

WITHAM FOURTH DISTRICT INTERNAL DRAINAGE BOARD

MINUTES

of the proceedings of the **Board** at a Meeting at 47 Norfolk Street, Boston on **Wednesday, 11th June 2025.**

Present: - P. Richardson (Chairman)

Messrs: T. Ashton R. Hall-Jones
P. Bedford N. Jones
A. Bush M. Leggott (Vice-Chairman)
C. Butler D. Scoot
A. Carr A. Saul
C. Crunkhorn K. Smith
S. Evans J. Ward
C. Hardy S. Welberry

Also, in attendance was Mr Chris Harris, the Internal Auditor.

1 **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

1.1 **2025 Inspection and Wrangle Pumping Station Opening**

The Chairman confirmed the event had been a great success with some very positive feedback. The Chairman thanked Ed and his team and Sarah for arranging a very successful day.

1.2 **Congratulations**

The Chairman extended the Board's congratulations to Archie and Michele Saul on their horse, Lordships Graffalo, winning at Badminton Horse Trials for an unprecedented second time.

1.3 **MHCLG Consultation – Local Authority Funding Reform**

The Chairman confirmed the Board has submitted a response to this consultation prepared by ADA. The response highlighted the inequality of local authority funding with IDBs in their district. The Board's response supported the move to a centrally funded solution using an adjustment to the retained business rate.

1.4 **Lincolnshire Show 18-19 June 2025**

The Chairman reminded Members attending the show that the ADA Lincs branch had a stand in the Countryside Area, near the clock tower.

1.5 **Recovery Fund**

The Chairman confirmed this would be covered in more depth by the Chief Engineer during the meeting but hoped that Members were aware that the Board had been successful in applying for £1.4m of Tranche 2B which would be used to fund the dredging programme. The Chairman confirmed this was a tremendous achievement on top of the first Tranche of funding the Board had received last year.

2 **APOLOGIES**

Apologies had been received from D. Middleton, J. Woods, M. Kumar, A. Hall and B. Bowles.

3 **DECLARATION OF INTEREST ON ANY GENERAL ITEM**

Outer Dowsing and wind farm cable route – A. Bush, K. Smith, P. Richardson & C. Crunkhorn
Gaysfield Road – A. Saul

4 **MINUTES**

4.1 **Board Meeting – Thursday 12th February 2025**

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Board held on 12 February 2025 were submitted and their accuracy confirmed.

The Chief Executive confirmed that an energy adviser had been contacted, and a 2-year fixed electricity contract had been entered into. The rate was 10% below the current rate but was still 18% higher than the rate 2 years ago.

There were no other matters arising and the Board gave their approval for the Minutes to be signed by the Chairman.

5 **Emergency Board Meeting – Wednesday 12th February 2025 held by Teams** **- CONFIDENTIAL ITEM**

6. **MEETINGS WITH OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS**

The Chief Executive confirmed the meeting with the RFCC on 25th April had also been attended by M. Leggott and had been an extremely long meeting. The Chairman, Eddie Poll, had retired and he had done a very good job during his time as Chair which had resulted in 63k houses having better flood protection from various schemes. At the last meeting Leigh Edlin had acknowledged the funding issues for the East and West Fen Catchwater drains. The Chief Executive confirmed that information had been sent to him ready for discussion.

T. Ashton - said everything seemed to be changing at once. He was no longer a member following the recent election results and believed that the loss of some members, and Eddy Poll, was serious as these were people who care about drainage and posed a genuine risk to the partnership environment.

The Chairman thanked T. Ashton for all his past efforts and agreed it was a major worry. M. Leggott urged T. Ashton to apply for his position on the RFCC.

7. **CHIEF EXECUTIVE AND FINANCE MANAGERS REPORT**

7.1 **Cash Book Balances**

The Chief Executive confirmed that the balances were looking healthy and that the FDGiA monies were being spent on current projects. The money markets were good and the first 50% instalment payments for the Special Levies had been received.

The large payments shown consisted of large electricity payments that had been made, costs associated with the Hobhole Pumping Station project, the completion of Littlemoor Lane pumping station and the purchase of 2 x mobile pumps.

