

WITHAM FOURTH DISTRICT INTERNAL DRAINAGE BOARD

MINUTES

of the proceedings of the **Board** at a Meeting at 47 Norfolk Street, Boston on **Wednesday, 14th June 2023.**

Present: - P. Richardson (Chairman)

Messrs: T. Ashton A. Harrison
P. Bedford N. Jones
B. Bowles M. Leggott
C. Butler D. Scoot
C. Crunkhorn (Vice-Chairman) K. Smith
C. Hardy H. Staples
A. Hall J. Ward
S. Welberry

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

1 **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

1.1 **New Board Members**

The Chairman welcomed the newly appointed Boston Borough Councillors to the Board Calum Butler, David Scoot, Helen Staples and Suzanne Welbery were in attendance. The Chairman looked forward to welcoming Stuart Evans and David Middleton at the September Board meeting. The Chairman also extended his congratulations to Peter Bedford, Tom Ashton, Neil Jones and Alex Hall on all being re-elected.

The Chairman added that a Question-and-Answer session would be given by this Board and Black Sluice at the Borough from 10.00am on 20th July 2023 for the benefit of new members. An inspection tour of the District was also planned prior to the Board Meeting on 13th September 2023.

1.2 **Lincolnshire Show 21-22 June 2023**

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

1.3 **Flood & Water Live 5-6 July 2023**

The Chairman confirmed this was an ADA flagship event being held at Dyson's farm at Carrington and would be supported by the Board. Attendance details are on the ADA website which, for new members, is ADA.ORG.UK.

1.4 **Annual ADA Conference**

The Chairman confirmed that the ADA Board have agreed to split the traditional conference and AGM into two separate events. The AGM will now be held online on 27 September 2023 (online) and the ADA Annual Water Management Conference will be held on 21 November 2023 at a London venue.

2 **APOLOGIES**

Apologies had been received from J. Grant, R. Hall-Jones, D. Middleton, S. Evans, J. Woods and A. Saul.

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

None but new Members were given the Register of Members' Interest form to complete.

4 **MINUTES**

4.1 **Board Meeting – Wednesday 8th February 2023**

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Board held on 8 February 2023 were submitted and their accuracy confirmed. There were no matters arising and the Board gave their approval for the Minutes to be signed.

J. Ward - asked if there was an update regarding the pay award? The Chairman confirmed that the last offer had been accepted namely 2.1% and a one-off payment of £1800.

4.2 **Board Meeting – Wednesday 22 March 2023**

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Board held on 22 March 2023 were submitted and their accuracy confirmed. There were no matters arising and the Board gave their approval for the Minutes to be signed.

4.3 **Works Committee Meeting – Wednesday 26 April 2023**

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Board held on 22 March 2023 were submitted and their accuracy confirmed. The Chief Engineer referred new Board Members to the recommendations on page 50 and confirmed that Option 4 had been the Committee's preferred option.

P. Bedford proposed that the Board support the recommendation and agree to dredge the main drains (cost £4.6m) plus a 50% re-profile of the drain banks (cost £5.4m). This was seconded by M. Leggott.

A vote was taken, and all were in favour with no objections. So it was:

RESOLVED That the Board's desire was to dredge the main drains (cost £4.6m) plus a 50% re-profile of the drain banks (cost £5.4m).

The Chairman added that this was only a recommendation to carry out the works when the funds were available. The Chief Engineer confirmed that most capital works of this scale were grant funded. At the present time, this would be ratepayer funded.

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

5. **MEETINGS WITH OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS**

The Chief Executive confirmed this was a snapshot of meetings which were attended by himself, the Chairman and other Board members. One point of interest was that Lee Edlin had been appointed as the new Area Director of the EA and was responsible for the sign off of local projects. The Board enjoyed a good working relationship with Lee and also with Morgan Wray. The Chief Executive said that he did not propose to spend any more time going through the meetings but that he was happy to take questions after the meeting, or by phone, if any one required further clarification on any point.

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

6.1 **Cash Book Balances**

The Chief Executive went through his report and read the list of larger payments made. The Chief Executive confirmed that the bank balance was looking very healthy but did include £1m of EA grant fund money which had not yet been spent.

