

# Somerset Environmental Records Centre

34 Wellington Road  
Taunton  
Somerset  
TA1 5AW

01823 664450  
Email [info@somerc.com](mailto:info@somerc.com)

---



Bee-Fly Orchid by Tony Price

## Annual report 2015 – 2016

# Somerset Environmental Records Centre

## Recording our environment



### Introduction

The Somerset Environmental Records Centre is hosted by the Somerset Wildlife Trust and is based at the Trust offices in Taunton.

The core work of the Somerset Environmental Records Centre (SERC) is to gather, manage and supply biological and geological data and hold the county list of sites recognised for their natural value. Data gathered by SERC is used to build up a comprehensive picture of the biodiversity and geodiversity of Somerset, and help to monitor the state of the natural environment. The Record Centre is therefore concerned with quality as well as quantity of data.

SERC is an impartial organisation and its activities are steered by the need for data.

### Objectives

The objectives for the Centre are to ensure:

- A wide variety of biodiversity data both recent and historic is collected stored and used;
- Data is analysed and there is an understanding of data gaps;
- Promotion of wildlife recording and a wide understanding of the need for information about our environment;
- Ensure easy access to biodiversity data for all those who wish to use it whilst maintaining security and quality of data;
- It is adequately resourced to meet the need of stakeholders;
- Continuously review of the Centre's governance and processes assuring it operates efficiency, benchmarks itself and takes advantage of technological developments;
- Ensure the Centre maintains standards that are promoted by the Association of Local record Centres (ALERC) and allows it to be part of the National Biodiversity Network (NBN);
- Maintain the transparency of governance arrangements by publishing its Prospectus

### Partners

The SERC Executive Management Group consists of representatives from each of the following partners

- Wessex Water
- Natural England
- Taunton Deane Borough Council (representing District Councils)
- Somerset County Council
- Somerset Wildlife Trust
- University of the West of England
- A co-opted member from a leading specialist group in the county

# Somerset Environmental Records Centre

## Recording our environment



### Staff and Volunteers

The Centre has four permanent staff members, two full time staff and two part time members of staff, equating to 3.2 whole time equivalents.

Paula Hewitson – Manager of SERC

Tony Price – Data Management Officer

Cathy Horsley – Ecologist (on maternity leave) cover has been provided by Ann Fells and Soraya Ashton during the year

Sue Simpson – Records Centre Support Officer

During the year SERC has been greatly assisted by seven regular volunteers, two of which gained much experience and knowledge at SERC which assisted them to get posts in the environmental sector.

Just at the end of the financial year SERC had taken on a placement student for six months, another from University West of England will be joining SERC for a ten month placement in June.

Volunteers have a variety of knowledge and experience and have made an exceptional contribution to the quality and quantity of data held at the Centre and knowledge about Somerset species. In particular the Specialist Group members and County Recorders do an amazing job, dedicating hours of their own time checking the accuracy of records each year.

Without volunteer time and dedication the Records Centre would not function properly.

### Key Performance data and achievements

- 1.91m species records held
- 2104 Local Wildlife Sites registered
- 241 Local Geological Sites registered
- 3 projects delivered
- 281 data searches carried out

### Big Bat Survey projects; in the Blackdown Hills and in the Brue Valley

In July 2015 the fifth Blackdown Hills Big Bat Survey took place. It was organised by SERC in conjunction with the Somerset Bat Group (SBG) and the Blackdown Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. SERC organised a Bat Survey Workshop prior to the event. 58 volunteers attended the survey which enabled 16 transects to be carried out and important data to be collected. The second greatest number of bat passes was recorded in 2015 with 3448 passes, second to the number of passes recorded in 2012 at 3952 passes. Common Pipistrelle Bats remain the most frequently recorded bats, and the percentage of passes from this species increased to 73% of the total recorded passes. The unexpected surprise of the survey was a *Nathusius Pipistrelle* pass recorded along the Wambrook transect, as this species is more often associated foraging over large waterbodies the location is unexpected, but it may have been a commuting bat as *Nathusius Pipistrelles* are known to travel large distances.



