

WITHAM FOURTH DISTRICT INTERNAL DRAINAGE BOARD

MINUTES

of the proceedings of the **Board** at a Meeting held via Zoom due to the Covid 19 pandemic on **Wednesday, 10th June 2020**

Present: - P. Richardson (Chairman)

Messrs:	T. Ashton	A. Hall
	R. Austin	A. Harrison
	P. Bedford	N. Jones
	B. Bowles	R.F. Leggott
	M. Cooper	A. Saul
	C. Crunkhorn (Vice-Chairman)	P. Skinner
	J. Grant	K. Smith
	R. Hall-Jones	J. Ward
	C. Hardy	J. Woods

1 **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

1.1 **A Virtual First**

The Chairman confirmed this was the first time the Board had met remotely. This necessitated an amendment to the Board's Standing Orders which have had a small alteration to reflect this. These were approved by the Minister in May 2020 and the Board are asked to approve the amendment so that they can be updated on the website. The Board gave its approval.

1.2 **ADA Events**

The Chairman confirmed that unfortunately, the Branch AGM in April had been cancelled and will be rearranged. ADA Committee Meetings are all being conducted remotely, and the Annual Conference in November has already been moved to a virtual Conference for the first time.

1.3 **Water Level Management**

The very wet start to the year has been replaced by five solid weeks of dry weather and we understand the difficulty this is placing on the farming community. The Board are doing what they can to keep the levels maintained until this position changes.

1.4 **Covid 19**

The Board like many other businesses, have had to respond to the threat and risks of the current pandemic. The Chairman was pleased with the way the Board had responded and the leadership that Peter and Ed have shown after a short break, to enable the workforce to continue to work safely. Whilst the office is still closed to the public, correspondence by email and telephone is available and normal business has continued. Ed would update the Board regarding the district maintenance programme during his report.

2 **APOLOGIES**

Apologies had been received from Cllr. Frank Pickett. No Apologies for non-attendance had been received from Cllr. A. Spencer or Cllr. C. Woodcock.

Also, in attendance was Mr Chris Harris, the Internal Auditor, who would be delivering the findings of the Board's recent internal Audit.

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

Declared an interest in discussions about Triton Knoll/Viking Link – P. Richardson, J. Grant and R. Leggott

4 **MINUTES**

4.1 **Board Meeting – Wednesday 5th February 2020**

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Board held on 5 February 2020 were submitted and their accuracy confirmed and signed by the Chairman. Matters arising: -

- C. Crunkhorn* - asked if there was any update in relation to the compensation payment for flood recovery costs? The Chief Executive confirmed that the Board were not due to receive anything but other Lincolnshire boards that had experienced flooding from EA main rivers had agreed compensation payments for their costs.
- J. Grant* - gave a brief update on the River Steeping Steering Group and the Action Plan that had now been made public. Project works were now progressing in line with this plan.
- J. Grant* - asked if there was any update for the figures for solar panel performance? The Chief Executive confirmed that he was waiting for the last quarters export payment in order to do this

5. **MEETINGS WITH OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS**

The Chief Executive read through the meetings listed in the Agenda and highlighted the following points:-

- (a) **Lincolnshire Flood & Water Management Partnership Management Group Meeting-** The Chief Executive explained that Local Choices is where schemes which cannot attract FDGIA are considered for local levy support by the RFCC. Last year the process was rushed and lacked transparency, and this was fed back to the RFCC. This year the process had started earlier, and the Board would submit a scheme for consideration in 2020.
- (b) **Environment Agency Meeting**
The Chief Executive mentioned a recent meeting with the EA to discuss the Lower Witham Strategy and this would look at modelling the lower Witham Catchment including the use of Grand Sluice Lock in times of extreme flow.

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

6.1 **Cash Book Balances**

The Chief Executive went through his report and read through the list of larger payments made.

6.2 **Rate Arrears as at 31 March 2020**

The Chief Executive confirmed there was a detailed list of rate arrears in the report. Some of the outstanding debts would have been pursued via the Magistrates Court but the hearing date had been delayed because of the Covid 19 outbreak.

Rate Demands for the current year have now been sent out and payments are being received. The Chief Executive confirmed that the phone lines had been exceptionally busy with people calling to make payments.

