

**Somerset Water Management
Partnership meeting**

Wednesday 25th June 2008
2 – 4pm
Westonzoyland Community Centre.

Minutes of meeting

Attendees:

Chair: Cllr Hazel Prior-Sankey (HPS), SCC
John Herrington (JH) TDBC
Louise Webb (LW), EA
John Rowlands (JR), SWDT
Vanessa Leavy (VL), EA
Pat Lehain (PL), NE
John Taylor (JT), SDC
Steve Thomas (ST), EA

Nick Stevens (NS), IDB
Barry Philips (BP), NE
Sarah Diacono (SD), SCC
Simon Lipscombe (SL), WW
Ruth Barden (RB), WW
Rebecca Seaman (RS), SCC
Steve Dury (SDy), SCC
Roger Meecham (RM), SSDC

Members of the public observing:

Veronica Chard, Crewkerne TC
Peter Chard, Crewkerne TC
John Milbank, Westonzoyland PC
Shirley Derbyshire, Chilton Trinity
Philip Derbyshire, Chilton Trinity
Carol Goodall, Ilminster TC
Bill Kelly, Taunton
Tom Jeanes, North Curry Flood Group

Loretta Whetlor, Watchet TC
Jane Baker, Greinton Parish Meeting
Greg Baker, Greinton Parish Meeting
Allan Debenham, Staplegrove
Dr J. Jurgensen , Wilton
Campbell Main, West Huntspill PC
Catherine Main, West Huntspill PC

1. Apologies / minutes last meeting

Matt Crocker, EA – Steve Thomas standing in
Mervyn Winslade, SWADA
Brian Watkis, SWADA
Lisa Schneidau, SWT
Paul Cottingham, NFU
Anne Fraser, SDC
Cllr Dave Durdan , TDBC
Anthony Gibson, NFU
Cllr Patrick Palmer, SSDC

There were no changes requested to the minutes of the last meeting. HPS requested that declarations of interest should be made part of the agenda at future meetings.

2. Introduction by Steve Dury to the SWMP aims and objectives for the benefit of members of the public observing

3. Nominations for a new SWMP Chair

HPS informed that the only nomination for the new chair was Anthony Gibson; this nomination was seconded in the meeting and thus Anthony has been elected the new SWMP chairman. HPS suggested that a vice-chair would be useful, and asked for nominations. RM nominated HPS, which was also seconded. HPS will therefore be SWMP vice-chair for 1 year.

4. Land Drainage and flooding responsibilities: Roger Meecham, SSDC

Roger gave an overview of the current roles and responsibilities, explaining who does what with regard to flooding and different types of flooding. He introduced new legislation to be drafted next spring 2009, the Floods & Water Bill; the government has set aside £34.5 million to go towards implementing the bill.

SDy – The Pitt Review has been published today, is it felt that Local Authorities have sufficient resources / skills to take on the additional responsibilities that are being recommended in the report?

RM – There are not enough resources/skills/man power within Local Authorities at present, more funding will be required from central government.

NS – This may well come via Defra grant aid, although this may well be 50% of the cost, there should be a push for 100% of the cost to be provided.

BP – One of the recommendations from the Pitt Review is for Local Authorities to draw up electronic maps of the main flood risk management and drainage assets (over and underground), including a record of their ownership and condition. There is a fairly short timescale for this.

RM – Getting data is often difficult, the answers sometimes lie closer to home. Often problems with rivers over-topping and flooding are contributed to by minor ditches not being cleaned out.

BP – This Pitt Review recommendation is particularly relevant to the Levels & Moors, greater care is required in the maintenance of minor ditches, as was recognised through the Parrett Catchment Project (PCP).

NS – Some good news is that through Surface Water Management Plans, data can be shared locally. The GIS layers for this are good, and it is not too far off being completed for IDB areas.

JT – As part of this mapping is there not also a requirement to also identify who is responsible for the maintenance / upkeep of different drainage infrastructure?

NS – No, only the ownership

JT – In that case the Surface Water Management Plans should be more straightforward, information on main rivers, critical water courses, maintained rhymes, already exists as GIS layers.