7.2 **Rate Arrears as at 31 March 2025**

The Chief Executive confirmed there was a detailed list of rate arrears in the report. The arrears for the year had been higher than usual mainly because of one debt which totalled £30k. The ratepayer had made an agreement to make payment of £8k per month to clear the arrears and the current year's rates by 31st March 2026. Overall, the collection rate was down 2% to 96% and he was happy with this. The outstanding debts were all being pursued via arrangements and through the Court.

7.3 **Rate Income 2025/26**

The Chief Executive confirmed that Rate Demands for the current year had just been sent out and payments totalling £26k had been received within the last 2 days via telephone payments and payments made direct into the bank account. The rates of the current year totalled £1.78m and £300k had already been promised by way of instalment payments.

8. **Internal Audit and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 March 2025**

8.1 **Management Accounts – Approval for the year ended 31st March 2025**

The Chief Executive then referred Board Members to the Financial Statements which were included in the separate folder. Page 1 provided an overview of the financial commentary for

the year, including details of the recovery fund monies. The Chief Executive ran through his report raising some points for Board Members.

The Chief Executive said looking at normal operating costs there was a surplus and in February this year it had been agreed to invest this surplus in the Capital Investment Funds to cover dredging works. The costs for the year were at 99% of target.

£1.43m was recovered from the first Tranche of the Recovery fund monies. £549k of these funds were transferred to the General Reserve which meant the General Reserve now sat at 22% of the annual expenditure. £150k had been spent on pumping station repairs and £420k on asset repairs. This had enabled £343k to be carried forward into the next year's asset repair programme.

C. Crunkhorn - asked what figure was needed for the General Reserve to be at 23%?
The Chief Executive confirmed that £811k represented 22%.

The Chairman confirmed that the aim would still be to get the General Reserve to 23% next year and added that just for interest Storm Babet had cost the Board £549k.

T. Ashton - stressed that the Board needed to be aware that the risk of repeat storms was very real. Drainage Boards had done very well out of the two recent storms but the EA remained woefully underfunded and were not able to complete the works required to repair the breaches. The Chief Engineer confirmed that Babet had cost £2.6m in damage to the District which is why he was so keen to get the dredging work completed to reduce any further damage.

The Chairman confirmed that hopefully plans would be put in place to spend money on Capital Works and the Board members would decide the way forward. It was essential to spend money to make the improvements. The Chief Executive confirmed that 2 years ago the General Reserve was at 20% and the Board wanted to increase this by 1% per year. Now the Board was up and running and able to spend money on dredging works. The Board was very much on the front foot and things were positive.

The Chairman added if each weather event cost £540k two such events would cost the Board £1m. The new efficient pumping stations would help reduce the labour charges making weather events cost less.

Page 4 of the accounts shows an additional £2.9m of EA funds had been received so the income was £8m. The Chief Executive reminded Board members that where income was over £6m it would be classed as a large authority and subject to a large authority audit. It was likely that this Board would fall within that category for the next couple of years. However, SAAA were trying to increase the limit to £15m with the ultimate aim to remove IDBs from the equation.

Page 12 showed the balance sheet of the year. The Capital Investment Fund was at £616k and a healthy amount of interest was being earned on the monies invested. The Board's position was looking healthy and upwards of £240k would be spent this year. Regarding the Pumping Station Renewals fund, the Chief Executive was pleased to confirm that most new pumping station projects were almost 100% funded. There was a potential issue with Hobhole Pumping Station, and it may be necessary to put money into the electric station there. The Chief Engineer confirmed that there had been significant breakdowns at Hobhole.

Pages 13 and 14 of the report showed the position concerning weed control, cleansing and pumping stations and there was £420k credit in cleansing monies received from the recovery fund. Regarding the pumping stations fund there were two credits of £150k – more money had been spent on repairs, but this had been credited from the fund.

8.2 **Approval of the Accounts and Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) – year ended 31 March 2025.**

The Chief Executive referred Board Members to the Annual Governance and Accountability Return 2024/5 Part 3 (“AGAR”). Pages 1 and 2 set out details of what is required, and Page 3 details the Internal Audit Report and Chris Harris, the Internal Auditor, had already signed this off.

The Chief Executive asked Chris Harris to address the Board. C. Harris confirmed it had been a “unique” audit this year because of the cyber issues. He thanked the Chief Executive and the Finance team for their assistance during a difficult time. Despite these challenges, he was pleased to confirm that there were no recommendations to be made and that substantial assurance had been given to the Board. The Governance and Risk framework in place was working very well.