The Chief Executive confirmed that. In accordance with the Board's approval, £500k had been placed on a high deposit account and we were still waiting to place a further £500k with Santander but due to the high number of applications they had not yet processed the application paperwork.

6.2 **Rate Arrears as at 31 March 2023**

The Chief Executive confirmed there was a detailed list of rate arrears in the report and was pleased to confirm that 98% of the rates had been recovered.

6.3 **Rate Income 2023/24**

The Chief Executive confirmed that Rate Demands for the current year have been sent out and payments totalling £260k had been received as of today. The Chief Executive confirmed that he and the Ratings Officer had recently attended a Court hearing and had obtained 18 Liability Orders to secure payment of outstanding arrears which would be enforced shortly.

7 **Accounts Year Ending 31 March 2023**

The Chief Executive confirmed there were three areas to cover in the meeting. Firstly, the Internal Audit which would be covered by Chris Harris, secondly the formal approval of the Accounts and the Annual Return, and thirdly, the external audit process which has not happened yet:

8. **Internal Audit and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 March 2023**
Internal Audit – report from Internal Auditor for 2022/23

The Chief Executive asked Chris Harris, the Internal Auditor who was attending the meeting, to take the Board Members through his report.

The Internal Auditor began by thanking the Chief Executive and his staff for their assistance given to him during this remote audit. He confirmed that the Chief Executive had set a very high bar pointing out that the Board had been given the highest level of assurance, which was “Substantial Assurance” with no recommendations which was excellent and a perfect outcome.

The Chief Executive added the signing of the AGAR should give the Board assurance that good governance was in place.

8.1 **Management Accounts – Approval for the year ended 31st March 2023**

The Chief Executive then referred Board Members to the Financial Statements which were included in the folder showing one of the new telemetry stations on the front cover. Page 1 provided an overview of the financial commentary for the year. The Chief Executive ran through his report raising some points for the new Board Members.

Asset Improvement was less than expected. £1.2m capital works had been delivered and were funded by DEFRA. These works included the new telemetry system and the culvert re-lining work at Littlemoor Lane at no cost to the ratepayer.

The expense of running the office had gone down as we had lost a member of staff. In 2019 when Wainfleet flooded the Board had all pumps running at the same time and the pumping costs were £250k. Obviously, with £600k in the General Reserve this was not sufficient,

When the budget for 2023-24 was set rates were higher due to inflation costs but the Board also does a large volume of rechargeable works.

One anomaly was in relation to the pension fund deficit which had “disappeared” as the actuary had changed assumptions of mortality rates (have declined as a result of Covid 19.) and interest rates.

The Chief Executive appreciated that there was a lot of information contained within the accounts, especially for the newly appointed Board Members. However, he confirmed that if anyone required clarification on anything within the accounts that he has more than happy to answer questions now or at any time following the meeting.

The Chairman confirmed that the Board was very aware of the issue concerning the level of the Reserves. The Vice-Chairman confirmed that it was the Board's intention to improve upon the level of General Reserve. He was confident that this would be achieved but that it would take time to get there. The Vice Chairman was aware that other Boards had increased the level of their Reserves to 30%. The Chairman added ideally it was essential that Reserve funds could cover the costs of two potential weather events and still have surplus funds available. During the rain event at Wainfleet in 2019 all the Board pumps had been run at the

same time and this had resulted in costs of £250k. Obviously, £600k in the reserve would not be sufficient if there were two weather events.

P. Bedford - confirmed that Black Sluice IDB's General Reserve currently stood at 30% but the intention was to increase it because of the pumping stations. The Vice-Chairman confirmed that this Board also needed to continue to increase the General Reserves.

The Chief Executive asked the Board for approval of the accounts. There was overall approval from the Board.

8.2 Approval of the Accounts and Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) – year ended 31 March 2023.

The Chief Executive referred Board Members to the Annual Governance and Accountability Return 2022/3 Part 3 ("AGAR"). Pages 1 and 2 set out details of what is required, and Page 3 details the Internal Audit Report and C. Harris, the Internal Auditor, had already signed this off.