RM – Highways drainage will be the Highways Authorities responsibility

NS – Brian Faulkner is doing some work, they have produced a draft report. They will let John Taylor and Sedgemoor see the results and they can come and listen to his presentation.

BP – Natural England has been approached by Jeremy Newman from Atkins about a Somerset Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS) project group that they are proposing to set up. Does RM know about this?

SDy – Yes, confirm that Jeremy Newman has circulated details of a first meeting next week (Wednesday 2nd July), in order to establish a working group – SDY has provided information on relevant contacts

BP – Is the PCP SUDS working group still networking?

RM – Work that was carried out under the project is still there, relevant legislation has not changed that much, the group could always be reactivated again fairly rapidly. There is also a national SUDS group, and the work being undertaken by CIRIA, a member-based research and information organisation dedicated to improvement in the construction industry.

BP – Why is Atkins setting this up, suggesting a SUDS working group outside the PCP strategy?

NS – They obviously see this as a commercial opportunity – they see potential financial gains here, not surprising given the content of the Pitt Review.

LW – There used to be an EA SUDS group in the Bristol area.

RM – I also have a Highways Drainage presentation but will save that for another meeting.

5. Update on Catchment Sensitive Farming (CSF) - Louise Webb, Environment Agency (EA)

CSF has been allocated funding for another 3 years. It will be setting up strategic partnerships,

there is hope for two in the South West region due to its large size, and members will include water companies and the Rural Development Agency (RDA). CSF has a small grant scheme, towards separating clean/dirty water, covering farmyards with roofing etc. Eighty application packs for the grant scheme have been sent out in Somerset. A review is under way on the target areas for the grant. CSF had publicised their work through having a stand at the recent Agricultural Building Show.

Results of the Environment Agency's part of the Blue Knots sediment fingerprinting study are now coming through. This covers the Brue, Cary, Tone, Isle, Parrett and Yeo. Briefly, pasture is a major source of pollution, this partly reflects the large area covered by pasture. Interestingly, some catchments have very different signatures. For the Yeo, roads and arable land are the major sources. This will be communicated to RM (South Somerset District Council) and to SCC Highways Dept. Phosphates are a major issue in the River Isle, with 40% are still coming from sewerage works. This will be communicated to Wessex Water. Phosphate pollution from pasture land is very high in the Brue, the highest of all the catchments studied. This is impacting on the requirement to return the SSSI's to favourable condition, that Natural England have responsibility for.

We are currently reviewing all the data, to check whether we have covered the right areas, or whether we should be targeting new areas. We will also be conducting interviews to obtain feedback, and will prepare a report for the Regional EA Office.

RB – Will CSF funding be at the same level as last years?

LW – yes, no more than this

RB – No work is planned for phosphate removal on the Isle in the coming year, but in light of these results perhaps there needs to be. We need to talk further about this.

6. Working with communities: raising awareness of flooding - Vanessa Leavy, EA

Vanessa gave an introduction to the EA Wessex Area Flood Incident Management team. Work includes: improving accuracy of warnings, increasing the number of properties which can be offered a flood warning system, running public awareness campaigns, ensuring incident preparedness, co-ordinate the area's response to flooding. Vanessa's work is focused on helping communities and individuals to put together flood plans.

RM – The current flood warning systems relate to predictable warnings, and are not so suitable in rapid response catchments.

VL – Work on rapid response catchments is being carried out at the moment. Agreements are in place with local radio stations to give out warnings.

SD – Outcomes from the Pitt Review will cause more pressure for more rapid response warnings

HPS – Does the EA work alongside the Somerset Civil Contingencies Unit in this work?

VL – Yes very closely

7. Report of visit by Parc naturel regional des Marais du Contentin et du Bessin, Normandy: Future Opportunities: Steve Dury, Somerset County Council (SCC)

At the beginning of June there was a visit by three representatives of this National Park in France, which has worked with partners in Somerset in the past.

Marais du Contentin have recently been developing an Interreg IVA Cross-Border bid with partners in Devon, Cornwall and Dorset, focusing on landscape character (trees and hedgerows). However they were also very keen to develop links and source funding to tackle issues of concern related to the wetlands within the Parc, hence the contact with Somerset (via Steve) and the interest re the Levels & Moors. Jean-Baptiste was involved in a previous

collaboration with the Levels & Moors, involving SCC, the RSPB and English Nature. This was a LIFE project in the mid 90's that funded the first Brue Valley Study, works to enhance Westhay Heath, and the second phase of Avalon Marshes work at Westhay Moor, including a joint reedbed-creation project at Ham Wall and St Jean de Daye.

