

WITHAM FOURTH DISTRICT INTERNAL DRAINAGE BOARD

MINUTES

of the proceedings of the **Board** at a Meeting held at 47 Norfolk Street, Boston PE21 6LL on
Wednesday, 13 December 2023

Present: -

Messrs: P. Bedford D. Middleton
B. Bowles P. Richardson (Chairman)
C. Crunkhorn A. Saul
(Vice-Chairman) D. Scoot
S. Evans H. Staples
A. Harrison J. Ward
M. Leggott S. Welberry
J. Woods

1 **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

1.1 **James Grant**

The Chairman confirmed the sad news of James' passing on 10th November. James' funeral had taken place on 12th December and the Board were well represented. A tribute had been paid to James by Robert Caudwell, the ADA Chairman at the ADA Conference on 21 November and also in the ADA Gazette.

The Chairman asked all present to stand for a minute's silence as a mark of respect for James.

1.2 **Thank you**

The Chairman extended his thanks to M. Leggott, T. Ashton and N. Jones who had attended the ADA Conference. He confirmed there had been a good range of speakers and an extended lunch and networking session which was really useful.

1.3 **Christmas**

The Chairman sent best wishes to the staff and asked the Chief Executive to thank them for their efforts this year. He also wanted to extend his thanks to Board Members for their input throughout the year.

2. **Apologies for Absence**

The Chief Executive confirmed that apologies had been received from T. Ashton, C. Butler, A. Hall, N. Jones, R. Hall-Jones and C. Hardy.

3 **Declaration of Interest on Any General Item**

None declared.

4 **MINUTES**

4.1 **Board Meeting – Wednesday 13 September 2023**

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Board held on 13 September 2023 were submitted and agreed as accurate and signed by the Chairman.

Matters arising:

With regard to paragraph 6.6, the Chief Executive clarified that the request to DLUCH was that IDBs and Parish Councils would always be subject to a smaller audit to avoid the risk of them becoming a large Authority requiring a full on-site audit.

5. **MINUTES OF GOVERNANCE & RISK COMMITTEE – 15 November 2023**

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 15 November 2023 were submitted and agreed as accurate and signed by the Committee's Chairman.

The Chairman thanked S. Welberry and D. Middleton for joining the Committee.

The Chief Executive took Board Members through the proposed amendments to the Risk and the Finance Regulations confirming that all proposed amendments were highlighted in red. These amendments had all been agreed at the Committee Meeting.

Turning to the Financial Regulations, the Chief Executive confirmed that the values had been increased.

Item 4 of the Risk Register dealt with cyber insurance and the Chief Executive confirmed that insurance had now been arranged from 1st January 2024 which gave protection up to a value of £2 million. Likewise the previous value for approved purchases shown in paragraph 7.3 had been increased from £20k to £30k.

The Committee Chairman asked for the Board's approval of the updated Risk Register and the Finance Regulations.

There was unanimous approval and it was therefore:

RESOLVED That the updated Risk Register and Finance Regulations be adopted by the Board.

The Committee Chairman confirmed that the level of the General Reserve had been discussed in depth at the Committee meeting and it was felt that 20% of annual expenditure was an ever-moving target but it was decided that an additional 1% would be added to this variable each year for the next five years to get the level to 25%. The position would be reviewed thereafter. The Committee Chairman asked for the Board's approval. *There was unanimous approval* and it was therefore:

RESOLVED That when the budget was set each February, an additional amount would be added to the rate so that the level of the General Reserve would increase until it represented 25% of annual expenditure. This would happen over the next 5 years.

6. **MINUTES OF WORKS COMMITTEE – 15 November 2023**

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 15 November 2023 were submitted and agreed as accurate and signed by the Committee Chairman.

6.1 **CHIEF ENGINEER'S ESTIMATES 2024/2025**

Weed Control Estimates

The Chief Engineer took the Board Members through the estimates. The Chief Engineer confirmed the increases this year are not work related but as a result of costs, inflation, and future pay rises.

The Chairman asked for the Board's approval for Weed Control and Cleansing Estimate 2024-2025 be adopted. *There was unanimous approval* and it was therefore:

RESOLVED that the following Estimates be approved

| | | |
|-----|-------------------|-------------|
| i) | Weed Control | £977,225.42 |
| ii) | Cleansing/Mudding | £478,562.47 |

6.2. **Asset Improvement Programme**

The Chief Engineer confirmed the increase in the Asset Improvement Estimate was in relation to the costs of jetting the watercourses and for the specialised cctv services. The Chairman asked if there were any further questions.