6.3 **Income from Credit card payments to 31 March 2020**

The Chief Executive advised the Board that we now had a new, faster card payment machine and that bank payments would be more popular in the current circumstances

7. **Accounts Year Ending 31 March 2020**

8. **Internal Audit and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 March 2020**

8.1 **Internal Audit – report from Internal Auditor for 2019/20**

The Chief Executive introduced Chris Harris the internal auditor who was attending the meeting. The Internal Auditor began by thanking the Chief Executive and his staff for the hospitality shown to him during his visit in February 2020. He went through his report and

began by pointing out that the Board had been given the highest level of assurance this year for the first time, which was “substantial assurance”. This meant that Board Members could rely on the internal controls that the Board had in place and that they were working well.

The Internal Auditor had raised 3 issues which were detailed in his report and the Chief Executive had responded with a timescale by when the matters raised would be dealt with. He had completed the Internal Audit section of the AGAR and confirmed that the Board were able to confirm on the AGAR, that appropriate governance procedures were in place. He remained for the rest of the Board Meeting.

8.2 **Approval of Accounts and Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) – year ended 31 March 2020**

The Chief Executive then referred Board Members to the Annual Governance and Accountability Return 2019/20 Part 3 (“AGAR”). Pages 1 and 2 set out details of what is required, and Page 3 details the Internal Audit Report. C. Harris, the Internal Auditor, had signed this off. The accounts were approved after some questions. The Chief Executive explained the significant amount of EA works which had been carried out in 2019/20. £460K was included in Rechargeable works and the supervision income we receive from this has had a positive impact on our accounts.

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

RESOLVED that the Annual Governance Statement for the Year Ended 31 March 2020 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 had already signed the accounts statements and 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 2020 be approved and signed by the Chairman.

8.2 (3) **External Audit**

The Chief Executive confirmed that he would send the approved Annual Return, 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. 1/20**

9.1 **Pumping Station Operations**

The Chief Engineer confirmed that the first part of his report focused on pumping station operation, the hours to the end of the reporting period – 4,777. With 7,652 hours for the year so far compared to 2019.

9.2 **Secondhand Engine Offer**

The Chief Engineer updated the Board on the acquisition of the second-hand Allen T47 Engines from Peckforton Pumping Station.

T. Ashton - confirmed he was pleased this was progressing and wanted the Board to acquire as much as it could.

J. Grant - agreed that we should be acquiring as much of this equipment as possible.

B. Bowles - believed it was better to bring away only what we need so as to avoid storing large quantities of parts we may never need.

A discussion was held about continuing to look at new engines for Hobhole Pumping Station and that acquiring these second-hand parts was only a temporary solution for emergency breakdowns. It was important to keep a focus on the long-term solutions for the site.

9.3 **Pump No.1 Gearbox/Engine**

B. Bowles - asked for an update on the engine issue at Hobhole Pumping Station. The Chief Engineer expanded on his report to detail that the blocked air filter was now going to be cleaned annually but he could not offer an explanation as to why these hadn't been cleaned before.

10 **Rainfall**

The Chief Engineer updated the May rainfall total as an average of 7.7mm.

10.1 **Water Levels**

J. Grant - asked if there had been any issues with flow in the River Witham and had this restricted abstraction? The Chief Engineer confirmed there had been no issues.

The Chief Engineer informed members that the Dogdyke abstraction was now open and feeding water from the River Witham into the West Fen. Members were informed this abstraction was on Water Transfer Limited's Licence.

A. Harrison - asked if the Chief Engineer could speak to Water Transfer Limited before the level was lowered in the Autumn as some farmers are still irrigating at that time. The Chief Engineer confirmed he would and added he was working to improve communication with Tim Casey on water level matters that would affect irrigation

11 **Soil Moisture Deficit**

The Chief Engineer took the Board through the reporting period and updated members that the May soil moisture deficit was 100mm and the June figure was currently 124mm.

12 **Channel Maintenance Operations**

The Chief Engineer picked up on Richard Leggott's concerns raised in the Finance Managers Report that he was concerned that maintenance was being curtailed to subsidise other work. The Chief Engineer explained that flail mowing operations had had to be stood down due to the wet ground conditions and the figures in the report reflected this. The Chief Engineer confirmed that it was not physically possible to complete the work and that is why there was a saving on maintenance that had helped with the pumping costs.

