

WITHAM FOURTH DISTRICT INTERNAL DRAINAGE BOARD

MINUTES

of the proceedings of the **Board** at a Meeting held at 47 Norfolk Street
on **Wednesday, 8 February 2023**

Present: -

Messrs: T. Ashton R. Hall-Jones
 R. Austin N. Jones
 P. Bedford F. Pickett
 B. Bowles P. Richardson (Chairman)
 C. Crunkhorn A. Saul
 (Vice-Chairman) J. Ward
 J. Grant J. Welbourn
 C. Hardy J. Woods
 A. Hall

1 **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman welcomed members to the meeting and asked that the Members' Interest Forms please be completed and returned even if there were no changes so that the records could be kept up to date.

The advert for the Senior Engineer/Manager vacancy had now closed and the Chairman was pleased to report there had been 3 strong candidates. Interviews will be taking place over the following 7 days. First interviews would be with the Chief Executive and Chief Engineer, second interviews would be conducted by the Chief Engineer and the Chairman.

The Chairman advised the Lincolnshire Show was due to take place on 21st-22nd June 2023 and ADA Lincs Branch would be attending.

The ADA Flood and Water LIVE event would be taking place on 5th and 6th July 2023. ADA would be releasing details of the various events within the next few days. The Chairman believed demand would be high and urged members to book quickly if they were interested in a particular tour during this event..

The ADA Annual Conference was again being split into two separate events this year. The AGM would take place on 27 September 2023 by Zoom and the annual Water Management Conference would be held on 8th November at a venue to be confirmed in London.

2 **APOLOGIES**

Apologies for non-attendance were received from: -

Mrs. P Ashleigh-Morris
A. Harrison
M. Leggott
K. Smith
P. Skinner

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

Outer Dowsing – A. Saul, J. Woods, C. Crunkhorn, B. Bowles, J. Grant

4 **MINUTES**

4.1 **Board Meeting – Wednesday, 7th December 2022**

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Board held on 8 December 2022 were submitted and were agreed as accurate, pending one amendment, and signed by the Chairman.

- J. Grant* - stated that there was an undercurrent of invasive weeds and asked if the EA were doing any other work, other than mechanical, to prevent this? The Vice-Chairman confirmed that at the ADA meeting last week it was confirmed that work was undergoing trials using a bug to eat the invasive weeds. However, the trials were ongoing to ensure that the bugs did not cause any other damage. The Chief Engineer added that all invasive species were being recorded and shown on the Biodiversity Action Plan ("BAP").
- J. Ward* - asked if there was any update regarding the pay review? The Chairman confirmed that the improved offer had not been forwarded to members and had simply been rejected by the Union. The Union wanted a consolidated rise of 5% plus a one-off payment of £1,000. The Chief Executive added that his estimates had been prepared based upon the improved offer of 2.1% plus £1800 one off payment but said this was not too far adrift from the figure the Union had proposed.

The Chief Engineer confirmed that with regard to paragraph 11.5 of the Minutes regarding Slip Repairs on the Fodderdyke Bank, Lincolnshire County Council ("LCC") usually contribute 50% towards any repair costs. However, this year they have confirmed that there are no surplus funds to enable them to contribute and the Chief Engineer confirmed that he will ask them about the possibility of a payment in the new financial year.

- J. Woods* - asked if there was a danger of this situation becoming commonplace? The Chief Engineer confirmed that there had been significant investment in the Fodderdyke and that timber piles had been trialled as a cheaper solution.
- C. Hardy* - asked how the Gride was holding up? The Chief Engineer confirmed it was holding up and he had spoken with LCC regarding drainage control as 50% of the work required was dependent upon their contribution.
- J. Ward* - asked if there was any update regarding the two-storey extension at Butterwick? The Chief Engineer confirmed there was no update to report.

With regard to paragraph 14 concerning the Board's strategic direction update, the Chairman confirmed that a small group of Board Members had met recently to discuss this issue but it was felt that it was not possible to discuss this issue within the usual Board meeting and it would be preferable to call a separate meeting to discuss this item.

