the environmental impacts	IDS/TB
<b>SDBC20250722-05</b>	MW to assess and highlight across all 3 boards what would give most short-term benefit in terms of critical works, and provide a cost as a one-off exercise	MW
<b>SDBC20250722-06</b>	Write to ADA/Innes asking them to apply pressure nationally	IDS/TB
<b>SDBC20250722-07</b>	To pursue non-party MP discussions on flood risk further	IDS
<b>SDBC20250722-08</b>	To make contact with Sarah Dyke	IDS
<b>SDBC20250722-09</b>	Report to EA re unsafe activity at tilting weir in Rooksbridge	MW