J. Ward - asked about commuted liability on all bridges. The Chief Engineer confirmed there wasn't and the bridge at Barlode had been transferred to the owner on a 999-year lease.

The Chairman asked if he could ask for the Board's approval for the Asset Improvement Programme Estimate 2024-2025 be adopted. *There was unanimous approval* and it was therefore:

RESOLVED that the following Estimate be approved

| | | |
|----|-------------------|------------|
| i) | Asset Improvement | £75,000.00 |
|----|-------------------|------------|

7. **MINUTES OF PLANT & PUMPING STATIONS COMMITTEE – 15 NOVEMBER 2023**

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 15 November 2023 were submitted and agreed as accurate and signed by the Chairman.

The Chief Engineer confirmed the Plant Replacement programme had been discussed in great detail at the Committee meeting. The Toyota Hilux was due for delivery in January 2024

The Chairman asked the Board to approve the 2024/25 Estimates recommended by the Plant & Pumping Committee. *There was unanimous approval* and it was therefore:

RESOLVED That the Board agree the Estimates recommended by the Plant & Pumping Committee be approved

- (i) JCB JS180 Excavator Estimate £180,000.00
- (ii) Toyota Hilux 4x4 Estimate £33,000.00
- (iii) 3no Weedbaskets – Estimate £36000.00
- (iv) 2no Pump Sets – Estimate 80,000.00
- (v) Mobile light tower – Estimate 10,000.00

J. Ward - asked if the Votex had been delivered? The Chief Engineer confirmed that it had been delivered at the end of the season.

J. Woods - asked if the JCB was still available?. The Chief Engineer confirmed that it was but because of the poor service history he was not sure that it would be the right purchase for the Board.

The Chief Engineer confirmed that a trade in price would be obtained in respect of the old equipment which would be offered for sale by tender in January. The highest price would be accepted whether that was by way of tender bid or trade in price.

7.2 **Estimate for Pumping Stations 2024/2025**

The Chief Engineer asked the Board to approve the 2024/25 Estimates for Pumping Stations recommended by the Plant & Pumping Committee. As the Board could see there was a significant increase in the running costs, this was mainly attributed to the increase in the energy costs which would commence in April 2024. *There was unanimous approval* and it was therefore:

RESOLVED That the Board approves the Pumping Station Estimates recommended by the Plant & Pumping Committee.

| | 2024/25 Estimate | 2023/24 Estimate |
|------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Pumping Stations | £1,032,994 | £598,897 |

The Chief Executive added that all Board Members had received copies of the paperwork showing the increase in electricity costs for the coming year. ADA were pushing for an investigation into the Standing Charge which had had a major effect on the increase.

7.3 **Depot Estimate 2024/2025**

The Chairman asked the Board to approve the 2024/25 Depot Estimate recommended by the Plant & Pumping Committee. *There was unanimous approval* and it was therefore:

RESOLVED That the Board approves the Depot Estimates recommended by the Plant & Pumping Committee.

| | 2024/25 Estimate | 2023/24 Estimate |
|------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Pumping Stations | £53,000 | £43,500 |

8. **MINUTES OF ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE – 15 NOVEMBER 2023**

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 15 November 2023 were submitted and agreed as accurate and signed by the Chairman.

The Chairman outlined the main points covered in the Minutes of the Environment report which he would take as read. He asked the Board to approve the 2024/25 Estimate recommended by the Environment Committee. *There was unanimous approval* and it was therefore:

RESOLVED That the Board adopt the 2024/2025 Estimate recommended by the Environment Committee in the sum of £99,925.00.

9. **MEETINGS WITH OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS**

9.1 The Chief Executive confirmed there had not been many meetings but the meeting with Victoria Aitken had been very well attended.

At the Joint Lincolnshire Branch and Welland and Nene Branch Meeting in October, Christine Marshall, the Deputy CEO of Boston, East Lindsey and South Holland Councils had given a presentation about the IDB precept which had been very well supported and was an ongoing issue that she was pursuing with local MPs to try and resolve.

The meeting with Victoria Aitken was attended by a large number of landowners and was pretty heated. The landowners were very unhappy with the performance of the flood protection in Horncastle and the way in which the EA responded to the flooding. Generally they were very supportive of the work done by the IDBs. The MP asked for the EA to meet with farmers and the IDBs and wanted to hear the results within 4 weeks. However, since that meeting Victoria Aitken has taken another position within the cabinet and nothing further had been heard from the EA.