The meeting was provisionally agreed for 22nd March 2023 at 2.00pm and the Chairman confirmed that any decision would require 70% support for it to be approved. Documents will be forwarded to all Board Members and if anyone was unable to attend the meeting then their feedback and preference would be appreciated prior to the meeting taking place.

5. **MINUTES OF FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE – 18 January 2023**

5.1 **Matters arising:**

To approve the Adoption of Officer's Estimate

The Chief Executive confirmed that a copy of his Estimate Memorandum was available to all Board Members which covered the out-turn of the current year. Subject to any adverse weather conditions to the end of the current year, there would be around a £120k surplus.

The Chief Executive confirmed that the original estimate had shown there would be an anticipated surplus of £68k to be added to the General Reserve, however, pending average rainfall for the rest of the year, the actual figure would be nearer to £120k. This was because the year had been drier than normal so there had been minimal use of the pumps. There had been a slight reduction in Admin costs due to the loss of a staff member. Last year the 5% rate increase had been agreed based on the issue of red diesel. This argument had been won allowing use of red diesel at the pumping stations and some machinery however this had been affected by the significant increase in fuel prices. £40k of the £120k surplus was due to this.

The Chief Executive referred Board Members to the General Reserve and confirmed the current balance as £530k. With the potential £120k above, this would increase to £650k which would mean that the Board would be slightly ahead of where it wanted to be this year. (21% x annual expenditure).

The Vice-Chairman confirmed that the Board needed to make that progression. If there was a year with a significant weather event, the funds may need to be drawn.

The Chief Executive confirmed that some other Boards were having to consider horrendous increases to their rate because they had incurred increased energy costs but this was not something that the Board needed to consider until next year when hopefully things would have settled down. Whilst the proposed increase of 8% was the largest the Chief Executive had seen in his tenure; he was still of the firm belief that this Board provided value for money. Even with this proposed increase the Board's average increase over the last 10 years was 2.65%.

The Vice-Chairman confirmed in his view, 8% was still conservative and that next year energy costs and a possible weather event would all have a detrimental effect.

J. Grant - *hoped the energy markets would settle by next year.* The Chairman confirmed that the General Reserve was a moving target. The Board was heading towards 25% but once that had been achieved, ideally, we would then be looking towards 35%.

The Chairman asked the Chief Engineer if the electricity costs increased significantly and it was necessary to use the electric pumps would the costs escalate? The Chief Engineer said not necessarily, because they were more efficient and less manpower would be required. The Chief Executive added that a comparison would be made at the new Hobhole pumping station. The Chairman added that this should be complete in 2027-28 and things could change by then.

The Chairman asked if there were any further questions and there were none.

5.2.1 **To approve the proposed rate increase**

T. Ashton proposed that the rate increase of 8% be accepted. This was seconded by J. Ward. A vote was taken, and all were in favour with no objections. So it was:

- RESOLVED**
- i) The Chief Executive's Estimates be adopted with an 8% increase in the rate.
 - ii) that the resultant rate be levied in the Sub District 1 (*the former Borough Area of Boston*) to be one half of the full rate:

9.51 pence
 - iii) that the resultant rate be levied in Sub District 2 (*the remainder of the Internal District*) be the full rate:

19.03 pence
 - iv) that the Special Levies on Local Charging Authorities be set as follows:

Boston Borough Council	£1,256,520
East Lindsey District Council	£ 443,015

The Rate was duly sealed at the meeting and would be published on the Board's website.

Finally, the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 18 January 2023 were submitted and agreed as accurate and signed by the Committee's Chairman.

6. **MEETINGS WITH OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS**

The Chief Executive confirmed that as it was such a short space of time since the last Board Meeting he had only attended 2 meetings and he did not propose to go into them in any great detail. The Chief Engineer added that there was significant progress with the move forward to legislate SUDS.

7.

