

HADDENHAM LEVEL DRAINAGE COMMISSIONERS

At a Meeting of the Haddenham Level Drainage Commissioners
hosted at the Middle Level Offices, March on Thursday the 4th November 2021

PRESENT

| | |
|----------------------------------|---------------------|
| M Church Esq (Chairman) | J Smith Esq |
| G L P Wilson Esq (Vice Chairman) | N Tibbett Esq |
| T Chambers Esq | Cllr S Cheetham Esq |
| R Darby Esq | R Flint Esq |
| N R W Wright Esq | A R Yarrow Esq |

Mr David Jordan (District Engineer) was in attendance.

Miss Lorna McShane – Solicitor and Assistant Clerk & Mr Gary Roberts – Consultant were also present

The Chairman announced that Peter Lee had died recently and that his funeral was arranged for 5th November 2021.

Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from:

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|---------------|------------------|-------------|-----------|
| AW Darby Esq. | Mrs M Darby | Mrs L Flint | R Lee Esq |
| A Lenson Esq | P Mappedoram Esq | | |

C.412 Standing Orders

Miss McShane reported that ADA have obtained agreement from Defra for the flexibility which allowed the Board to choose how they wished to hold Board meetings during the pandemic to become permanent. This change will allow remote attendance or fully virtual meetings to take place in future should that best meet the Board's particular requirements at that time.

RESOLVED

That the Board approve the revised Standing Orders to allow remote attendance or fully virtual meetings to take place in the future.

C.413 Declarations of Interest

Mr W Dennis declared an interest in item 7 on the agenda.

The Chairman declared an interest in item 15 on the agenda.

C.414 Confirmation of Minutes

RESOLVED

That the Minutes of the Meetings of the Commissioners held on the 22nd April 2021 are recorded correctly and that they be confirmed and signed.

C.415 Matters arising from the minutes.

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

C.416 Construction of Irrigation Reservoirs – Willow Hall Farm

Further to minute C386, The Chairman reported that the matter had been considered by Cambridgeshire County Council Planning Committee and the application had been approved. The agreement previously drawn up had been signed by the Commissioners and William Dennis. Work was not expected to commence before the new year and that consents from the Commissioners were still required.

The Chairman also referred to traffic issues and the proposed scheme to enhance traffic calming measures in Station Road. The proposals had not yet been approved and the Chairman would attend the parish meeting when this matter was to be considered.

C.417 Ouse Washes Section 10 Reservoir Middle Level and Level South Barrier Bank works

Further to minute C.387, the Chairman referred to the Newsletter from the Environment Agency dated June and August 2021.

C.418 Contravention of Commissioners' Byelaws – Tree on Catchwater Bank and Review of Watercourses

Further to minute C 399, The Chairman reported that there was a tree growing on the top of the Catchwater Bank which the Commissioners had been asked to reduce the height of to prevent damage in the event of it falling. The Chairman advised that the tree was not in the ownership of the Commissioners, but a letter could be sent on behalf of the Commissioners to the land owner passing on the comments about the request to the Commissioners.

RESOLVED

That a letter be sent to the owner of the land requesting the reduction in height of the tree.

The Solicitor to check ownership of the land at the land registry.

The Chairman agreed to provide a plan showing the location of the land or details of ownership if known by the Commissioners.

C.419 Review of District Watercourses

Further to minute 400, The Chairman reported that slubbing out was needed to be carried on the dykes as they have had no maintenance or a number of years. The Fairview drain to the main drain has had maintenance work.

- 1) The Chairman also reported that three culverts between Hoghill Drove and Lakes Drove on the concrete road needed to be lowered. A quotation for these works was to be obtained from Fen Ditching.
- 2) In order to have more control over the summer level of water from Claytons Bridge, the Chairman suggested that a water control structure should be installed in the dyke by the drove, and a one-way valve between the dyke and the main drain.
- 3) The Chairman suggested that at Dairy house and the east dyke, the old concrete slacker should be removed and replaced with a pipe, which can be blocked as necessary.