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 2023 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 2023 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. 1/23

The Chairman referred Board Members to page 8 of the Chief Engineer's report where they would note that they all had negative balances. The Chief Engineer confirmed that at each Board meeting he identified the work completed and this had to tie in with the costs heading for each task. The estimates prepared in October were based upon diesel and other costs at that time. However, in April at the start of the new financial year the inflation rises had kicked in and the budget had been spent before the work had been completed. The Chief Engineer was hopeful to be back on track next year and that the bulk of the maintenance would be completed by April but care was needed to make sure that the budget would be sufficient to carry us through in the event of a wet winter. The Chief Engineer believed that this was just an anomaly

S. Welberry - confirmed Black Sluice IDB had found themselves in a similar predicament.

The Chief Engineer confirmed, as usual, he would take the report as read and provide Board Members with any relevant updates and was happy to take any questions that Board Members may have.

- 9.1 **Pumping Station Operations**
The Chief Engineer confirmed the energy costs for the current year had been reduced thanks to a really dry winter.
- 9.2 **Pump Hours**
Page 2 of the report showed the pumping hours for the period both electric and diesel and also the sluicing hours at Hobhole Pumping Station. The Chief Engineer confirmed that wherever possible sluicing was used rather than pumps and the Chairman confirmed that sluicing was beneficial for the eels.
- 9.3 **Rainfall and Water Level Management**
The Chief Engineer advised the chart showed the monthly rainfall total for each site. This information was provided by the new telemetry system which was purchased with grant funding.
- 9.4 **Water Transfer**
The transfer window was now open. The Chief Engineer confirmed for the benefit of new members that there were two levels. Summer level between April and October which was 1m higher than the winter levels.
- 9.5 **Water Quality**
The Chief Engineer confirmed that salinity still caused the biggest problem.
- 9.6 **Soil Moisture Deficit**
The Chief Engineer confirmed that the graph on page 7 of his report showed the dryness of the soil throughout the year. The higher the reading the drier the soil.
- 9.7 **Channel Maintenance Operations**
The Chief Engineer confirmed that he was not intending to dwell on this section as it had already been covered.
- 9.8 **Plant Operations 2023-24**
The Chief Engineer confirmed that 4.3, 4.4 and 4.5 of his report provided a roundup of other activities that had been completed in the last year. With regard to slips, timber piles were being used on the Fodderdyke which had a life span of 45 years. They were significantly cheaper than usual steel piles which cost between £600-£700 each. The Chief Engineer confirmed he was trying to seek cost effective solutions.
- J. Ward* - asked if there was any method of enforcing single track traffic there supported with lights? The Chairman suggested that the Board could say they were not going to repair the watercourse and see what response that provoked. The Chief Engineer confirmed that this was really a highways safety issue rather than a water issue but the Board owned the batter and so it had been repaired. He confirmed it was feasible that the road could be marked.
- 9.9 **Planning**
The Chief Engineer confirmed 112 planning applications had been reviewed during March – April and that it took one staff member 90% of their time dealing with them.
- 9.10 **Mareham Le Fen S/114/02315/17**
The £25,000 payment for the future improvements to the down-stream drainage infrastructure had now been paid.
- 9.11 **Consenting and Enforcements**
The Chief Engineer confirmed Outer Dowsing were now engaging with IDBs and this would result in a large number of consenting issues but at present there was no confirmation of the preferred route.
- P. Bedford* - confirmed they were consulting on both routes now. The Chief Engineer confirmed that either way there would be 100 consents.

9.12 **Enforcement**

The Chief Engineer confirmed that two issues had been resolved and one remained outstanding.

M. Leggott - advised there was an issue at Langrick where somebody was spraying vegetation with Round-Up. The Chief Engineer confirmed this had happened previously and that he would speak to the Clerk of the Parish Council and try and get this resolved.

9.13 **Plant and Equipment**

The Chief Engineer confirmed that 7.1 showed the summary of the plant items approved for purchase at the December Board Meeting. 7.2 showed details of the plant items disposed of by tender sale following the purchase of the new items approved in 7.1.

9.14 **Technical Matters**

The Chief Engineer referred the Board to section 8.2.2 of his report which related to the Main Drain Capital Dredging and confirmed that following a meeting of the Works Committee on 26th April, option 4 had been approved. The Chief Engineer confirmed that this work needed to be done but that there was nothing in the current year's estimate for the work to be started this year. The Chief Engineer hoped that there would be scope to obtain funding for this work but there could be no guarantees.

