

# WITHAM FOURTH DISTRICT INTERNAL DRAINAGE BOARD

## MINUTES

of the proceedings of the **Board** at a Meeting held at 47 Norfolk Street, Boston on **Wednesday, 14<sup>th</sup> September 2022**

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Present: - P. Richardson (Chairman)

Messrs:	T. Ashton	A. Harrison
	Mrs. P. Ashleigh-Morris	M. Leggott
	R. Austin	N. Jones
	P. Bedford	K. Smith
	B. Bowles	J. Ward
	C. Crunkhorn (Vice-Chairman)	J. Welbourn
	C. Hardy	J. Woods

### 1 **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

#### 1.1 **HM Queen Elizabeth II**

The Chairman said he was sad to hear of the death of HM Queen Elizabeth II last week and asked the Board Members to stand and observe a minute's silence as a mark of the Board's respect.

#### 1.2 **Judith Welbourn**

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Judith Welbourn to her first Board meeting which he hoped she would find of interest.

#### 1.3 **Mrs. Annabelle Ward**

The Chairman announced that Mrs. Annabelle Ward had been made Deputy Lieutenant of Lincolnshire and asked J. Ward to pass on the Board's congratulations.

#### 1.4 **Annual ADA Conference**

The Chairman confirmed the ADA Board have split the traditional conference into two separate events. The AGM would be held on 28 September 2022 by way of an online meeting. The ADA Annual Water Management Conference would be held on 9 November 2022 at Dysons conference facility at Nocton. Full details are on ADA's website.

*T. Ashton* - noted his displeasure that the AGM was not being held in person as it was a valuable opportunity to meet and express views. The Chairman confirmed he had expressed the same sentiments to Innes Thompson (ADA's CEO) last week.

### 2 **Apologies for Absence**

The Chief Executive confirmed that apologies had been received from A. Hall, A. Saul, J. Grant, and R. Hall-Jones. Councillor Ashton confirmed that P. Skinner had asked him to convey his apologies to the Board. No apologies had been received from N. Hastie or F. Pickett.

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

None

### 4 **MINUTES**

#### 4.1 **Board Meeting – Wednesday, 15<sup>th</sup> June 2022**

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Board held on 15 June 2022 were submitted and signed by the Chairman.

The Chairman ran through each page and asked members for comments.

The Chief Executive updated the Board regarding page 2 of the Minutes regarding the illegal planting of a hedge. The ratepayer had been sent a letter confirming that the hedge was planted without consent and should be removed. The ratepayer had responded intimating that he would be making an appeal which may result in a Tribunal hearing. At present, the Board are seeking legal advice as it is believed that we have legal rights to object.

- M. Leggott* - asked *who would administer the Tribunal hearing?* The Chief Engineer said that he believed that where he worked before it was the Institute of Engineers. The Chief Executive said he had no idea as this situation had never arisen before.
- C. Hardy* - asked *how long the process would take?* Again, the Chief Executive confirmed he did not know although he did add the ratepayer had been given consent for a small fence in place of the hedge.
- J. Woods* - asked *if the losing party would bear the costs?* The Chief Executive confirmed that until such time as the legal opinion was received, he could not answer.
- J. Woods* - added *the Board needed to stand their ground.*

The Vice-Chairman just wanted to remind Members that the Governance Meeting would take place at 11am on 11<sup>th</sup> October 2022 when the main topic would be the General Reserves.

Page 4, paragraph 8.3 - The Chief Executive confirmed that the Board had written to the ratepayer in relation to the sale of the land near Jolly Farmer bank with an asking price of £10,000.00. The ratepayer responded that it was a very fair offer but he was unable to afford it at the present time.

## 5. **MEETINGS WITH OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS**

5.1 The Chief Executive confirmed that:-

### 5.1.1 **Lower Witham Strategy Meeting**

The Environment Agency are working on a solution to “double counting” of benefits (houses etc) so that houses previously claimed by a sole project can now be apportioned between more than one project. This was a massive step forward.

### 5.1.2 **Incident Management**

The Chief Executive confirmed that a large flood exercise had been due to happen on 17<sup>th</sup> September but in light of the HM Queen Elizabeth II’s passing this had been postponed to 14<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> November 2022. This exercise would include a tidal flooding incident but was not believed to have any effect in the Board’s district.