B. Bowles - added pressure should continue to be put onto the EA. The Chief Executive confirmed that the Board were approaching the EA after Storm Babet to make a claim for the expenses incurred.

The Chief Engineer confirmed that the EA were constantly being lobbied to dredge the rivers out. However, the EA does not believe that dredging the watercourses will free up conveyance. With rivers in uplands areas this is fine but lowland systems that go into tidal estuaries do need to be dredged to get the water out. A discussion followed.

M. Leggott - added the EA have their "heads in the sand" because they do not want to spend their budgets. He urged that pressure be kept on them to carry out the required dredging and maintenance.

D. Middleton - confirmed Black Sluice IDB had been approached to carry out this work but the EA does not want to spend the money actually required to do the work properly so Black Sluice IDB do not want to be associated with it.

The Chairman confirmed that the issue was with EA watercourses water overtopping into the Board's watercourses which the Board then has to remove through their system. Storm Babet had cost the Board £286k and the General Reserve total was £600k it is plain to see that two weather events could easily wipe out the General Reserve which means it is more important than ever to keep increasing the amount of the General Reserve. One way to generate more funds is to increase the rate, but the rate is already under pressure and next year will see the biggest rate increase the Board has ever made of around 20%. This increase will only ensure that the Board remains in its current state and does not allow for any improvement.

S. Welberry - asked if there was any plan between the EA and IDBs? The Chairman confirmed that all EA watercourses hit the Board's District and there seems to be a reluctance to look at the issues because they know the IDBs will sort the problems out.

The Chief Executive confirmed all the Board's watercourses and outfalls are controlled by the Board. Black Sluice IDB pump into EA Rivers which are not dredged.

M. Leggott - asked if the Chinese Mitten Crabs were being removed? The Chief Engineer confirmed that they were being fished out.

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

10.1 **Bank Balances**

The Chief Executive confirmed that the board were now looking at numbers for the end of October. The bank balance had a few large sums going in and out :- £1 million received in respect of grant aid for Wrangle Pumping Station and another £1 million was received at the beginning of December. The Chairman added that none of the grant aid monies were invested.

10.2 **Fixed Term Deposits**

The Chief Executive confirmed that currently £1 million was held on deposit account and the monies invested with CCLA is currently providing £2k per month interest.

10.3 **Payments Made**

The Chief Executive confirmed that the larger payments made were all in respect of the Wrangle Pumping Station project. Compensation payments had been made in respect of access for the piling works which was only the second time in 15 years.

10.4 **Rating Income**

The Chief Executive confirmed that rating income was appropriate for this time of the year and that a further £134,000 had been recovered since the report had been prepared. Two ratepayers were refusing to pay their drainage rates because of recent issues with water levels. This was a real issue of inadequate maintenance in watercourses.

M. Leggott - stated it was regrettable that two landowners were refusing to pay their rates and asked if the Board had explained the rates pay for the bushing and maintenance works needed to keep us dry and the EA really need to get into action. The Chief Executive confirmed that both farmers had written to the EA. Details of the 2 ratepayers will be disclosed at the February Board meeting.

11. **CHIEF ENGINEER'S REPORT**
11.1 **Storm Babet Technical Briefing**

The Chief Engineer took Board Members through his Briefing Report drawing attention to the following points:-

- Soil Moisture
- Water Levels
- Water Transfer Ltd
- Water Level Management for 2023
- Weather Warnings
- Rainfall
- Storm Babet Rainfall
- Pumping Response
- Main River Overtopping
- Flooding
- Costs
- Chief Engineers Conclusions

The Chief Engineer confirmed that the total costs of dealing with Storm Babet was £289k over a 21-day period. He was happy that with the way in which the District had been managed prior to the Storm and was pleased that all staff had reacted well to the incident and worked tirelessly through the initial 36-48 hours, some without a break, to ensure that the Board were doing everything possible to deal with the event.

The Chief Engineer firmly believed that had the main rivers not overtopped the Board would have coped with the event with minimal flooding and drainage related incidents. The overtopping had pushed the system beyond its' design capacity which had resulted in the prolonged pumping response. Although the Board is not an emergency responder it had tried to assist those in need where possible.

The Chief Engineer confirmed the water level management in the East Fen has been questioned and some of the ratepayers would like to see the levels lowered a month earlier. The Chief Engineer asked the Board for their thoughts.

