



MIDDLE LEVEL COMMISSIONERS

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I.A.D. SMITH B.A., Solicitor
Clerk and Chief Executive

Our Ref.: 51

Your Ref.:

29 June 2010

Dear Sirs

Draft Great Ouse Catchment Flood Management Plan

I refer to the above draft Plan and to the discussions with members of the Agency's staff at the recent Plan "Drop-In" at Brampton.

This response is written on behalf of the Commissioners and of the other IDBs which are administered from this office and which are listed in Appendix 1. These organisations provide protection to life, property and land within their areas and will therefore be directly interested in and impacted upon by Agency policies. We welcome the opportunity to comment on the Plan, while it is still in draft.

It is noted that the Plan presumably follows a national 'template' which would explain why references appear in the main Plan to utilising wetlands and using as an indicator, the proportion of bankside physically modified, while later, the Plan recognises that 99.5% of Fen channels will be modified and that there is no space within the Fens for Catchment wide storage facilities.

It is understood from the information supplied at the "Drop-In" that all of the above bodies are included within the 'Fens' Sub-area. While it was clear from the Summary Document that the large majority of such bodies were within that area, it was not clear that the Bluntisham and Swavesey IDBs were so included. This response is therefore written on that premise. It must however also not be forgotten that events and policies in other catchments may affect the Fens area. A decision, for example to store water upstream will/may reduce flows reaching the Fens or the main rivers crossing them and will clearly therefore impact on the area. While, therefore, the Agency have, for understandable reasons, chosen to divide the catchment into Sub-areas, the cumulative effect of the Plan's recommendations as a whole should be considered in addition to those relating to the individual Sub-areas. It is also understood that a number of more local area Plans will be produced for the Fens area. Clearly, the present Plan contains only large scale generic policies and much of the detail and the ability to comment on the meaning and import, will have to await these local documents. These will also have to link together to show cumulative impacts. The comments made at this stage are therefore, of necessity, only on the generic Plan and must be read subject to any more detailed information later produced and comments made thereon. It is however noted, even at this stage, that no reference is made to the Awards which govern some of the Agency's main rivers and the need to ensure compliance with the terms of those Awards.



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Current and future flood risk (page 6 of Summary Document)

Flooding within areas managed by IDBs can of course occur due to run-off coming into their Districts from land outside such Districts. We are somewhat surprised not to see a reference to Swavesey village within this section, in view of the various studies which have been undertaken in the last few years; studies which the Agency have as yet not related to each other to give an overall composite standard of protection. It was in this context very surprising to note that, in Form 12.5 of the full Plan, Swavesey Drain has a standard of protection of 1:150. This, if the case, can only be so if the presence and influence of the Great Ouse and its locking of the Webbs Hole Sluice are ignored. Indeed the Agency's own reports have suggested in the past that the true level of protection for Swavesey village is around the 1:25 mark, at the very bottom end of the scale of protection that Defra expect. The reference also in Form 12.5 to the right bank of the Great Ouse also having a level of protection of 1:150 years is not understood, in view of the fact that the level of the river banks close to Swavesey are below their design standard and part of Swavesey village is shown on the Agency's flood maps as flooding at lower return periods. The list therefore of places subject to flooding from the River Great Ouse, should include Swavesey village. Similarly, it is surprising not to see a reference to Swavesey village in the tables on page 7. See also page 8, which refers to a level of protection for Swavesey village of 0.75%.

It is also assumed that the Fens are regarded as defended within the document and that therefore maintenance of the raised fenland defences is likewise assumed.

Page 12 of the Summary document states that the 11 sub areas have similar physical characteristics sources of flooding and levels of risk. It should be noted that the Swavesey Board area has an agreed level of protection standard of only 1:10, 10%, well below that of the normal fenland systems.

Page 13 of the Summary Document refers to the flood risk management policy options. While the chosen policy option 4 is not objected to it is noted that the costs of implementing Policy Option 5 as set out in the main Plan for the Fens only appear to equate to those of the Middle Level Commissioners' new St Germans Pumping Station.

The Fens is referred to as Sub-area 10 on page 32 of the Summary Document. It would be useful to know where the properties at risk under the 1% and 0.5% events are situated. There is also no reference to the A1(M), which runs in part through the Middle Level area and relies on protection from the Middle Level and local IDB systems, nor indeed to the utilities, gas, water, electric, telephone etc that also rely on such protection.

While, as stated, the policy and therefore the vision are not objected to, they do depend, for their effective implementation, on proper and effective maintenance of the watercourse systems and structures. To this end therefore, it is felt that the Agency should commit to undertaking basic



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revenue maintenance of main river under the Plan or, if this cannot be promised, immediately prioritise a programme for de-maining lengths so that other bodies have the option of undertaking work on such channels. Without a proper level of main river maintenance, the level of flood risk elsewhere within the catchment will be adversely affected.

It is noted that a flood risk management plan or, as I was advised, a series of local plans, for the Fens is to be created. These must not however, lose sight of the need to view the Catchment as a whole. IDBs will already be aware of the flood risk within their areas and have over the years, developed approaches to manage that risk. Care should therefore be taken to ensure that consultants are not employed simply to "reinvent the wheel".