In August 2015 a survey was carried out in the Brue Valley. This was the second year SERC had organised this event in conjunction with the Somerset Bat Group and kindly sponsored by the Bat Conservation Trust, Natural England and Sedgemoor District Council. 36 people took part covering 11 transect routes. The greatest number of bat passes through all three years of the surveys, was by soprano bats, comprising 50% or more of the total numbers of passes. The Brue Valley is indeed a stronghold for this species which is often associated with wetland landscapes. The common pipistrelle, the commonest species throughout Western Europe, was only recorded at half the number of passes compared with soprano pipistrelle, contributing 27% of the overall passes. Nathusius' pipistrelle was recorded at Yeaps Bridge in 2014, Ham Wall in 2014 and 2015, Shapwick Heath and Catcott Heath in 2015. This is a migratory species and it is possible that these were bats in transit, but Nathusius' pipistrelle is believed to breed in North Somerset and had been recorded a number of times throughout summer within the past five years near Axbridge. Their presence in the Brue Valley is significant and would merit further investigation by continuing the surveys for a further year. The gradual increase in activity of this species may be of significance and further years' survey data may show whether this is an on-going trend.

### Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) Project

Local Wildlife sites cover at least 5% of England's land mass (6% in Somerset). These vary in size and shape. They can be privately or publically owned, and found in the depths of the countryside and in busy towns.

Most LWS are in private ownership and it is ultimately landowners and farmers often with the support of nature conservationists who secure the on-going existence of these special places. Unlike many nature reserves these special places are not protected by law however they considered important enough to receive recognition within the planning system. National planning policy requires local authorities to provide for LWS protection through local planning process.

There are more than 50 partnerships of local authorities, record centres and local specialists across the country. Each partnership is responsible for surveying, assessing and selecting sites against robust local criteria. Most partnerships also offer advice on land management and grants.

SERC is key to the Somerset Local Wildlife Sites programme in Somerset and many planning authorities and conservation organisations contribute funding to SERC to support this work.



During 2015-16 SERC continued its Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) review programme, including desktop and on site surveys for existing LWS. Additional funding was awarded by Exmoor National Park (ENP) for SERC to focus on LWS within Exmoor. During the year 10% of those LWS within ENP were reassessed as meeting the LWS criteria.

Quantocks - nine LWS have been desktop reviewed, one site was reconfirmed as still meeting the LWS criteria from this work. Two sites were visited to carry out a full site survey.

Blackdown Hills - data from 18 LWS sites surveys was collected and is currently being reviewed to reassess the sites against the LWS criteria.



## Recording our environment

Exmoor - 84 desk reviews were completed in the year with 34 reconfirmed as LWS based on current knowledge and the others needing a full site survey during the appropriate survey season. Additional

funding was made available by Exmoor National Park Authority to enable additional resource to be dedicated to Exmoor sites.

Key Urban Areas – there are 28 LWS in the key development belt around Yeovil, 7 around Taunton and 13 around Bridgwater. Of these 48 sites, 20 are in the process of being reviewed.