- T. Ashton* - asked *how committed the Environment Agency (“EA”) were to the future required works?* The Chief Executive confirmed he had attended a meeting of 16 people, 3 from IDBs and 3 from ARUP Consultants and the rest from the EA. The Chief Executive believed the EA were committed to the works to put things right on a “no regret” basis and were looking long term at a 100-year strategy. The first phase was looking at spending £40m in the first phase of this.
- B. Bowles* - said *he hoped there would be action and not just words.*

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

### 6.1 **Cash Book Balances**

The Chief Executive went through his report and confirmed that the bank balances were looking Healthy but this was due in part to monies received from the EA for works yet to be completed.

### 6.2 **Payments Made**

The Chief Executive detailed the payments made which included two payments in relation to Control Panels and Weed screens which had been fully funded by Grant in Aid. There was also the first of the large EA precept payments which had been paid. Insurance premiums had increased dramatically despite our excellent no claims record. The Chief Executive felt that there

were not enough specialised insurance companies hence the premium.

*J. Woods* - asked if the tablet dealing with Health & Safety had made a difference? The Chief Executive confirmed that he had prepared a full report detailing the system which had been submitted. Unfortunately, as we are just one Board implementing this it made little impact.

The Chairman added that as a result of the current economic climate the rebuild cost for buildings had also increased considerably.

*P. Bedford* - asked if the Board used Towergate for insurance? The Chief Executive confirmed 5 companies were used to deal with all aspects of the Board's insurance including Towergate.

*J. Ward* - mentioned as interest rates were starting to creep up would it be worthwhile putting some of the funds into a deposit account? The Chief Executive confirmed he was awaiting a call from the Bank's Relationship Manager to discuss the possible options.

The Chief Executive confirmed that a compensation payment of £167.50 had been paid within this reporting period. This was a very rare occurrence.

### 6.3 External Audit Report

The Chief Executive confirmed that a clean report had been received from the External Auditor. There were no qualifications although the did raise one point regarding the timing of the document advertised on the website but there were no penalties because of this.

The Chief Executive referred Board Members to the last page of his report detailing the expenditure to date which shows the Board is more or less on target and in a very good position to face the winter period. The Chief Executive confirmed that in February the rate was set with a 5% increase because of the red diesel tax issue. Although the argument with DEFRA to enable the Board to continue to use red diesel had been won, unfortunately the cost of red diesel has escalated and the Chief Executive will prepare a full report in relation to this for the December Board meeting.

### 6.4 Income

The Chief Executive confirmed that again we are where we expected to be, and members could see the total amount of rates collected as at the end of July 2022. The new credit card machine had been put to good use, especially during Covid and it was now very rare that people come into the office to make payment of their rates.

*T. Ashton* - was interested in the increase in electricity bills for the pumping station. The Chief Executive confirmed that in 2018, the Board had entered into a 5-year fixed rate electricity tariff which did not expire until September 2023. The Board was currently paying 0.14 pence per unit. The Chief Executive was due to meet with an energy advisor in early October .

*T. Ashton* - thanked the Chief Executive and confirmed this was excellent news and was aware that the impact on other boards was significant. He believed that colleagues needed to be repeating the efforts of working together to rally against the rate cap.

## 7. Future Management Options Report

The Chairman confirmed that these discussions had started with the Chief Executive approximately 3 years ago, when the Chief Executive had indicated his intention regarding future retirement. The Chairman felt this had now reached the stage where the Board needed to be included in the discussions.

The report had been prepared following a meeting with Black Sluice IDB as the Chief Executives of both boards were looking towards retirement. This Board would lose the financial function currently conducted by the Chief Executive and Black Sluice the engineering function carried out

by their Chief Executive. It therefore seemed prudent to re-open discussions about the possible benefits of working closer together.

The Chief Executive confirmed that the document set out a few of the options available to the Board. A shared service way of working with Black Sluice had first been visited approximately 10 years ago. The Chief Executive felt that there was some common ground with both boards, however, before the report had been completed the enclosed e-mail had been received from Black Sluice confirming that they felt that the proposals would not work although they were happy to continue looking at some ways in which the 2 boards could work together. The Chief Executive said that he would take the report as read and would be happy to take any questions.

*R. Austin - was puzzled why it was believed that there would be room for additional staff at the premises at Swineshead. The Chief Executive confirmed that he and the Chief Engineer had walked round the building and felt that there were some options regarding the space available – i.e., an extension to the existing building*

The Chairman added that if this were an option for the Board, then the Board's offices at Norfolk Street would be sold and some of the proceeds would have been utilised adding an extension to the existing offices at Swineshead although the property would always belong to Black Sluice.