STRATEGIC PLAN

The Chief Executive referred Board Members to the Strategic Plan and confirmed the document encapsulates everything the Board has done, is doing and wants to do in the future. The objectives are split into 3 main headings :-

- Strategic -** *those objectives that shape the future direction of the Board*
Legislative- *those routine objectives laid down by Statute/DEFRA/Environment Agency which cannot be changed*
Operational- *Discretionary objectives that improve the Board's ability to perform its role.*

The Chief Executive confirmed that it was getting harder to put new things into the document as other objectives were completed but he wanted to ensure that the Board was doing what the Board Members wanted.

The Chief Executive took Members through the Strategic Plan and referred to certain items. L3 dealt with the BAP and Tracker which reflected the Board's environmental response. The Chief Executive confirmed that it was also the intention to do an annual inspection around the District to show Board Members what was happening. The Board's Health & Safety had massively improved over the last 2-3 years.

With regard to operational objectives, there had been a £160k investment for water level management and there were now real time gauges so that the Chief Engineer could take a view on what was happening in the district and act accordingly.

IT was an area which required more work. Third party registration of the Board's land was also being tackled and there were hundreds of cases which would need to be reviewed and a decision made whether to challenge them or not.

- R. Hall-Jones* - *referred to L2 and asked about walking away from certain assets?* The Chief Engineer confirmed this would be discussed at the Works Committee meeting. The Chief Engineer confirmed that he was not in favour of walking away from watercourses but this needed to be reviewed. The Chief Executive confirmed an example would be where the end of one watercourse served one small landowner – obviously, larger landowners would be paying higher drainage rates so the Board would be unlikely to walk away from those.

Page 22, the Capital Programme would be updated once the dredging works had been reviewed.

The Chief Executive referred Board Members to Appendix IV and confirmed that three of the Capital Projects had been completed all fully funded by FDGiA. The Chief Engineer would refresh the list and prioritise the works once the Operations Manager had reviewed the list in the Spring.

The Chief Engineer referred Board Members to Appendix III which showed this year £1.2 million had been received from DEFRA for capital projects. If, this had not been received this would have required an additional been an additional 45% on the rate.

- P. Bedford* - *added there was a typo on page 18 – Freiston Shore Nature Reserve.*

The Chairman asked if the Board were prepared to approve the Strategic Plan, subject to the correction of the typo.

A. Saul proposed that the Strategic Plan be approved. This was seconded by F. Pickett. There was unanimous approval and it was therefore:

RESOLVED That the Strategic Plan be approved.

8. **CHIEF ENGINEER'S REPORT**

The Chief Engineer read through his report, which he would take as read and highlighted areas of importance for Board Members. The Chief Engineer was happy to answer any questions as he ran through the report.

8.1 **Pumping Station Operations**

The Chief Engineer confirmed the graph showed the number of pumping hours completed. January had got off to a much wetter start than last year.

8.1.2 **Sluice Hours**

The Chief Engineer confirmed the sluice hours at Hobhole Pumping Station had increased which had resulted in significant savings

8.1.3 **Catchment Pumping Hours**

The Chief Engineer confirmed that average pumping hours were 11,600 but this year we had completed 8,217 so well below average.

8.2 **Rainfall**

Page 5 of the Chief Engineer's report showed the total rainfall for 2022 as 22.1 inches in comparison to the figure for 2021 which was 25.1 inches

8.2.1 **Soil Temperature**

The Chief Engineer referred Board Members to page 6 of his report which showed the soil temperatures for the catchment through 2022 which peaked at 20.96 degrees Celsius. This information had been obtained via the EA and there was also a graph showing the soil temperatures over the last seven years which seem to be increasing.

The Chairman asked if this could have been the reason that the District had suffered so much weed this year? The Chief Engineer confirmed that the mix of warm water and warm ground could cause weed growth.

8.2.2 **Lade Bank Annual Average Rainfall**

Page 7 of the Chief Engineer's report showed the average rainfall at Lade Bank Pumping Station over the last 100 years. 2022 was a below average year for rainfall at only 97% of the 100-year average. The Chief Executive confirmed that the rainfall statistics could be seen on the Board's website.