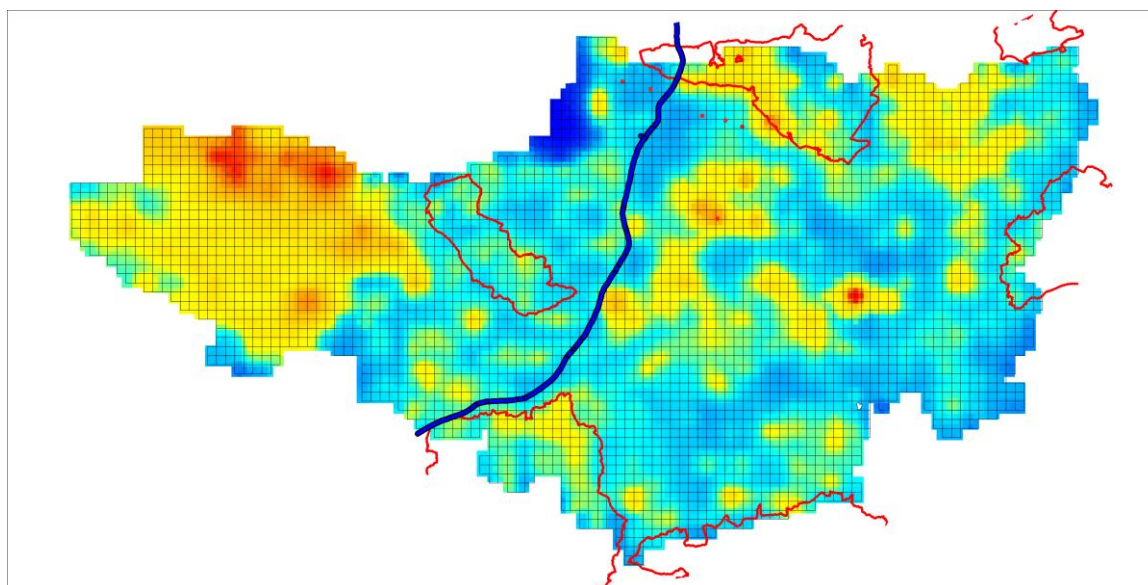
### Fungi Criteria

The criteria used to assess potential LWS sites for the importance and richness of fungi was reviewed and revised. This was to make the criteria clearer for surveyor's to apply and ensure the best examples of sites were being designated as LWS.



### Data distribution

An analysis of recording hotspots and cool spots is produced below. Starting with the blue areas, with least recording through green, yellow to red showing areas of the highest frequency of recording of data. There are key interesting areas of the county for specialist groups to visit but other recorders are often observing and submitting records relating to sittings near where they live.





# Somerset Environmental Records Centre

## Recording our environment



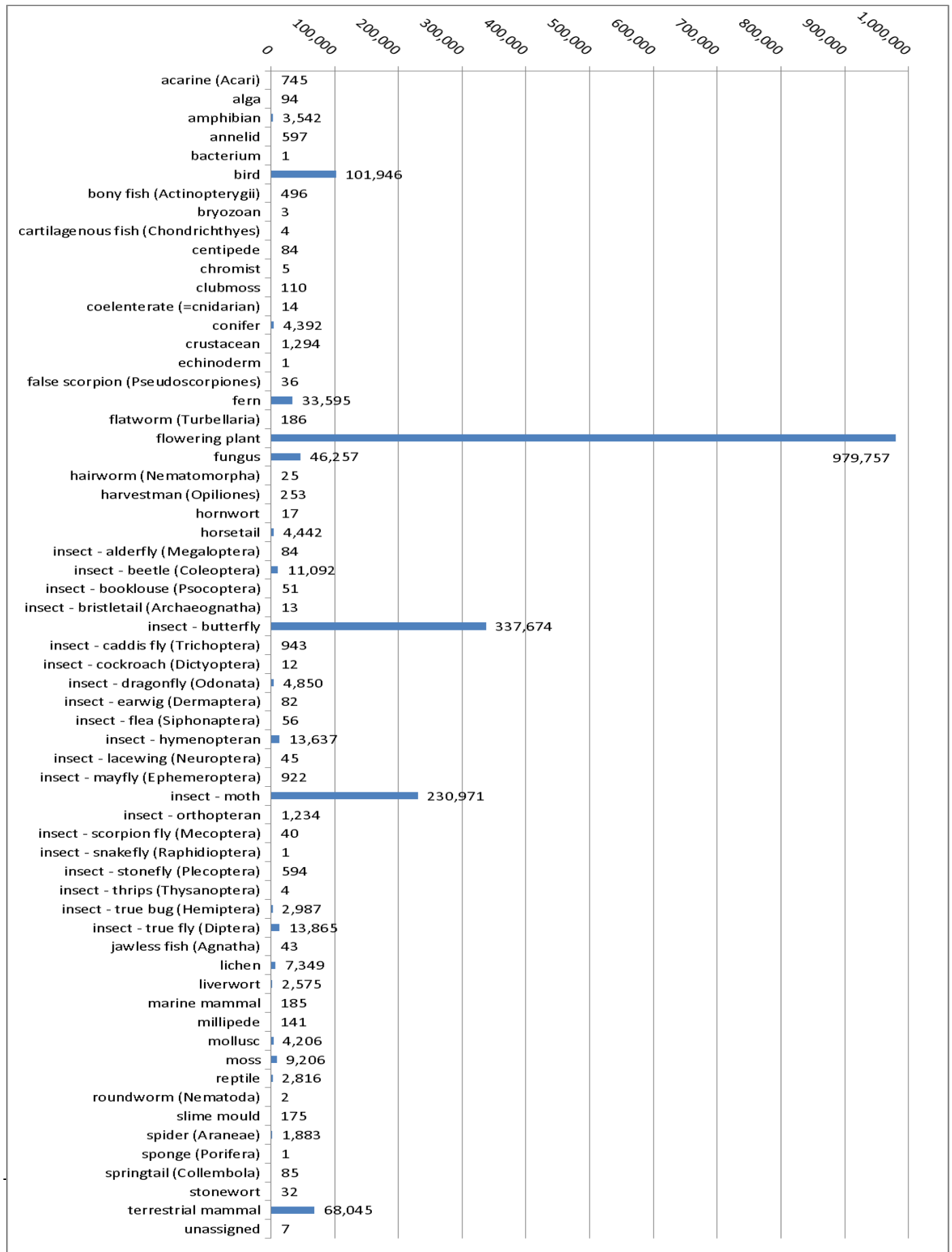
- SERC have recently introduced an on line recording facility. This enables data to be received electronically reducing the input and validation time and making data more visible and accessible.
- SERC has begun working with environmental projects and specialist groups in the County to adapt the online recording facility to their needs. SERC will continue to develop the functionality of this to enable the targeting of data gaps.
- Urban areas are a key geographical data gap in the county and SERC will be promoting recording in your garden.