*T. Ashton - said although Black Sluice had effectively killed the deal before it started, personally he felt uneasy at seeing Witham Fourth based at Swineshead - outside of our District. The Board was a catchment-based business and he felt that following the District Tour earlier in the year, it was of a scale where perhaps a like for like replacement building could be sought. He considered the Board to be one of the larger more efficient Boards and would like to see replacement premises found which would not impact the current capacity.*

*M. Leggott - felt it was only right and proper to enter into these discussions and it was a shame that nothing more had come from them.*

The Chairman added that in another few years there would be a natural loss of workforce (by retirements etc). The Chairman believed the Board's biggest asset was its workforce, and this created an additional problem moving forwards, who the Board could recruit?

The Chairman confirmed it was essential to consider all options and keep moving forward to become more efficient. He was keen to see the link between GIS Mapping and the DRS system to make land enquiries much quicker. Technology needs to be embraced and this would form part of the review process. Another option would be to base the offices at a pumping station.

James Grant had telephoned the Chief Executive before the meeting and had asked him to express his view which was "the very same thing happened previously when the discussions had taken place and he felt that this Board was big enough to stay separate." The Chairman believed however that it was right to consider all options.

*T. Ashton - was not opposed to shared services but did not believe that both Boards needed to be in one office. He was interested whether the Norfolk Street building was the right building for the Board and whether there would be any efficiency in moving.*

The Chairman asked if any of the Farmer representation had any comments.

*B. Bowles - felt it was wrong not to be looking at other options and moving forward and that the decision would all come down to costs efficiency.*

*N. Jones - agreed with B. Bowles and added that the local councils were all working together. The Board had to be careful not to just stick with the status quo.*

*J. Ward - asked whether any consideration had been given to the example of Water Management Alliance? The Chief Executive confirmed that whilst he would not be part of the Board's future, he felt it was right to look first to our immediate neighbours and see whether it would be possible to work together.*

*K. Smith - asked if an alliance with Lindsey Marsh IDB had been considered? The Chairman confirmed that he would prefer to leave that idea at present as there were a number*

of options available to the Board. He had had some discussions with other Boards but he wanted to ensure that any decision made would be the best for this Board. The Board does need to be flexible and consider efficiencies but were not under any immediate pressure and had sufficient time to consider all the options carefully.

- M. Leggott* - agreed wholeheartedly and confirmed that agriculture has had to embrace technology to satisfy the need to be efficient and drive down costs.
- P. Bedford* - felt that the Chief Officers should keep the lines of communication open and that we were far away from becoming one Board. The point which needs to be considered is the likely costs each Board would incur. The Chairman confirmed that in the event that Norfolk Street property was sold, and any possible joint venture failed - then it would be necessary to purchase another building. The door was open.
- J. Woods* - felt it was 100% the correct way to deal with this – transparent and open to scrutiny. If efficiencies could be found then that was good, but he felt that there was a lot to be said for the Board as it stands. Lots of small businesses were more efficient than larger ones. A partnership may seem idealistic at the start but does not always turn out that way. He urged the Management Team to proceed with caution.

The Chairman confirmed there were a number of options available, the pumping stations were being re-developed so perhaps an office could be built there for the engineering staff which would place them in the heart of the district.

- B. Bowles* - warned members not to get too bogged down with the property issue. The Chairman confirmed that no deal would ever be 100% perfect and would require flexibility on both sides.
- R. Austin* - agreed with this last comment and asked what the annual maintenance costs of Norfolk Street were? The Chief Executive confirmed £30k per year and that 8 permanent members of staff were based there.
- T. Ashton* - confirmed that if there were only 8 permanent members of staff then it showed how efficient the Board already is. He would be very interested to see what it would cost to build a new modern office, complete with Board Room in the district.

The Chairman confirmed that the building was secondary and that wherever the Board moved to it would incur costs. His main concern was reaching a solution that was best for the Board and to ensure Board Members were happy with it.

He believed in the short term it would be useful to have one volunteer representative from each of Boston Borough Council, East Lindsey District Council, and the elected members. They would be a sounding board for ideas and discussions before they were referred to the full Board. Anyone interested in volunteering was asked to contact the Chief Executive following the meeting.

The Vice-Chairman added that the Board had been very thorough in discussions and that a lot of time and effort had already been invested in this subject.

- C. Hardy* - asked about a replacement for the current Chief Executive? The Chairman confirmed that the Chief Executive had options as to when he wished to retire and the team would be working within this timescale. The Chairman confirmed that this would be within the next 2 years and that the Chief Executive had already pledged not to leave the Board in the lurch.
- P. Bedford* - confirmed the Black Sluice Chief Executive was looking to retire within the next 18 months.

## 8. **ENGINEERING MANAGER'S REPORT NO. 2/22**

The Chief Engineer would take his report as read and highlight all areas of importance and any updates for Board Members.