RESOLVED

- 1) That a quotation be obtained from Fen Ditching for the lowering of the 3 culverts between Hoghill Drove and Lakes Drove on the concrete road.
- 2) That a water control structure be installed in the dyke by the main drain
- 3) The old concrete slacker on the dyke east of the Dairy House be removed and replaced with a pipe.

C.420 Vehicles along the banks of the Catchwater Drain

Further to minute C.411, The Chairman reported that this matter had been raised by Mr Lenson. A number of off-road vehicles were travelling along the banks of Catchwater Drain causing damage to the bank.

The Chairman advised that as the bank was a public highway, the installation of additional gates was a matter for the County Council as Highway Authority

The Chairman advised that it was proposed to arrange a site meeting to discuss the matter further and determine if it would be possible to erect another gate although this would need to be with the consent of the County Council.

C.421 Haddenham Aldreth Neighbourhood Plan

The Chairman to reported that he had received a consultation document on the Haddenham Neighbourhood Plan. With assistance from Gary Roberts Consultant Engineer, a response had been reported on behalf of the Commissioners, and this had been circulated to Commissioners prior to the meeting.

RESOLVED

That the Haddenham Level Drain Commissioners consultation response be approved and the Chairman thanked Gary Roberts for his work on the consultation document

C.422 Clerk's Report

The Clerk advises:-

i) COVID-19 Actions

That the majority of control measures have been removed now and normal office working has resumed (with the exception of trialling a degree of flexible working, which has been shown to be effective following the previous periods of enforced home working). Impacts now are largely confined to the high rates of COVID-19 illness cases in the UK.

ii) Middle Level Commissioners and Administered Boards Chairs Meeting

That a seventh Chair's Meeting was held on the 2nd November 2021.

The meeting covered a wide variety of matters likely to affect IDBs. A summary of the key points and resolutions follows;

- a) The MLC Chair introduced the meeting and took the opportunity to warn those present that government were pushing for land in this area to be set aside to mitigate the impacts of climate change. In this respect there was concern that the data underpinning this move was out-of-date and inadequate and that there was a risk that no proper account would be taken of the storage effects of the land as it is currently managed compared to how it might react if managed as wetland.
- b) To better fit in with the farming calendar the annual safety audits carried out by Cope are to be moved to January and February. In response to a question from the floor, Chairs were advised that it is ultimately the Board and not the MLC's responsibility to manage safety at Board owned assets, although the MLC will assist where they can.
- c) Chairs considered it was important that IDBs and the MLC have a policy on climate change. It was felt likely that this will become increasingly important as pressure mounts for action to be taken. In this respect the Clerk advised that the MLC intended to carry out a baseline assessment of its carbon footprint which would then be used to underpin plans for reductions in CO² release and for mitigation. This model would be made available to those IDBs which wished to follow a similar path. Once what could be reasonably achieved has been defined a policy to steer implementation would be produced. Obviously, the aim will be to achieve net zero or as close to it as can be realistically and practically achieved.
- d) The Chief Executive outlined the work of WRE, including the regional reconciliation of water supply just carried out, the proposals for two new reservoirs (one in Lincolnshire and one in Cambridgeshire) and the future plans for water security providing a 1 in 500 year level of drought tolerance for potable water supply. On this latter point he advised that he had been pushing hard for the needs of agriculture to be taken into account, noting that wet farming and environmental targets for farming would require extra water in this region. Also, he considered that separating agricultural need from environmental need was an error and failed to recognise the close tie between the two.
- e) It was reported that it seemed increasingly likely that despite lobbying MPs and Defra it will be the case from the 1st April 2022 that IDB's will lose access to red diesel for anything other than powering generators and for heating. This will increase costs and will present problems with the use of contractors who also work for agriculture which will have an exemption, hence can continue to use red diesel in plant.