Steve gave an overview of the presentation given by them. The Parc naturel regional des Marais du Cotentin et du Bessin is one of 40 regional national parks in France established in 1991, as a result of the area needing to be revitalised whilst protecting environmental and cultural heritage.

A number of organisations participated in the visit, including SCC, SSDC, TDBC, EA, IDB, NE, SWT, RSPB, SWADA. The Interreg IVA – Cross Border funding Programme was discussed, and a number of ideas were discussed and jointly put forward for potential collaboration. Ideas included:

1. Role of wetland biodiversity for i) informing public and ii) stimulating local economy
2. Raising awareness value of wetlands – community engagement
3. Optimal management of peatland - issue of peat soil conservation and the consequences of poor management, and peat as a carbon sink/source (further information was provided on this, which is generating a lot of discussion).
4. Flooding impacts on / from farming (cf DEFRA 'Making Space for Water' policy)
5. Washlands – potential within Levels & Moors
6. Skills training – wetland management
7. Research – lapwing population dynamics
8. Coastal managed realignment (Stear) – saltmarsh creation.
9. Biodiversity as an economic driver; involvement of local communities
10. Data gathering to assist in water level management
11. Recreational access

This is not an exhaustive list - further proposals can be added to this - but it gives an idea of the areas of common ground between the two locations.

BP – There has not really been any research on peat in the Levels & Moors for the last decade, it was then work carried out by English Heritage. Results from this work showed the rates of shrinkage to be quite frightening. Richard Brunning (SCC Heritage) is very knowledgeable on peatland.

SDy – Richard Brunning is indeed contributing to the recent and ongoing discussion on peatlands/carbon, and has proposed a number of measurements that could be done to calculate the peat/carbon balance in Somerset. Whilst plenty of work has been undertaken on upland peatlands, there is a need to find out whether the science is robust enough for lowland peatlands in order to make assumptions about different wetting scenarios, or whether this was still in need of further research

BP – Have links been made to the SWEET and MIRE projects?

SDy – Steve Davies from Natural England and SDy have been receiving updates on the SWEET (Sustainable Wetlands as Environmental and Economic Treasures) project, and informing those in Somerset who may be potentially interested. SDY is not aware whether this has been actively taken forward by local partners. It may well be that partners would prefer to link into the SWEET project, on the issue of peatland management - this project is being led by Shropshire County Council. We are aware of the Exmoor MIRE restoration project, of which one of the benefits is storing more carbon on the moorlands in the form of fresh peat, to fighting global warming and climate change, and similar projects such as the 'Our Moors, Our Planet!' Carbon Capture Programme on Lancashire's moorland, that Lancs County Council contributes towards, but these relate to upland peatlands.

BP – There is lots of interest from Natural England on this as well.

8. AOB

The Pitt Review

BP – The Pitt Review in full is available from today. There is a good summary of the recommendations from this, the report is a significant report, follows on from the governments earlier Foresight Study – Future Flooding, and will contain information relevant to Somerset.

Gloucester College Conference

SDy – SDy had been contacted the previous day by Chris Short from Gloucester College, who is organising a conference (12th Biennial Conference of the International Association for the Study of Commons) in mid July, and would be interested in organising a field trip to the Somerset Levels & moors. He had previous links with the Levels & Moors through work undertaken on behalf of both the Parrett Catchment Project and Wise Use of Floodplains (WUF) projects. SDy will circulate further information to SWMP members.

HPS – There will be an update on SWMP finances and which organisations have contributed at the next meeting. Also, officers should remind their councillors of the next meeting date, provisionally Tuesday 7th October, although will need to check with elected members and Anthony Gibson for their availability. A slot for public questions should go on the next SWMP meeting agenda; the next meeting will also be open to the public to observe.

Dates of the next meeting:

7 Oct 2008. Venue t.b.c. (Village Hall)