8.2.3 **Water Transfer**

Some discussion on water security was held and the Chief Engineer informed members that Water Transfer Limited were now looking at solutions for securing water for irrigation in the future and this could take the form of reservoirs to top up the system in the summer months rather than directly from the river.

The Chief Engineer added that Members may have noticed particularly low water levels in the West Fen Drain, this was as a result of works in progress. Referring to page 9 the blue line on the graph showed the tidal trend. The solid line was the upstream water level and sluicing opportunities were lower at low upstream levels. The Chief Engineer confirmed that Telemetry was a very useful tool.

R. Hall-Jones - asked if sluicing was being done every 24 hours? The Chief Engineer confirmed that if the opportunity arose at night then the men do not go out as sluicing has to be done manually. You had to weigh up whether it was more cost effective to have men sitting there or become automated.

8.3 **Soil Moisture Deficit**

The Chief Engineer confirmed that Soil Moisture peaked at 148 during the heatwave. The average for January is 8.6mm and the current reading is 12.9mm, so it is drying out but this could be short lived.

8.5 Channel Maintenance Operations

The Chief Engineer confirmed that the meterage total was a negative figure because of the increased fuel running costs. The increase in the rate this year would enable the work to be completed. Cutting was given priority this year.

J. Grant - was unhappy that work was not being completed as it essentially causes issues for the following year. The Chief Engineer agreed but confirmed that he can only work to what is in the budget and work had to be prioritised which is what he had done.

The Chairman added that care needed to be taken not to spend more money than is available in the budget.

J. Grant - felt that the Board should be flexible.

A. Saul - agreed with J. Grant.

J. Woods - concurred stating it was like saying fuel costs had increased so the Board would not be working.

The Chief Engineer said that the plant rate had been increased resulting in a £65k recovery but if he felt that if additional funds were required then he could bring that to the Board. The Chief Executive added that had the Chief Engineer known about the pumping hours he could have budgeted for it but he stressed that this did not happen often.

8.6 Planning

J. Grant - asked if there was adequate attenuation on the ex-Kings land at Mareham-Le-Fen? The Chief Engineer confirmed that the developers had excavated a watercourse and paid a commuted sum and the Board have adopted the watercourse.

J. Grant - asked if there were a period of heavy rain was the attenuation adequate? The Chief Engineer believed so, the modelling showed 1 in 100 year plus climate change.

8.7 2022 Consenting Summary

The Chief Engineer confirmed that since the Board implemented their new charging policy in 2020 more than £114k had been recovered in costs.

8.7.1 Outer Dowsing Offshore Wind

The Chief Engineer confirmed that affected Board Members would be aware that consideration was being given to an alternative cable route. If the original route should be the preferred route, it will have a major impact on the Board regarding consenting issues.

J. Grant - added that a 3rd route was being considered nearer to Alford. The Chief Engineer confirmed that all options were being considered and reviewed based upon the findings. The Chief Engineer believed that this needed to be in place to ensure Government targets are met. Four drainage boards would be affected.

J. Woods - confirmed that agents had been caught out by the costs of going through farmers land and this would hopefully be a factor for them to follow the more northern route.

The Chairman added that agents have met with and spoken to affected landowners and the sums involved in this project are so vast that compensation will not be a big issue but meeting the Governments' deadline is priority.

8.8 Plant and Equipment Plant Replacement 2023/24

The Chief Engineer confirmed that the plant & equipment was up to date so nothing further to report. The old plant was currently in the process of sale by way of tender, which was due to close on Wednesday, 15th February. Joe Larder had recently passed his HGV Class 1 driving test without any minors.

8.9. Technical Matters

8.9.1 Wrangle Pumping Station

The Chief Engineer confirmed that with regard to Wrangle Pumping Station, the Civils and Structural Design was going out to tender and the costs should be known by mid-March.

8.9.2 Hobhole and Lade Bank Pumping Stations and Cowbridge Sluice

The Chief Engineer confirmed that reports had now been received in relation to Hobhole and Lade Bank Pumping Stations and Cowbridge Sluice but he had only had an opportunity to look at the one for Hobhole. He confirmed that the report was quite damning and there were electrical and mechanical issues and some serious Health & Safety issues. There were also some compliance issues and it was clear that it was coming to the end of its life. There were also some cracks in the floor slabs and oil was leaking through which was an environmental issue. The report concluded that the station needs replacing on a new site.