- f) On member training it was agreed that the MLC would set up a Zoom type seminar running several of the ADA video training sessions back-to-back. All members of all MLC administered IDBs would be invited and attendance will be recorded. This was seen as the most efficient way of delivering the training that Defra expects members to have undertaken.
 - g) For the next round of IDB meetings, the MLC website secure pages will be used for Board meeting documents. Members will be sent links to the appropriate webpage with a password. The documents can then be downloaded whenever it is convenient to do so. **MEMBERS WILL BE ENCOURAGED TO FOLLOW THIS ROUTE RATHER THAN REQUIRE PAPER COPIES OF DOCUMENTS.** In exceptional circumstances – for example for those members without email addresses - a paper copy of the relevant documents can still be printed off, bound and sent out. The use of the Microsoft Teams software is also to be explored for future years.
 - h) GDPR was discussed and it was resolved that for internal matters, or where working with partner organisations all email addresses will be visible to allow members to see who has knowledge of the matter under discussion. All external communications will normally be blind copied unless there is a need to show the address or the address is already known (for example when a member is passing on a query he or she has received themselves). It was also agreed that the website could continue to show names and primary contact numbers as long as addresses were not identified.
- iv) Association of Drainage Authorities
- a) Annual Conference

That the 84th Annual Conference of the Association was held on Wednesday the 10th November 2021.

The Conference was once again held virtually and was split into two parts; the Conference in the morning and AGM in the afternoon. It is expected that, whilst in future years it is hoped to return to a face-to-face format, the clear separation between conference and AGM is likely to be retained.

Speakers this year included Rebecca Row MP (Parliamentary Under Secretary of State – Defra), Dieter Helm (economist) and Lord De Ramsey (then President of ADA).

Topics covered included the challenges of climate change and the need to step up to the plate in delivering on the aim to achieve a net zero target as soon as possible, the importance of partnership working and the importance of agriculture in feeding the nation. The latter included the need to better educate the population, who clearly desire to move forward on delivering climate change and ecological objectives, but do not fully appreciate the role of agriculture, its real impacts or even properly understood where and how food is sourced. One example given that challenged a common assumption that agriculture was bad for the environment was that recent monitoring of CO² release had shown that a well irrigated peat field of onions released less CO² than adjacent dry grassland.

In his speech Lord De Ramsey announced that he was stepping down as President and that his place would be taken by Henry Cator. He was warmly thanked by ADA for his many years of service and was presented with a painting by an artist which it is known he admires. Henry spoke about how pleased he had been to be invited to take over the role and that he looked forward to working with ADA to meet the future challenges of the industry.

The AGM that followed gave an update on the work of ADA, noting the likelihood that, despite vigorous lobbying, the expectation was that from 1st April 2022 IDBs would no longer be able to use red diesel for anything other than heating or to run generators. This will impact on costs and will provide challenges to the continued use of agricultural contractors. The passing of the Environment Bill was touched upon which will release barriers to the formation of new IDBs and will also provide opportunities for IDBs to explore extending their boundaries if it was clearly beneficial to do so. Innes Thomason spoke on the work of ADA and the consultations ADA had responded to, including proposals to extend beaver introduction and a water abstraction licencing charging review amongst other things. Finally, it was reported that the ADA Board had agreed to a 1% rise in subscriptions for the 2022/23 year and noted that with inflationary pressures a higher increase should be expected next year.

b) Annual Conference

That the Annual Conference of the Association of Drainage Authorities will be held on Wednesday the 9th November 2022, venue yet to be announced.

c) Meeting of the River Great Ouse Branch

That the Annual Conference of the River Great Ouse branch of the Association was held on Tuesday the 1st March 2022.

This was the first face to face meeting held since the COVID-19 outbreak but the format was restricted to the AGM only. It is planned however to reintroduce the popular and useful morning workshops for 2023.

Marc Heading was reappointed as chair with Councillor Doug McMurdo as vice chair. Topics covered included unsurprisingly red diesel, and water resources/the work of WRE.

Sofi Lloyd announced that Brian Stewart and Ian Hodge from the EA had recently joined the ADA Board and that DEFRA had asked ADA to liaise with them on the implementation of schedule 3 of the Flood and Water Management Act. She was also please to be able to report that ADA had been instrumental in initiating an all-party parliamentary group with a remit to discuss and consider Sustainable Flood and Drainage Management.

