

HADDENHAM LEVEL DRAINAGE COMMISSIONERS

At a Meeting of the Haddenham Level Drainage Commissioners
hosted at the Middle Level Offices, March on Wednesday the 17th February 2021

PRESENT

M Church Esq (Chairman)	R J Lee Esq
G L P Wilson Esq (Vice Chairman)	A Lensen Esq
S G Cheetham Esq	P Mappedoram Esq
A W J Darby Esq	J Smith Esq
R J Darby Esq	R Waddelow Esq
W Dennis Esq	N R Wright Esq
R Flint Esq	A R Yarrow Esq

The Clerk to the Board and Mr David Jordan (District Engineer) were in attendance.

The Chairman first wished it to be recorded that the Commissioners offered their thanks to the District Engineer, David Jordan, who had worked tirelessly over the winter to ensure that the unprecedented amount of rainfall was managed correctly, often working throughout the night to operate the pumps.

Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Mrs J Darby and H L Hurrell Esq.

C.375 Declarations of Interest

The Clerk reminded the Commissioners of the importance of declaring an interest in any matter included in today's agenda that involved or was likely to affect any of them.

Mr Dennis declared an interest in minute C.379.

C.376 Confirmation of Minutes

RESOLVED

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Commissioners held on the 5th November 2020 are recorded correctly and that they be confirmed and signed.

C.377 Planning Issues

a) Garden Close/Mepal Road, Sutton

Further to minute C.358(a), the Chairman reported that he had visited the site with Gary Roberts, Middle Level Commissioners' Engineer, and a local resident in November 2020 and the site was very wet and all dykes overgrown. He advised that planning permission had been refused again.

b) 115 dwellings on land at Camp's Field, south of Stretham Road, Wilburton

Further to minute C358(b), the Chairman advised there was nothing further to report.

C.378 Consulting Engineers' Report, including planning and consenting matters

Further to minute C.362, the Chairman reported that, although not in the District, because of localised flooding, the Commissioners had been asked to comment on a planning application for 32 houses at Metcalfe Way, Haddenham.

C 379 Floodex 2021

Further to minute C.361(c), the Chairman noted that Floodex had been moved to November and would be held in London. The Clerk advised that Floodex was no longer linked with ADA and hence its second day coincidentally now fell on the day of the ADA conference.

There were no other matters arising and beyond the comments made by the Chairman and there were no others made by any other Commissioners.

C.380 Construction of Irrigation Reservoirs, Willow Hall Farm

Further to minute C.359, the Chairman reminded the Commissioners of the discussion and agreements arising from the November meeting and of the removal of the original planning application and its replacement with one which was based around working the gravel extraction wet. He also noted that the boreholes requested by the Commissioners had been installed and were operational. Concerns remained however over the effects of de-watering during construction and the impacts this could have on surrounding land and crop yields. The Chairman referred to the letter that had been circulated to the Commissioners and drew attention to the apparent change in timing of de-watering to that which had been previously agreed as October to December, but now also included January and February. A response from the applicant had been received and in this it was stated that it would be a reasonable expectation that ground water levels would return to normal levels by April even with the extended de-watering window.

The Chairman also wished to draw the Commissioners attention to the fact that the Commissioners control levels using the pumping station and that it was imperative that this should remain the primary source of control as it was tried and tested and provides the certainty the Commissioners would wish for.

The applicant referred to the draft agreement and felt that it needed to be revised slightly to clarify actions and controls during construction of the reservoir and post construction. The Chairman noted that the agreement was really needed for the post construction situation and that some of the sections added were made by the Middle Level Commissioners. Neither he nor the applicant had any objection to it being extended to cover both situations but agreed that there needed to be some changes made to ensure clarity.

The frequency of monitoring of boreholes was then covered and it was resolved that readings taken weekly would be satisfactory and that the borehole monitoring was required just for the construction phase.

The Chairman stated that currently the application only referred to the old boreholes and their monitoring and that he considered it was essential that the additional boreholes be added to the application and be monitored and actions triggered based upon readings taken from them.

Discussion returned to the addition of January and February for de-watering and the applicant stated that these had been included as a safety net, hence abstraction during these months may in the event not actually be required. However, he reiterated that the advice of the hydrologist was that their use should not be a problem.

The Chairman then invited the Commissioners to comment and ask questions.

Mr Wright noted that the Commissioners had agreed in principle to there not being the need for any recharge trenches if de-watering ceased after December each year. The applicant responded that he was going on the advice of his hydrologist.

Mr Lee stated that he understood the Commissioners cautious 'belt and braces' approach but queried if they were being overly onerous in their demands. He felt that the requirement to monitor the additional boreholes outside of the red line of the planning application might be unnecessary as his experience with quarries had not presented the issues which were being suggested could occur. He also wondered if there should be a requirement to install gauge boards in pertinent positions which the Commissioners could check periodically. The Chairman responded that the key levels for the Commissioners were those at the pumping station which were used to control levels throughout the District and hence monitoring gauges should not be required if the risks were removed through appropriated development of the site.

Mr Lee asked if the Over reservoir site had been clay lined as this was one where issues had been experienced. The Chairman confirmed it was and that the biggest problems had occurred in the first year of quarrying.

Mr Wright asked for Mr Lee's view of what an adequate belt and braces approach should be to which Mr Lee responded that he considered that the Commissioners were very nearly there with what had already been agreed with the applicant.

The Clerk pointed out that the issue with Boreholes appeared not to be one of whether or not the applicant was prepared to monitor the extra ones but rather whether it was legally possible for this to be a condition of planning. He suggested that if it was not then perhaps the legal agreement could be adapted to address the Commissioners' concerns in relation to this.

Mr Wright stated that he felt that the only real issue that seemed to be dividing the Commissioners and applicant appeared now to be the de-watering during January, February and March. The applicant stated that he believed that by monitoring the boreholes it would be possible to decide if surrounding water levels were being significantly impacted and that if they were then the abstraction pit could be refilled again. There were however questions on how effective this would be and where the water to fill it would come from.

The Chairman stated that he considered that the lack of absolute certainty over impact and timings of return to normal levels meant that, unless the application was amended, it would be his recommendation that the objection should be sustained. He also noted that the Environment Agency had yet to offer their comments on the application.

Mr Smith raised the question over the future use of the reservoir for water supply to crops when a district wide ban was in place. The applicant pointed out that the reason for constructing the reservoir was to ensure that a ready supply of water was available. The Chairman pointed out that

abstraction licencing and the controlling of it was a matter for the Environment Agency as the licencing authority and not the Commissioners.

The Chairman proposed that the objection continue in place and members agreed. Mr Lee felt that the applicant should be given the chance to consider the Commissioners' concerns and to look again and offer an alternative/amendment. The Chairman advised that the earliest it would be considered by the planning authority would be April and if not then it would be June as there was no planning committee meeting in May.

RESOLVED

That, based upon the application submitted for planning as it current stood, the Commissioners should sustain an objection to it.

(NB) – Mr W Dennis declared an interest which this item was discussed.