

ALCONBURY AND ELLINGTON INTERNAL DRAINAGE BOARD

Board Meeting

Minutes of the meeting held on 6th June 2017, 10am at Brookfield Farm, Great Stukeley.

PRESENT: J Sewell (Vice Chairman); K M Baker; M G Baker; B Chapman; G Grey and E A Ruston.

IN ATTENDANCE: F Bowler (Chief Executive/Clerk); J Oldfield (Director of Operations) and R Easom (Committee Clerk)

In the absence of Mr Raby (Chairman), Mr Sewell (Vice Chairman) chaired the meeting.

1 APOLOGIES for absence were received from H Raby (Chairman); M R Eayrs; and R Warrener.

2 DECLARATION OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Mrs Ruston mentioned she had an interest in land affected by the new A14 road improvement scheme.

3 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 31 January 2017

The Minutes of the meeting held on 31 January 2017 were accepted as a true and accurate record for the Chairman to sign.

4 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

There were no matters arising.

5 WORKS PROGRESS REPORT for period April 2016 to March 2017 and Works Programme for 2017/18

The Director of Operations presented the Works Progress Report together with an A3 plan showing works completed in black. Also, presented was the Works Programme 2017/18 together with an A3 plan showing planned maintenance in red.

The Director of Operations said the maintenance work would, as usual, be split between hand work and mechanical work. The mechanical work would be put out to tender during the next week and it was proposed to approach three contractors: Lattenbury Services, MD Contracting and Breheny.

Members accepted the Works Progress Report 2016/17 and the Works Programme 2017/18.

Discussion took place:

Mr K Baker queried why maintenance works had been carried out on land near him. He said his Entry Level Stewardship (ELS) and Cross Compliance schemes had been damaged by excavators tracking on his land he did not think the watercourse maintenance had been necessary at that time as there did not seem to be much vegetation to clear. He said he had needed to re-seed the area and pick up wood debris. The Director of Operations said Notices of Entry letters had been sent out and there should be no loss suffered in Stewardship schemes, where the Board has carried out works, as there is special dispensation. He believed only necessary work was carried out on the watercourse and some was only spraying. The Director of Operations said the Board's officers should have provided more supervision and guidance to a new contractor.

Mr Chapman asked when the maintenance works planned for the 2017/18 programme would be commenced. The Director of Operations said he hoped that the tender would be awarded mid to late July and then work should commence soon after harvest.

The Clerk explained that the significant difference in the price of the tenders for the 2016/17 maintenance works had meant that the Board had decided to engage the services of MD Contracting for the first time. Also, other drainage boards use their services.

Mrs Ruston asked about a length of watercourse, near Park Road in Brampton, which Highways England had taken over as part of the A14 improvement. She was concerned that if it was not cleared that corner could be very vulnerable. The Director of Operations said the Board could not carry out its maintenance works on A14 improvement land but agreed the Board would carry out as much as it could up to the point where Highways England have taken control of the watercourse and added that the new culvert may restrict the flow.

6 TECHNICAL REPORT

The Director of Operations presented the Technical Report.

A14 Road Improvement Scheme

The Director of Operations added an update to his report on the A14 Road Improvement Scheme: the agreement with Highways England to cover Section 23 and Byelaw Consenting had been agreed and signed by the Chairman that morning. It should be completed during the week. It will mean all consenting is carried out under this agreement and the costs associated with Board's officer time will be recovered. Highways England have been communicating more with the Board's officers lately and progress had been made.

Alconbury and Alconbury Weston

The Director of Operations added to his report on the £100,000 project under the Natural Flood Management initiative. He believed the best natural flood management initiative for that area was to make the soil structure more permeable. He said that at FloodEx 2017, which took place in May, there had been a presentation on creating permeable soil structure. He said he would be interested in trying to get the EA to adopt that approach rather than planting woodland.

Members accepted the Technical Report.

Discussion took place:

The Chairman asked how far downstream the project would extend. The Director of Operations said it was the whole of Alconbury Brook. The Chairman pointed out that the Hinchingsbrook end of the watercourse required a lot of work due to trees in the watercourse. The Director of Operations said the catchment needs to be looked at as a whole and added that more work has recently been carried out on Main River by the EA since the introduction of Local Choices where the Board can have more say on how its precept money is spent.

Mr M Baker remarked on how many reports and investigations he had witnessed over the years on flooding at Alconbury. All of which have cost a great deal of money but the various schemes have not been pursued. The Director of Operations agreed and said he would hope that previous reports would not be forgotten. A reduced scheme could be beneficial rather than the more sophisticated one which did not go ahead due to economical appraisal rules.

7 INTERNAL AUDIT

(i) TO RECEIVE THE ANNUAL INTERNAL AUDIT REPORT 2016/17

The Clerk presented the Internal Audit report. The internal auditor had given his opinion as 'adequate assurance'.

The Clerk outlined the four recommendations in the Management Action Plan together with the management comments:

- A Update the Investment Strategy – this was being addressed in Agenda item 10 with a revised investment strategy for approval.
- B Consider removing one stage of the recovery process so only one rates reminder letter is sent – the Clerk said it had been agreed she would continue to send out two reminders as this was in-line with ADA recommendations.
- C Apply to the Magistrate Court for summons to recover debts as quickly as possible – there is now a new procedure in place to do this.
- D Consider introducing the use of debit or credit cards as a method of payment – the Clerk said the two larger Boards in the Group would be pursuing this but it was not cost effective for the Alconbury & Ellington Board.