9.15 **Wrangle Pumping Station**

The Chief Engineer confirmed the original pumping station had been built in the 1950s and had been condemned. The project to build the new pumping station was proceeding and work was due to start in July 2023. A new access road to the pumping station was underway and the new pumps would be 100% fish and eel friendly. The estimated completion date was August 2024 and there had been an 80% increase in the materials estimate since the start of the project.

The good news was that 99% of the funding had been secured with the Board's contribution varying between £25k to £100k. The total project value was approximately £6.2m.

B. Bowles - asked if the costs could still escalate? The Chief Engineer confirmed that 30% had been added to encapsulate any increase.

B. Bowles - also advised to ensure consents were granted from Natural England.

The Board were asked to approve the Board's contribution of £25k-£100k towards the costs of the Wrangle Pumping Station, the sum to be paid from the Pumping Stations Renewal Fund.

M. Leggott proposed that Board's contribution of £25k-£100k towards the costs of the Wrangle Pumping Station be paid from the Pumping Stations Renewal Fund. This was seconded by T. Ashton. There was unanimous approval and it was therefore:

RESOLVED

That the Board's contribution of £25k-£100k towards the costs of the Wrangle Pumping Station be paid from the Pumping Stations Renewal Fund.

9.16 **Hobhole & Lade Bank Pumping Stations and Cowbridge Sluice (FDGiA £350k)**

The Chief Engineer confirmed that following meetings with the Environment Agency ("EA") it had been agreed in principal that what work had been done was correct and the EA were happy. Consideration now had to be given to assess the value of the benefits in the catchment area were protected by the pumping station which were circa £1.5 billion. Approximately, £893 million had been apportioned to the Hobhole project which gave the Board access to £63 million funding which would fully fund the project.

The next stage was to finalise this with the EA who wanted the project delivered by the end of 2026.

S. Welberry - asked if there were any plans for large new developments? The Chief Executive confirmed that this was based upon historical picture up to 2011. The Chief Engineer believed that the Board needed to apply and get the process moving as it had been agreed in principle.

The Chief Engineer confirmed that the New Hobhole Pumping Station will be the 3rd or 4th largest in the country and will be the main protection for the District.

10. **Health & Safety**

The Chief Engineer confirmed there was nothing further to report and the report provided a snapshot of the Board's Risk Assessments and Health and Safety procedures. There were 3 Health and Safety meetings per year and the only amendment the Chief Engineer would propose is that a Board Member also join the Committee Meetings. M. Leggott indicated that he would be willing to attend.

11. **ENVIRONMENT REPORT**

The Chief Engineer confirmed that he would report more in future meetings on Environmental and Health and Safety issues but he was aware of time constraints today. The Chief Engineer briefly ran through the BAP for new members and confirmed that this was a record that the Board were meeting their environmental targets and that a snapshot of the environment tracker would be placed on the website.

S. Welberry - asked if the IDBs worked together on environmental issues? The Chairman confirmed that ADA held environment meetings but the Board chooses what they want to do. The Chief Engineer confirmed that the targets were localised to us and Natural England but the Board could do things to benefit our district.

The Chairman added that our district was a man-made structure whereas other boards had natural structures.

12. **Additional Authorisation to represent the Board at Magistrates Court and Valuation Tribunals**

The Chief Executive asked the Board to approve Sarah Isaacs to be added as an authorised person to represent the Board at the hearings held at the Magistrates Court and at Valuation Tribunals. At present, the Chief Executive is the only authorised person and it made sense for Sarah, as the Ratings Officer to attend the hearings as she had extensive knowledge of the cases brought to Court.

There was unanimous approval and it was therefore:

RESOLVED Sarah Isaacs added as an authorised person to represent the Board at the hearings held at the Magistrates Court and at Valuation Tribunals.

13. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

The Chairman thanked Chris Harris, Internal Auditor for his attendance at the meeting today.

T. Ashton - wanted to express his thanks on behalf of East Lindsey District Council ("ELDC") for the Board's ongoing support with regard to the Special Levies. He confirmed that in a recent budget £3m had been applied to the Councils and ELDC had received £1m which was really good news.

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

Chairman