With regards to the rate arrears whilst collection was not currently where it needed to be, the Ratings Officer was capable and in control of the situation. The Board’s reserves were critical as we were living in very uncertain times – with climate change, inflation and the insecurities associated with the new government. It was critical to ensure that Reserves were where they needed to be. He finished by saying that he always liked to attend this Board’s meeting and members could rest assured that the highest standards were in place.

The Chief Executive asked Board Members to approve the Annual Governance Statement and for the Chairman to sign the Accounting Statements. This was proposed by A. Saul and seconded by C. Crunkhorn.

- 8.2 (1) The Chief Executive asked Board Members to review, confirm and approve the Annual Governance Statement. There was overall approval from the Board. It was therefore:

RESOLVED that the Annual Governance Statement for the Year Ended 31 March 2025 be approved and signed by the Chairman and Chief Executive.

- 8.2 (2) The Chief Executive confirmed that Section 2 of the Annual Return dealt with Accounting Statements which summarised the figures from the Management Accounts and the Board could see that the figures agreed. The Chief Executive asked for the approval of the Board for the Chairman to sign the Accounting Statements. There was overall approval from the Board. It was therefore:

RESOLVED that the Accounting Statements for the Year Ended 31 March 2025 be approved and signed by the Chairman.

8.2 (3) **External Audit**

The Chief Executive confirmed that he would send the approved AGAR, to the External Auditors. Their Audit Report together with the signed External Audit Opinion would hopefully be received in time to be discussed at the September Board Meeting. The Chief Executive confirmed that a notice would be placed on the website and would also be displayed on the notice board in the Office Reception, offering ratepayers the opportunity for public inspection.

9. **CHIEF ENGINEER’S REPORT NO. 1/25**

The Chief Engineer confirmed that he would take his report as read and would update Members as he went through the report. He confirmed he was happy to take questions at any time.

9.1 **Pump Hours**

The Chief Engineer updated the Board on May pumping hours.

9.2 **Diesel No.3 Engine**

The repairs to the diesel engine were now complete.

9.3 **Diesel No. 1 Pump**

The pump had been removed, and the gearbox had been inspected. David Brown & Sulzer could not find any issue with the gearbox however it appeared that some of the seals were worn and some possible bearing issues. The seals and bearings had been replaced and no other issues could be found.

9.4 **Rainfall and Water Level Management**

The Chief Engineer confirmed the average rainfall for May was 29.2mm.

9.5 **Water Levels**

The Chief Engineer confirmed there had been a full transfer at Antons Gowt and the Crows Bridge transfer was open.

9.6 **Water Quality**

The Chief Engineer confirmed that salinity was being tested weekly because of the high levels. Salinity was approximately double the usual levels. The EA had been consulted to compare readings before irrigation was commenced.

Weedcutting was due to commence on 1st July at Dogdyke to try and help reduce salinity levels. There were a number of salinity hotspots because of salt pans in the district.

C. Crunkhorn - asked if irrigators were being kept informed? The Chief Engineer confirmed they were, and the Engineering Manager confirmed that weekly reports were submitted to the EA so that readings could be compared.

S. Evans - asked as a newcomer how the salinity levels this year compared to, say, the last 10 years? The Chief Engineer confirmed it had changed over the last 3-4 years since the dry period in 2020. However, this year it was almost double. The only thing that could be done was to keep monitoring the position and feeding fresh water through the system.

9.7 **Soil Moisture Deficit**

The Chief Engineer confirmed that the graph on page 8 of his report showed the dryness of the soil throughout the year.

9.8 **Sewer Mudding Programme**

The Chief Engineer confirmed that 34,395 metres of mudding had been completed.

9.9 **Planning**

The Engineering Manager confirmed that details of the 73 planning applications reviewed and processed in the period February to April 2025 were set out from page 11 onwards of his report.

Page 16 of the report deals with a proposed development of 200 dwellings at Wainfleet Road. The Engineering Manager confirmed he was in discussions with the developers and the filter drain had now been installed at the north end of the site to mitigate the flood risk to other properties.