The proposal to implement the recommendations of the Great Ouse Tidal Strategy cannot, as a bland statement, be supported. This Strategy is a short and longer term view of flood risk and contains certain recommendations which have already been objected to by this and, we understand, other offices, for example the South Level Barrier Bank and Earith Drawmark proposals. This office has also raised a number of queries with the Agency over this Strategy, answers to which are awaited. While it is appreciated that this Strategy is a 'snap shot' in time and will require and is intended to be subject to a continual review process, we are surprised that the proposal is made to implement the recommendations, presumably as they currently stand, without substantial caveats.

Much the same comments can be made of Earith to Mepal Area action plan which, as the Agency are aware, is not supported by the local IDB and in respect of which a series of questions posed by the Board to the Agency, remain unanswered. An open recommendation to support and implement the current recommendations of this action plan cannot therefore be supported.

The full Plan itself has also been studied and the following additional comments are made. It is unfortunate, in this respect that some pages of the CD were overlaid by others and many pages were out of sequence, making the Disc more difficult to study.

It is noted that on pages 333-4, it is stated that Swavesey has no flood risks during the 10% event. It is presumed that this is a reference to the village rather than the Board's District, which is exposed to risks at a lower return period. However, this statement does appear to be contradicted by the map on page 203. It is also noted that no maintenance is undertaken on Church End Drain and that flood risk is regarded as low. Within the remainder of this sub-catchment, which includes reference to the Swavesey Drain embankment, it is noted that 1822 people are at risk within the 10% return flood and that the risk is regarded as medium.

It is noted that the risk at March and Chatteris is low and this presumably also takes account of IDB defences. The higher risk at Ramsey is presumably due to the standard of protection from Bury Brook, a statement consistent with that on page 228. On page 340, it is stated that much of the flooding across the Fens is from drains and small watercourses. No detail is given as to where and how this takes place, how it has been assessed and how significant this, in itself, is.



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On page 179, it is stated that it is the policy of IDBs to give a level of protection of 5% to agricultural property and 1% for developed areas. There is however, no such policy for IDBs administered from this office, who look to provide a consistent level of protection within their districts as set out on their policy statements. It is also unfortunate that, of the tables 3-11 to 3-16, that relating to the Commissioners' area is overlaid by the CD and cannot therefore be commented on. Although much of the text relating to the Middle Level area on (it is presumed page 205) is covered, no reference is made to the towns and villages protected within that area; the reference solely to agricultural land being misleading.

Page 1033 et seq confirms that Policy 4 is appropriate for the Fens and provides a summary. While this Policy is not, in itself, objected to, it is noted above that the costs of implementing Policy 5 and providing an increased level of flood protection, would only equate to the approximate cost of the Middle Level's new St Germans pumping station. This will be particularly significant if, as expected, greater emphasis is placed on agricultural food production in the coming years. The statement on page 568 that protecting all agricultural land from flooding is noted and appreciated but may well have to be reviewed in the light of such emphasis. The intention to produce local plans for the Fens has already been commented on. It is, however, noted that it is then stated that this may lead to a reduction in the standard of protection in some areas. This, if and in so far as it may lead to a reduced level of protection in this area, would be opposed. The IDB systems are geared and maintained to provide the level of protection which local ratepayers demand and are able to afford. This should not be undermined by a unilateral decision by the authority responsible for the main river system to reduce the level of protection provided by that system and any attempts to reduce the ability of others to undertake local works, will be opposed. There is, as previously mentioned, no mention or seemingly consideration given to the roads, railway and other transport links or utilities protected by drainage works undertaken within the Fens and the need to protect these facilities, the level of protection required for them and their significance need to be included within the Plan. AINA (the Association of Inland Navigation Authorities) should also be included in the list of partners within the Plan.

On Form 12.5 it would appear that only the Agency's own fluvial defences and certain limited sections maintained by others primarily local authorities, have been included but not the raised defences maintained by the Commissioners. In view of our previous comment concerning the incorporation of IDB works, we are surprised that this is the case, especially in view of the important role in flood risk management played by these defences and the misleading impression of actual flood risk given by their omission. A reference is also made to four IDBs operating within the Fens and to their maintenance spend. There are considerably more than 4 IDBs and more than 4 offices within this area. Please confirm what the £2.2 million figure of maintenance expenditure relates to. Equally, on what premise is the figure of £3.3 million for IDB spending under Generic Policy 4 on this Form, based?

The Plan does not seem to refer to the effects and impact of the introduction of flows arising from outside a catchment into a catchment, eg from sewage treatment works. This can raise water levels



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and render defences perhaps previously adequate, more at risk. In view now of the requirements and regime of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010, an assessment of such cross-catchment flows needs to be included within the local 'Fens Plans', if not the main Plan.

We look forward to receiving details of and being consulted over the local 'Fens Plans' in due course.

Yours sincerely
Iain Smith
Clerk & Chief Executive

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