M. Leggott - confirmed that sterling work had been carried out by the Chief Engineer and the staff and appreciated the detailed costings. He asked if the costs were recoverable? The Chief Executive confirmed that in an emergency situation Bellwin would be applied however in this instance no emergency was declared so there is no automatic mechanism in place for recovery of the costs. The Chief Executive of Witham and Humber Drainage Boards had summarised their costs and approached RFCC and a payment had been made.

The Chairman added that the Board had written to RFCC detailing the costs incurred and the EA are expecting a claim for costs, which inclusive of dredging costs will be in the region of £150k.

M. Leggott - added it was ironic that the EA provided the grant payment for the telemetry system which shows their failings.

M. Leggott - also added it was essential to get this onto the RFCC agenda and maintenance has to be completed to prevent this happening again.

The Chairman re-iterated that the total of the General Reserve was really only the costs of dealing with 2 Storm Babets and the main problem was, if used, how long it would take to rebuild that total. Whilst the men are busy pumping, general maintenance is not being carried out. During Storm Babet, the Board had 2 people spare. The Chairman added that the Board is NOT an emergency service and that whilst we have assisted with pumping out flooded properties this was not the Board's main priority.

The Chief Engineer confirmed one of the most difficult conversations is managing peoples' expectations.

M. Leggott - asked about the response to the public. The Chief Executive confirmed that a web page had been set up providing advice and links to helpful websites. People calling into the office (over 70 calls in one day) were told that the Board was not an emergency service and that if their property was flooded they needed to call the Fire Brigade in the first instance.

The Chief Engineer added that all staff had dealt with an awful lot during this event and deserved credit for the way in which they had conducted themselves.

H. Staples - asked if collaborative working happened between the councils and the IDBs. The Chief Executive confirmed there was a County Emergency Centre set up in Lincoln and strategic partners attended meetings and exchanged information etc. However, the Boards' number one priority at this time was to pump water out of the District.

B. Bowles - confirmed that Parish Councils had been an emergency response team in the village where local, practical people with equipment were on hand to help out where possible although self-preservation was key.

M. Leggott - was concerned about pumping staff and the relevant health and safety issues. How was the Board addressing these issues? The Chief Executive confirmed that at the back of the yellow pages in the report was a memo to staff regarding Employee Health Surveillance ("OHS"). Following recent issues with two operatives the services of an Occupational Health Adviser had been sought and she had confirmed that the Board's approach to dealing with such issues was historic and that the way forward was by way of OHS. This would involve an annual meeting with a specialist where an assessment would be undertaken to make sure the staff member is fit to undertake their daily role. This protects both the Board and the employees.

The Vice-Chairman said that the Board needed to be aware of the level of stress on employees.

M. Leggott - agreed it was necessary to mitigate stress on staff.

The Chairman expressed his thanks to the Chief Engineer and added that this was all evidence that a new pumping station was needed. The Chief Executive added his thanks to all the Board's staff.

J. Woods - added that many things were now available to help prevent flooding and could the Board direct people to them? The Chief Executive confirmed the website provides useful links and the Chief Engineer confirmed that flood sacks are available at £6 each.

S. Welberry - asked if there were any retained flood operatives? The Chief Executive confirmed that in an emergency event retired staff and farmers were able to assist.

11.2 **Complaint**

The Chief Engineer referred Board Members to his briefing note which dealt with a complaint raised by Mr P Roughton. The briefing note fully sets out details of the complaint raised in the East Fen area, the Board's current stance on vegetation control maintenance and background as to how water levels are managed in the East Fen. Mr Roughton's complaint is that the water levels were not lowered in time and the standard of maintenance is inadequate.

The Chief Engineer confirmed he had met with Mr Roughton on a few occasions and a number of actions had been completed. The Chief Engineer believes that everything possible has been done to try and improve the position in the East Fen. The levels were at winter levels for 2 days before the storm hit. The Chief Engineer follows the water levels and appraises the Board accordingly. From 1st October – 30th April each year the levels are dropped to the winter levels although the levels were dropped this year on 30th September.

Mr Roughton states that he is speaking on behalf of himself and other farmers in the area and wants the levels dropped 4 weeks earlier. The Chief Engineer confirmed that whilst he would be happy to do this but this would have other implications such as a dry Autumn could result in no water in the East Fen watercourses.

The Chairman added that the EA have reduced the water levels, so if there is no rain then there is no water.