T. Ashton - asked if the floor cracks had been caused by the building or by vibration? The Chief Engineer confirmed it was because of vibration and even the chimneys were moving.

T. Ashton - asked if the pumping station were to be fitted with modern equipment would this resolve the issue? The Chief Engineer confirmed that if a decision were made to refurbish the pumping station it would have to be out of service for a year. It would take until April 2024 to obtain business case approval and hopefully construction in April 2025 but the Board has consultants working to see what effect a do-nothing approach would have. Obviously, this would affect the funding and would mean that more properties could be affected. The Chief Engineer confirmed this project was with a view to setting the Board up for the next 50-60 years.

The Chief Executive added that the EA were keen to get this project through in the next 6 years and it was in their top 5 projects.

J. Ward - asked what the original build cost was? The Chief Executive confirmed that it was less than £500k. The Chief Engineer added that a new pumping station would be much more efficient, able to deal with climate change and would be more carbon efficient.

C. Hardy - asked if all the pumping stations would be scrapped? The Chief Engineer said his vision was that one site would do all – nothing flash just functional. The station would benefit from electric pumps with a diesel back-up. Also sluicing would create power which could be regenerated reducing the Board's carbon footprint.

9 CHIEF EXECUTIVE AND FINANCE MANAGERS REPORT

9.1 Bank Balance

The Chief Executive confirmed that the bank balances were looking healthy. The Board had approved funds to be placed on deposit so £500k had been placed with Lloyds Bank Plc and £500k with Santander which should hopefully generate interest of around £30k.

9.2 Payments Made

The Chief Executive confirmed a total of £599k had been paid in December 2022 including £240k in respect of the pumps at Wrangle Pumping Station and £155k in respect of the EA precept.

9.3 Rating Income

The Chief Executive confirmed the rate arrears shown in his report had since reduced to £100k. Reminders had just recently been sent out which had led to an increase in credit card activity.

9.4 Solar Panel Performance

The Chief Executive referred Board Members to the handout that showed the position over the last 6 years. The project had generated more income in 2022 as generated electricity had not been used and the Board received 15p per unit for generating the electricity and were then able to sell it on at 13p per unit. The panels had paid for themselves last year so the Board was now in profit.

R. Hall-Jones - asked if the inverter had been reliable? The Chief Executive confirmed that one had failed and been repaired under warranty.

J. Grant - suggested looking at extending the warranty. He had recently done this with his and it had not cost that much.

10. **HEALTH AND SAFETY OFFICER'S REPORT**

The Chief Engineer confirmed that due to the short turnaround period since the December Board Meeting there was nothing further to report.

12. **ENVIRONMENT REPORT**

The Chief Engineer confirmed that Board Members were able to see what action has been taken from the Tracker. At the end of 5 years this document will be a comprehensive report of the Board's actions. A number of bat boxes had been purchased and efforts were being made to entice swans onto 3 trial decks so that when the water levels were raised their eggs are not lost. David Elston, the "Swan Man" from Frithville was helping to entice them onto the decking.

A. Saul - asked what changes were being made for the grass snakes? The Chief Engineer confirmed that the composting heap was too dry so the Board was trying to add soil and algae to get some heat in there for them. The Board's Ecologist felt this environment was more suited to invertebrates than grass snakes.

J. Woods - asked if weed from the weed screens would be suitable. The Chief Engineer confirmed the rotted matter at Lade Bank Pumping Station would be ideal but we are unable to move it because it is classed as contaminated waste. The Chief Engineer confirmed that the Board was trying hard to make cost-effective wins.

13. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

The Chairman thanked Members for their time today and confirmed that papers would be sent out in readiness for the additional Board meeting on 22nd March 2023 at 2pm. The chairman asked for any questions prior to the meeting.

The Chairman confirmed there was no other business and the meeting concluded at 3.50pm.

Chairman