With regard to the Gaysfield Road development, the Engineering Manager confirmed there had been a number of enquiries from representatives from the village group. The Board have responded to all concerns raised but did not want to become embroiled in the dispute between the villagers and the council.

9.10 **Consenting**

The Engineering Manager confirmed he would take this section as read unless anyone had any questions. He confirmed that with regard to paragraphs 6.6, 6.7 and 6.8 on page 18 of his report the Board were continually interacting with all relevant parties to protect the Board's position. There were no questions.

9.11 Enforcement

- J. Ward* - asked what the depth level was for underground cables and would the Board be pushing for deeper levels? The Engineering Manager confirmed that policy stated 2m below the hard bed and 1.5m in sewers and directional drilling. The Chief Engineer confirmed 5m depth was required under the Hobhole drain.
- C. Butler* - asked for an update regarding no. 10 in the enforcement table. The Engineering Manager confirmed that the resident had removed the fence and had made the necessary application for consent for the fence to be installed.

The Chief Engineer thanked the Engineering Manager for his updates.

9.12 Plant and Equipment

The Chief Engineer confirmed that all plant listed for 2024/25 had been received except for the Hitachi ZX180 delivery of which was expected within 6 weeks.

The Chief Engineer provided an update for plant purchase approved for 2025/26.

The Engineering Manager referred Board Members to the detailed proposal prepared which showed the costs for replacing the current GPS survey system with a drone, which would provide the Board with improved technology and safety. The cost of the drone and the GPS was £43k. A discussion followed.

- A. Saul* -asked if operators had to be licensed? The Engineering Manager confirmed that they did and confirmed that the Technical Officer and the Assistant Engineer would undergo training to make sure the Board got the most value out of the drone.
- M. Leggott* - confirmed this was a massive step forward for the Board. Precision would result in cost savings and the package looked very impressive. The Chairman agreed and said it would be very useful in a weather event.

The Chief Engineer asked the Board for approval for the purchase of the drone at a price of £43k. This was proposed by D. Scoot and seconded by S. Evans. There was a show of hands, and it was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND That the Board purchase the drone and GPS equipment at a price of £43k plus VAT

- M. Leggott* - asked how the Board would ensure that the tipper trailer was not overloaded. The Chief Engineer confirmed that the gross weight was known and basically we relied on people's common sense.

9.13 Rechargeable Works

The Chief Engineer confirmed the Environment Agency had cut back the PSCA works by 30% because of a reduction in their funding. This means work cannot be done on the East and West Fen Catchwater drains or other critical watercourses. This would have a significant knock-on effect on the lowland ratepayers. Even when fully maintained, highland water overtops into the system. They have agreed to fund the work for Maud Foster and Stonebridge drains.

The Chief Engineer felt the Board now had 3 options:-

1. Do nothing and let it fail
2. Board agrees to fund 50% of the remaining work which totalled £65k and the EA to fund the remainder.

3. If the EA refuse to pay the 50% contribution does the Board want to fully fund the work at a cost of £65k.

- A. Saul* - asked if the work was mainly flailing and weed control? The Chief Engineer that approximately £40k was for weedcutting and £25k for grass cutting.
- T. Ashton* - asked if this would be an annual cost to the Board? The Chief Engineer said he was not sure but that as it was a medium consequence it may attract funding next year.
- T. Ashton* - added the EA's position was not likely to improve so the Board had a dilemma. Historically, the Board was responsible for drainage of the fens, but the ratepayers have paid so why should they be asked to pay again? But the work done would be a benefit to those ratepayers. He did not feel the Board should make a habit of funding this work but the consequences of not doing so, for the ratepayers and farmers, gave the Board no choice but to do it. The Chairman said the simple question was does the Board do the work or not?
- M. Leggott* - asked how the Board would ensure that the tipper trailer was not overloaded. The Chief Engineer confirmed that the gross weight was known and basically, we relied on people's common sense.
- J. Ward* - said if the Board did the mowing and the weedcutting that that would make a significant difference in another weather event. The Chief Engineer confirmed work needed to be done to assist conveyance.
- R. Hall-Jones* - confirmed the least the Board should do is to clear the watercourses and limited mowing.
- C. Butler* - asked if the Board had the manpower? The Chief Engineer confirmed that the Board already did the work under the agreement .
- N. Jones* - said there was no choice and the Board needed to do the work

The Chairman confirmed that the Board did not control the water levels although they would like to. The ideal being to de-main the system and bring it under the Board's control but to do that would require permission.