12.1 **Plant Operations 2020/21**

The Chief Engineer updated members on the critical watercourse cutting and the hours completed to date. The Chief Engineer also informed members that this work was almost complete, and the dry weather had helped with access on the land. There had been no issues with land occupiers and running through crops.

12.2 **Slips**

The Chief Engineer updated members on the current slip situation and explained that only the high-risk slips would be repaired this year and some work would have to wait until next year. The Chief Engineer informed members that there was £55k in the estimate for slip repairs and we had spent £30k.

The Chief Engineer explained the Fodderdyke slip repair was now complete and we had submitted as claim with LCC for a 50% contribution.

J. Ward - asked why we had only obtained a £25k contribution to the first slip when the work came to £75K? The Chief Engineer explained that this was all that LCC had available at the time and they had also paid for all the road repairs and road closures.

- J. Grant* - pointed out that he had ****PERSONALLY**** negotiated and set up the initial agreement with Andy Radcliffe and LCC for 50% of any costs on these slips and we should be getting that. The Chief Engineers said he would pursue 50% on all future roadside slip repairs.
- K. Smith* - asked when the slip at Friskney was going to be repaired? The Chief Engineer confirmed it would be done as soon as we could get to it.

13. **Planning**

13.1 **Toot Lane, Fishtoft PENQ/20/0010**

The Chief Engineer confirmed informed members that this development would be charged for a surface water contribution on this site and under the new banding system it would equate to approximately £36K.

13.2 **Viking Link**

The Chief Engineer updated members that consenting work was about to start on this project and it would attract a minimum of £13k in consenting fees

14. **Plant and Equipment**

- A. Saul* - asked how the fuelling system was going? The Chief Engineer said it was going well so far, but the test would be when we have all the plant out at work during the summer.
- T. Ashton* - added his support for purchasing another tank if it would help as the cost difference in this system compared to having the Unimog running around must be significant.

15 **Health and Safety**

15.1 **Covid 19**

The Chief Engineer explained the process he went through risk-assessing the Board's employees. He confirmed how pleased he was with the response from District Operatives coming back to work.

- J. Grant* - suggested using temperature testing before operatives start work and having screens in shared vehicles. The Chief Engineer said he would consider this if needed.

16. **Technical Matters**

16.1 **Wrangle Pumping Station Feasibility Study**

The Chief Engineer updated members on the plans for this project and informed that the contractors had been appointed to carry out the confined space work. The work is due to start early July and the results will feed directly into the business case for flood defence grant in aid.

- J. Grant* - asked to make sure all the steel piles were inspected properly as they were starting to rot. The Chief Engineer confirmed these would be looked at as part of the inspection.

17. **Other Engineering Matters**

17.1 **Public Sector Cooperation Works (PSCA) – Main River Maintenance**

The Chief Engineer updated members that the 2020/21 estimate for Main River Work had been approved for £170k and this work was underway with H&S Grass cutting and Boat weed cutting.

The Chief Engineer also informed members that an order had been placed for £59k for bushing work on the West Fen Catchwater Drain between Revesby and Hagnaby Lock, this was due to start anytime now.

- R. Hall-Jones* - asked if the East Fen Catchwater drain could have some mudding work completed as it was holding up flows? The Chief Engineer confirmed he was onto this and trying to get some action.

17.2 **Staff Matters**

Organisational Restructure

The Chief Engineer confirmed that concerns had been raised by some Board members (J. Grant, C. Hardy, J. Woods and R. Hall-Jones) that this restructure had not been authorised by the Board before being implemented. The Chief Executive informed members that the Officers had operated within the finance regulations and only new appointments had to be approved by the Board.

The general consensus was that it should still have been run past the Board, the Officers apologised and confirmed it would not happen again.

The Chief Engineer reassured members that this was a direct investment in the District and assured members that he did not want to carry any excess staff costs that were not needed. This change was to promote better standards of maintenance, workmanship and Safety.

After further discussions full support was given to the change by the Board Members.

10. **ENVIRONMENT REPORT**

The Chief Engineer ran through the Environment Report with the Board.

11. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

There was No Other Business and the meeting concluded.

Chairman