### 8.1 **Pumping Hours**

The Chief Engineer confirmed there were 95 pumping hours as at the end of August.

### 8.2 **Hobhole Pumping Station**

The Chief Engineer confirmed the access gate had now been completely installed.

### 8.3 Rainfall

The Chief Engineer confirmed that 60mm was recorded for the catchment during August which was very welcome. The Chief Engineer referred Board members to page 7 of his report showing the Soil Moisture Deficit which had been as high as 156mm. The recent rain had reduced levels to a much healthier total.

### 8.5 Dogdyke Freshwater Feed

The Chief Engineer confirmed the Dogdyke freshwater feed had been opened on 4<sup>th</sup> July and at the end of August 91,000 cubic metres had been abstracted in an effort to maintain water quality.

### 8.6 Plant Operations

The Chief Engineer confirmed that all critical watercourse work had been completed and the usual summer maintenance operations were now underway.

*J. Ward* - asked if the issues with the SPV had now been resolved? The Chief Engineer confirmed that at the present time they were.

*A. Harrison* - asked if the steel pile driver had been purchased? The Chief Engineer confirmed that it was currently pending as he was trying some larger, more robust wooden piles and, if successful, a more robust compactor would be required to deal with them

### 8.7 Planning

The Chief Engineer confirmed significant levels of planning applications were currently being processed which was very time consuming. The Toot Lane planning applications and consents had now all been completed which had generated £70k for the Board.

*B. Bowles* - confirmed he was not supportive of new properties being built on raised land because of the effect on existing lower-level properties. The Chief Engineer confirmed he did not support ground level raising but it was a condition applied by the EA. However, ground level raising did not create any drainage issues for lower lying existing properties as the water was collected on site and then discharged from there.

### 8.8 Outer Dowsing Offshore Wind

The Chief Engineer confirmed there was nothing further to add in this regard although this was the 3<sup>rd</sup> major infrastructure project to go through the district that would result in major consenting issues but developers were happy to reimburse the Board.

### 8.9 Technical Matters

The Chief Engineer confirmed that the Catchment Survey work carried out by two graduate students was progressing very well.

### 8.10 Wrangle Pumping Station

The Chief Engineer updated the Board that the new design had now been completed and the pumps, spare motor and gearbox had all been ordered and should hopefully be on display at the ADA presentation at Nocton next year.

*B. Bowles* - asked if Natural England had been included in this? The Chief Engineer confirmed they had been on board since the beginning and this would hopefully avoid any delays moving forwards.

*J. Ward* - asked if the diesel engines at Hobhole Pumping Station were all up and running? The Chief Engineer confirmed that all maintenance had been completed so all should be ok although no guarantees could be given.

*A. Harrison* - asked if the new Telemetry boxes were secure? The Chief Engineer confirmed that they were as secure as they possibly could be and there was not much inside them to interest vandals.

9. **Health and Safety Officer's Report**

The Chief Engineer confirmed there had been one incident over the reporting period which involved an overhead power cable being brought down. This was as a result of the driver failing to follow the correct procedure. The driver had subsequently received a Warning.

The incident had been reported to the Health & Safety Executive under RIDDOR. The Chief Executive confirmed that in the Chief Engineer's absence on holiday, he had provided the Officer all documentation requested (Risk Assessments, policies etc) and nothing further had been heard from them for the past 2 weeks.

The Chief Engineer confirmed that had the driver followed procedure he was confident that this could have been avoided. The Chief Engineer confirmed that Western Power came out and confirmed that the cable was low at 4.2m instead of 5.4m. If Western Power can see a betterment, then they carry out improvement works. No major change to policy is required as a result of this incident and the Chief Executive confirmed that the Board's credibility remained intact because a Risk Assessment had been conducted on a daily basis.

10. **ENVIRONMENT REPORT**

The Chief Engineer read through the Environment Report and confirmed that it had been possible to deliver some of the required targets in relation to the BAP.

The Chief Engineer drew the Board's attention to the issue regarding American Mink. There had now been 7 mink caught in the trap which had subsequently been destroyed.

The Chief Engineer confirmed there was an ongoing issue with water quality and salinity levels throughout the region. This was exacerbated by the heat and the salt pans. Aerators had been borrowed from the EA for use at Hobhole Pumping Station which appeared to help and may be a good investment looking to the future.

*A. Harrison* - confirmed the weed levels on the Witham were causing issues. The Chief Engineer agreed and suggested that perhaps a boom could be purchased to place in the water.

11. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

There was no other business and the meeting was closed at 3.30pm

Chairman