Members approved the Annual Internal Audit Report 2016/17.

(ii) TO APPROVE THE INTERNAL AUDIT STRATEGY AND AUDIT PLAN 2017-18

The Clerk presented the Internal Audit Strategy and Audit Plan and said the internal auditor, Mr David Gowing, would be pleased to answer any specific queries members may have.

The Audit Plan amounted to a total of 3 plan days across the Bedford Group of IDBs.

The Clerk added that the 2017/18 internal audit would be the last one that Mr Gowing would carry out as he was retiring. The Lincolnshire Boards will be engaging the

services on a new internal audit team and the Clerk said she was planning to pursue the use of their services when Mr Gowing has retired.

Members approved the Internal Audit Strategy & Audit Plan 2017-18.

(iii) NATIONAL AUDIT OFFICE REPORT ON INTERNAL DRAINAGE BOARDS

The Clerk explained the background to this report; it stemmed from a freedom of information request made of an internal drainage board and concerned an ecology issue, which is why the report has an ecology bias. She said the National Audit Office have made no recommendations and Defra have not, as yet, raised any issues as a result of the report. One of the main criticisms of the report was the fact that not all Boards have an ecology officer as part of their staff. The Bedford Group have a nationally regarded ecology consultant who attends the Boards when necessary, providing good, pragmatic advice.

Members noted the National Audit Office Report on Internal Drainage Boards.

8 TO APPROVE THE REVISED RISK REGISTER

The Clerk presented the risk register which is reviewed annually and said the only change was that highlighted in red on page 2: The provision on a 24 hours emergency response has been removed. The Boards duty officer will provide out of hours support to Category 1 & 2 Emergency Responders.

Members approved the Revised Risk Register dated May 2017.

9 FINANCE

(i) FINANCE REPORT AS AT 31 MARCH 2017

The Clerk presented the Finance Report which included:

- a) Receipts and payments through the Board's individual bank account with Natwest for 2016/17;
- b) Cheque list for 2016/17 and
- c) Investment and Bank accounts balances as at 31st March 2017.

Members approved the Finance Report and agreed that the Clerk should put £66,000 of the £99,835 currently held in the Reserve Account into a joint Boards' investment account with Lloyds.

(ii) TO APPROVE THE STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS FOR THE YEAR ENDING 31 MARCH 2017

The Clerk presented the Statement of Accounts.

Income and Expenditure Account

The Clerk highlighted the expenditure on watercourse maintenance and the difference in expenditure between 2015/16 and 2016/17. This was a result of the change in contractor as discussed under agenda item 5.

Members approved the Statement of Accounts for the year ending 31 March 2017.

(iii) TO APPROVE THE ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT YEAR ENDING 31 MARCH 2017

Members approved the Annual Governance Statement for the year ending 31 March 2017, answering questions 1-8 in the affirmative for the Chairman and Clerk to sign.

(iv) TO APPROVE THE ANNUAL RETURN ACCOUNTING STATEMENTS FOR THE YEAR ENDING 31 MARCH 2017

The Clerk presented the Annual Return Accounting Statements for the year ending 31 March 2017 and tabled a replacement page 3, section 2 – Accounting statements 2016/17: Item no 8 - Total value of cash and short term investments under year ending 31 March 2017 - the correct figure was £162,658

Members approved the Annual Return Accounting Statements for year ending 31 March 2017, with the amendment as tabled, for the Chairman to sign.

10 TO REVIEW THE REVISED INVESTMENT STRATEGY

The Clerk presented the revised investment strategy pointing out that the amendments were shown in red. An additional change, since the Beds & River Ivel IDB meeting the previous day, was to delete the restriction of the investment.

Members approved the revised Investment Strategy with the following amendment to 4.3:

- 4.3 The limit of any such investment ~~will be restricted to £....~~ **will not be restricted at the present time** with any one particular institution or group, or such other sum as the Joint Management Committee (JMC) specify from time to time. It should be noted that the Government guarantee of £85,000 which applies to private investors does not apply to bodies such as Internal Drainage Boards.

11 ELECTION

- (i) To approve the Register of Electors**
Copies of the Register of Electors were tabled.

Members approved the Register of Electors.

(ii) Election process

The Clerk explained the election timetable and added that the notices associated with the election are no longer required to be placed in the local press; they can now be placed on the Board's website instead.

The Clerk asked that members inform her of any ratepayers they know of who may be interested in becoming Board members. She said she planned to put a leaflet in the rate demands in order to raise awareness.

Discussion took place:

Mrs Ruston asked when to notify the Board about land changing from agricultural into special levy due to the A14 road improvements. The Clerk said she would need to be informed once the land is properly taken over, she would then adjust accounts.

Mr Chapman asked how the Board's area is defined. The Director of Operations said it was in accordance with the "Medway letter" which states eight feet above the top of the bank of the flood level. The Clerk said there was talk of a revaluation exercise, the last one being in 1992.

12 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Members wished Mr Raby a speedy recovery from his recent surgery.

13 DATE OF NEXT MEETING – 7 November 2017 – New Board

The meeting closed at 10.46am.