Phil Hulme and Amanda Macloughlan spoke on behalf of the EA covering the challenging associated with significant staff changes at the EA and noted that with the capital program for this six year cycle being double that of the previous one this would be generating considerable additional work load.

It was advised that this coming years revenue (maintenance) budget was £5.3M which was more than the previous year but what could be delivered within this budget could be impacted by inflation.

The date of the next meeting is Tuesday 7th March 2023.

C.423 Smart Level System/District Wide Telemetry Bid

Further to minute C388(iii), the Chairman reported that the Commissioners had previously agreed that a site survey should be carried out, and it was likely that the Commissioner's would proceed with the installation of the new system. The survey had not yet been carried out on behalf of the board.

C.424 National Drainage Show & Floodex 2022

That the National Drainage Show & Floodex 2022 will be held at ExCel, London on the 23rd and 24th November 2022.

C.425 Consulting Engineers' Report, including planning and consenting matters

The Chairman reported that only routine maintenance had been carried out since the last meeting, with the exception of work to the Haddenham No 1 gearbox which was removed and new seals fitted and is now back in service. Estimates for the work were received – Bedford Pumps had provided the cheapest quotation and they had carried out the work.

The weed cleaner hoses are cracked and need to be replaced, but this work has not yet been carried out.

At Sutton Gault, the gland bush packing had been replaced.

The Consulting Engineers report was noted and approved.

C.426 District Labour

District Engineer's Wage Increase – 2021/2022

Further to minute C241(i), The Commissioners gave consideration to the District Officers fee and it was reported that the District Officers wages would be increased in accordance with the Middle Level Commissioners award of 2.7%.

C.427 District Work Report

The Chairman reported that water had been available to meet all farmers needs and this had been assisted by a wet June & August.

Pumping commenced in August and this has continued as and when necessary, since August.

Work on drain maintenance and clearing started as soon as permitted an 15th July together with contract work for Over & Willingham IDB.

The Chairman advised that the Sutton Pump has a large sump in front and when water levels are low, a level of soil/silt had built up. This has always been difficult to reach with the Commissioner's machine and in the past Kelvin German had been employed with a long reach

machine to clear it, but unfortunately he has now retired. Fen Ditching have a new 14 metre machine, which has been operated by David Jordan, the District Engineer.

Work is need on the catchwater drain at Mepal, the work needed is beyond flail mowing and a quotation from a contractor is needed for this work. The rechargeable work carried out to date is £6786.00.

C.428 Health and Safety Report

The Chairman reported that the annual visit by Cope Safety Management was carried out on 27th October 2021.

At Sutton Pumping Station, Cope raised the issued of damaged floor tiles and expressed concern that the tiles may contain asbestos and discussed ways to cover the for so that the tiles were not exposed.

The only other matter of concern was the electric cables when working with the 360 machine – there was no height limiter or wire watcher fitted.

RESOLVED

That the 2 matters raised by Cope Safety Management needs to be considered and the necessary works be carried out.

C.429 Completion of the annual review 2020/2021

- a) The Commissioners considered and approved the comments of the Auditors on the Annual Return for the year ended on the 31st March 2021
- b) The Commissioners considered and approved the Audit Report of the Internal Auditor for the year ended on the 31st March 2021

C.430 Defra IDB1 Returns

Miss McShane referred to the completed IDB1 form for 2020/2021 which the board noted and approved.

C.431 Expenditure/Estimate Update

The Chairman updated the Commissioners on how the estimated expenditure for 2021/2022 compared to the actual expenditure to date, it was estimated an extra £2,000 be allowed for weather related pumping.

C.432 Dates for 2022 Meetings

RESOLVED

That the next Meetings of the Commissioners for 2022 be held as follows

- i) Thursday the 28th April 2022 – 7.30pm
- ii) Thursday the 3rd November 2022 – 7.30pm

at the Baptist Hall, Station Road, Haddenham.

C.433 Any other business

The Chairman reported on works that had been carried out by Welney on the Hundred Foot River. In the course of slubbing out, clay had been recovered from the river bed. The Environment Agency had stopped working as remedial action to the river bed was required.