Somerset Environmental Record Centre ranked 19 out of 159 data providers for volume of records uploaded to the NBN.

A chart showing the number of records by taxonomic group held at March 2016 can be seen on the next page.

# Somerset Environmental Records Centre

## Recording our environment



# Somerset Environmental Records Centre

## Recording our environment



### Engagement Strategy

Progress continues in implementing data exchange agreements with the Specialist Recording Groups an agreement was signed with the Somerset Invertebrate Group and the Somerset Badger Group.

Regular data sharing happens with local groups such as the Somerset Moth Group, Exmoor Natural History Society, Somerset Bat Group, Somerset Otter Group, the Reptile and Amphibian Group for Somerset and the Somerset branch of Butterfly Conservation, Somerset Rare Plant Group, Somerset Botany Group amongst others.

SERC also exchanges data with National groups such as the British Mycological Association, British Lichen Society, the People's Trust for Endangered Species and the Wildfowl and Wetland Trust.

SERC is particularly keen to support local groups such as the Friends of the Meads Eco Park in Bridgwater who are developing a local interest group helping the District Council manage a key town site with monitoring and training events.



The introduction of Somerset on line recording will enable SERC to engage with members of the general public who want to extend their love of wildlife into the recording of useful data. SERC already has an extremely dedicated group of individuals who send their sightings in to the records helpdesk [sercrecords@somerc.com](mailto:sercrecords@somerc.com). During 2016/17 the online recording is a key area SERC is aiming to develop.

### Data supply

Ad hoc data search requests are received for a number of purposes. These may be to assist landowners, to enable research or to assist with local community plans. Many data searches are also carried out by consultants to assist with development planning and design process.

Academic	Landowner	Local Group	Consultant/NGO	Public	SLA
3	4	5	247	14	8



# Somerset Environmental Records Centre

## Recording our environment



### Service Level Agreements (SLAs)

In 2015-16 SERC had SLAs to supply data regarding habitats (geological and biological) and species with:

- Environment Agency
- Natural England
- Wessex Water
- Mendip Borough Council
- Taunton Deane Borough Council
- West Somerset District Council
- South Somerset District Council
- Sedgemoor District Council West Somerset Council
- Somerset County Council
- Exmoor National Park Authority
- Somerset Wildlife Trust

Some SLAs also contain provision for the supply of Ecological Network data and additional targeted survey work.

As part of the SLAs with the District Councils SERC screens planning applications. This involves SERC carrying out a data search to identify any records held which correspond to the area affected by the planning application. The numbers of applications screened are set out below along with the number returning positive records. These records are supplied back to the District Councils to assist with decision making.