J. Ward - asked if the earlier date would comply with the Eel Regulations? The Chief Engineer confirmed that the eel run was September/October time which was when the storm hit and this takes precedence over the eels. In this instance we were not caught out because the watercourse was at winter levels on 18th October.

A. Harrison - added that to clear the water we need the watercourses to be empty.

J. Ward - asked if it would have made any difference?

The Chief Engineer advised that any changes made needed to be for the benefit of the majority not just for one or two people.

M. Leggott - added the Board had done everything possible. Mr Roughton claims to speak on behalf of other farmers yet has not taken up the opportunity to meet and discuss matters.

P. Bedford - stated this was a low-level area and questioned the state of the farmer's own maintenance.

J. Woods - concluded that the storm was expected and could not see what other action the Board could have taken.

The Chief Engineer proposed sharing the Storm Babet Briefing document with Mr Roughton and invite them to attend a meeting to discuss the way the Board manages everything. Two Board Members, K. Smith and A. Saul farm in the East Fen.

The Chief Executive concurred it would be useful to have knowledgeable farmers in attendance at the meeting.

11.3 **Pump Hours**

The Chief Engineer confirmed there had been 4,295 hours of pumping in November.

11.4 **Soil Moisture Deficit**

The Chief Engineer confirmed the ground was completely saturated.

11.5 **Channel Maintenance Operations**

The Chief Engineer confirmed the Board was approximately 2 weeks behind as a result of Storm Babet. The Sewer Mudding programme would start in the New Year.

11.6 **Planning**

The Engineering Manager advised there had been 90 planning applications received but he wanted to draw Board Members' attention to two issues which had been flagged as a result of Storm Babet. Page 12, no.8 Toot Lane -concerns had been raised with the EA regarding flooding.

Page 16, no 16 relates to the Cul de Sac, Stickford. Unfortunately the water from Storm Babet ran through the site into residential properties causing problems.

11.7 **Planning Review**

The Engineering Manager confirmed that the Board's planning response to the LPA has been amended to state:-

"While the Board understand Tidal Flood Risk Mitigation Policy seeks to ensure safe development and set the requirements for finished floor levels. The Board object to ground level raising which increases flood risk to those existing properties surrounding the site. Mitigation must be provided to eliminate this risk."

From April 2024 SUDS Groups will be created and their approval will be needed before developers can proceed.

11.8 **Outer Dowsing**

The Engineering Manager confirmed that he had a series of documents to review.

11.9 **Technical Matters**

The Chief Engineer showed the Board some pictures of the ongoing work at Wrangle Pumping Station which was on schedule at the present time.

11.10 **Hobhole Pumping Station**

The Chief Engineer confirmed the decision on funding was expected by 18th December 2023 and the signs were positive. The Chief Engineer showed Board Members some pictures and updated them on the pumps and the energy efficiency of the station.

J. Woods - asked if it might be prudent to potentially have a 6th pump available? The Chief Engineer confirmed there would be space for an extra pump if it should be required in the future but the 5 pumps had costs of £4.3 million.

A. Harrison - asked if there would be any back up to the pumps? The Chief Engineer confirmed there would be diesel back up and renewable energy was being considered.

B. Bowles - added that the presentation at Wrangle had been very helpful and well attended. He thanked the Chief Engineer for his time.

12. **HEALTH AND SAFETY REPORT**

The Chief Engineer said he would take the report as read and confirmed the Lone Worker app had been up for renewal in December. However, the phone-based system was not considered very user-friendly for the District operatives. The Chief Engineer and the Engineering Manager had reviewed alternative systems and one system was a small fob carried on the person which allowed 2-way audio and had a roaming sim. Prices had been obtained from 2 companies and the most competitive was £8 per fob. This system had been trialed by 3 of the District operatives for 3 days and it had been very well received. The phone application will be retained for use by office staff.

A. Saul - asked if the system provided the worker's location? The Engineering Manager confirmed that it did.

The Chief Engineer added that it also had impact detection enabled.

13. **ENVIRONMENT REPORT**

The Chief Engineer briefly went through his report which he had taken as read. He confirmed that the BAP Tracker was a useful tool which would be regularly updated and would provide a full record of what had been achieved. Wildlife Recovery East have obtained a grant to install more traps in the east of the county. The W4IDB are expecting 16 new traps to be installed in the new year.

14. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

The Chairman said there was now a vacancy for a Board Member for the East Fen area and that it just remained for him to give his best wishes for Christmas and the New Year. There was no other business and the meeting concluded at 4.10pm.

Chairman