- T. Ashton* - confirmed de-maining brought its own challenges and it would be good if the Board could take control of water levels and remove the EA from the equation.
- M. Leggott* - said the Board owed it to the ratepayers to do something. If the Board did nothing landowners and households would be flooded.

The Chief Executive confirmed that a decision was required just for the current year as to whether to offer the proposed funding option of 50/50 to the EA and, if this was not accepted for the Board to fund 100% of the costs.

This was proposed by J. Ward and seconded by N. Jones. There was a show of hands, and it was unanimously agreed.

- RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND** That the Board
- (1) Board offers to fund 50% of the work at a total cost of £65k and the EA to fund the remainder
or
 - (2) In the event the EA refuse to pay the 50% contribution, the Board will fully fund the work at a cost of £65k for the current year.

9.14 **Recovery Fund Works**

The Chief Engineer updated the Board on works completed from the £1.43m allocated to the Board. A total of £420k had been spent on slip repairs, £550k to dredging and from the remainder revetment and stoning works were due to be completed.

The Engineering Manager referred Board members to a video on the screen which showed the progress of dredging work being undertaken on the Barlode Drain heading northwards.

The Chief Engineer confirmed that interviews for the new Capital Works Project Manager were being held on 12th June and once the appointment had been made, he would start to bring detailed plans to the Board.

9.15 **Staff Matters**

The Chief Engineer confirmed that the District Operations Manager had resigned from his position with the Board. His successor had been appointed and commenced work on 9th June. Darren Odams came from Network Rail where he had been employed for 20 years as a Section Manager. Darren has a wealth of experience managing large teams, budgets and programming works for large organisations.

10. **CAPITAL WORKS**

10.1 **Wrangle Pumping Station Update**

The Chief Engineer that this project was now completed and had been officially opened by Mrs Grant on 30th April. The Defects period was now in place and that would last for 12 months. Georgina Nicholls has been working on the business case in support of the feasibility study on Benington and Leverton Pumping Stations.

10.2 **Hobhole Pumping Station**

The Chief Engineer referred Board Members to his report from which it could be seen there had been considerable efforts made to get the project to its current stage. However, due to the complexity of this project both he and the Chief Executive had concerns about the effect this was having on getting the Outline Business Case ("OBC") submitted for approval. It was felt that focus was being lost, and a project meeting was held with a senior member of the EA's Large Project Review Group to discuss the case and the options available to change the direction of the project. The outcome from that meeting was that the Board needed to re-focus and to concentrate on getting the OBC submitted for approval. The Board was also advised that due to the project value it would have to go through the EA to the DEFRA Investment Committee for treasury approval. This process would take 6-9 months.

The Chief Executive confirmed that the Hobhole Pumping Station Project Board, on which David Middleton sat, had held a meeting on 11th June and had given their full support for this change of direction. The Chief Engineer confirmed that the design project was a 13-month programme which would start in July so he would bring further updates to the Board at the September Board meeting.

The Chief Engineer confirmed that at the outset of the project the funding was positive however because of the recent change in Government funding rules there was no guarantee that the full funding option would be successful. Notwithstanding these changes, the Chief Engineer was hoping that as the project was already on the radar there may be transition period however the Board might only be successful in obtaining 90% funding which would leave the Board needing to find £10m to complete the project. The Chief Executive confirmed that the Board had never had a full promise of the funding.

11. **HEALTH & SAFETY REPORT**

The Chief Engineer confirmed he would take the report as read but confirmed that regarding paragraph 11 relating to the HSE Inspection it had been a very successful meeting, and they carried out a full audit of the Health & Safety procedures in place. Risk assessments had been reviewed, and, on the whole, they were impressed but did make one or two suggestions for improvement.

12. **ENVIRONMENT REPORT**

The Engineering Manager would take his report as read and mentioned that the BAP Tracker was now live on the website.

13. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

The Chief Executive confirmed that members should have a copy of the Good Governance Guide in front of them. This was a second edition and was a good source of information for Board Members as it covers everything that IDBs do.

There was no other business and the meeting concluded at 4.00pm.

Chairman