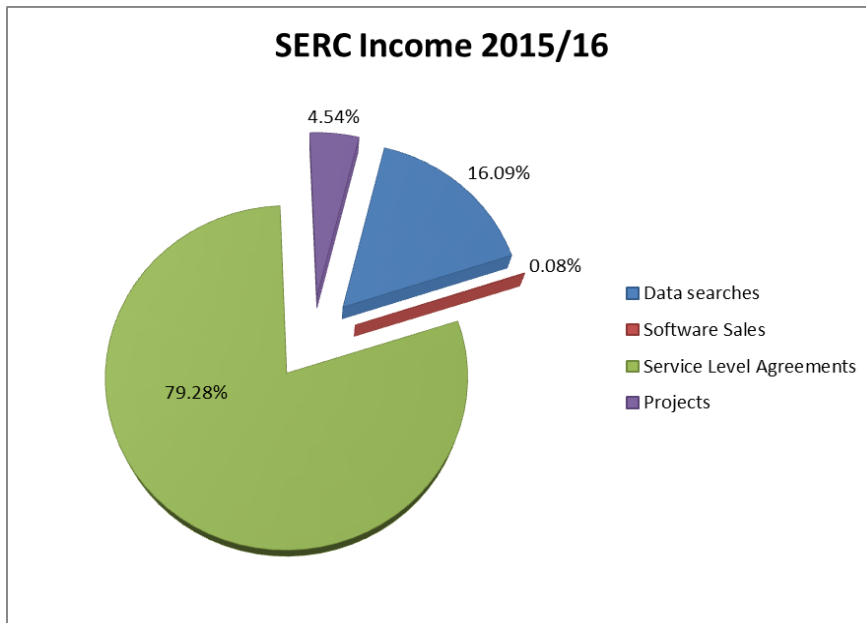
Authority	Number screened	Number with positive records returned	Percentage
Mendip District Council	8	8	100%
Sedgemoor District Council	1280	417	33%
South Somerset District Council	2387	879	37%
Taunton Deane Borough Council	1276	637	50%
West Somerset Council	0	0	0%
Somerset County Council	5	5	100%
<b>Total</b>	<b>4956</b>	<b>1946</b>	<b>39%</b>

There are many examples where data provided by SERC has prompted more detailed consideration and better outcomes in the planning process. One example from 2015/16 is as follows.

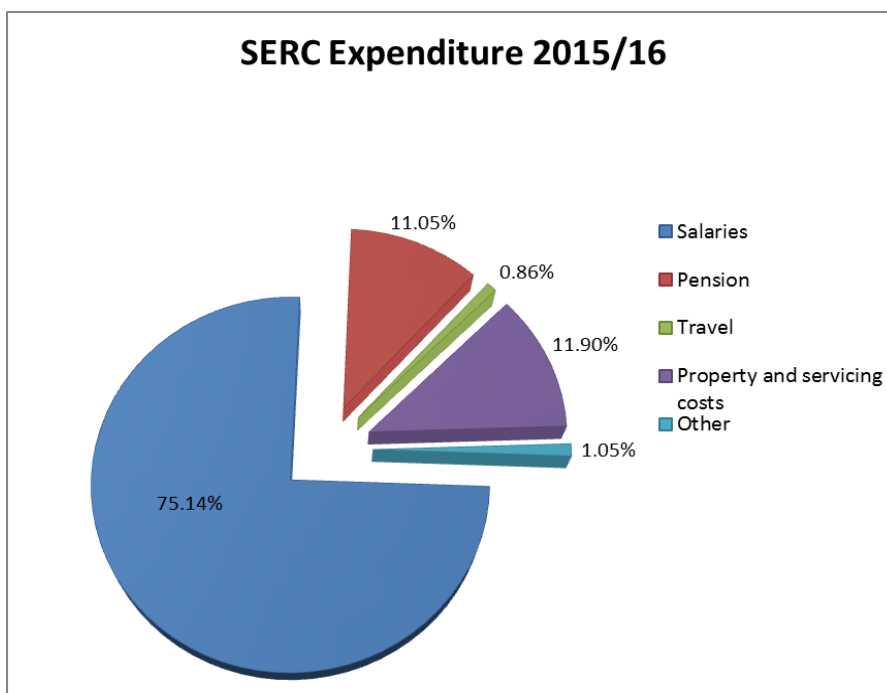
A designated Local Geological Site (LGS) called Pen Selwood landslip site was subject to a planning application during the year. SERC was contacted by the planning officer and checked the information the District Council had about the LGS. SERC contacted the Somerset Geology Group and provided information to them as an interested party. The acting chair of the group then liaised with the Council and site visits occurred. This process led to the planning officer receiving further information and advice to base a decision on. As a consequence the planning application was withdrawn by the applicant having been advised the Council it would object to the application to protect the LGS from being destroyed.



### Financial Summary



The majority of SERC’s income comes from its service level agreements but SERC is also able to get involved and carry out project work which enables further data collection and ID training in Somerset.



SERC began the year with a small surplus carried over from 2014/15. This enabled SERC to employ temporary staff to process the backlog of data entry and help cover maternity leave of a member of the SERC Team.