

ALCONBURY AND ELLINGTON INTERNAL DRAINAGE BOARD

Board Meeting

Minutes of the meeting held on 7 November 2017, 10am at Brookfield Farm, Great Stukeley.

PRESENT: H Raby (Chairman), J Sewell (Vice Chairman), K Baker, M G Baker, B Chapman, G Grey, E Ruston, R Warrener and J White

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

The Clerk took the chair as Chairperson pro tem.

1 APOLOGIES

There were no apologies.

2 DECLARATION OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

There were declarations of interest from G Grey, J Sewell and E Ruston concerning the A14 Improvement Scheme.

3 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

Mr H Raby was elected as Chairman, unanimously.

4 ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

Mr J Sewell was elected as Vice-Chairman, unanimously.

5 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 6 June 2017.

The minutes were accepted as a true and accurate record for the Chairman to sign.

6 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 6 June 2017

Internal Audit

The Clerk said the 2017/18 internal audit will be the last one conducted by Gowing Internal Audit Services Ltd as Mr D Gowing is retiring. The Clerk had been involved in a tender process to appoint a new firm of Internal Auditors. The process was now completed and a firm called TIAA had been appointed to carry out internal audit for the Bedford Group and the Lincolnshire Boards.

A14 Road Improvement

Mrs Ruston asked about the process of informing the Board of land which would be changing from agricultural to special levy as a result of the A14 improvements. The Clerk said officers would try and obtain a GIS mapping layer from Highways England in order to clearly see the areas affected. Regarding agricultural land in temporary use by Highways England, the Clerk

advised that the agricultural ratepayer should continue to pay the rates and claim back the relevant proportion from Highways England.

7 WORKS PROGRESS REPORT APRIL TO OCTOBER 2017

The Director of Operations presented the works progress report together with an A3 plan. He added that the works in progress, shown in purple on the plan, could, for example, be works where the watercourse has been flailed but was still to be dredged.

Members accepted the Works Progress report.

Discussion took place:

Watercourse No. 4 – Park Road, Brampton/A1 interchange

Mrs Ruston made reference to watercourse no 4, adjacent to Park Road, Brampton and close to the interchange with the A1. She said, as a result of A14 improvement works the watercourse had been diverted. The fishermen were reportedly concerned that the level of the lake was dropping. They had noticed that the new watercourse now had a small amount of water continually flowing in it whereas the old watercourse had usually been dry. The Director of Operations said the work to divert the watercourse had been consented by the Board. There was a possibility that Highways England had been pumping water out of borrow pits, which might explain the continuous trickle of water in the newly constructed watercourse. Mrs Ruston said she would get more details.

Easton

Mr M Baker said, so far this year, he had not had any reports from residents about maintenance works carried out in Easton and presumed the work was not yet carried out. The Director of Operations said flailing had taken place but the weed cutting was still to be carried out.

8 TECHNICAL REPORT FOR THE PERIOD JUNE TO OCTOBER 2017

The Director of Operations presented the Technical Report.

He asked that members raise any issues regarding A14 improvement works with the Board's officers as the Board's Principle Engineer is in frequent contact with Highways England personnel and this would help ensure no problems arise.

Consents schedule

Consent No 1094 - Bellway Homes Ltd

The Director of Operations drew members' attention to Consent no 1094 which was an application from Bellway Homes Ltd. He said the developers had not complied with the consent which had been issued and temporary fencing had been erected within 3 metres of the watercourse and not outside the existing byelaw distance of 7 metres. However, once the issue was raised with Bellway Homes they responded quickly and rectified the situation.

The Clerk explained that those consents shown in the schedule with an asterisk against them came under the A14 Development Consent Order process and no fee had been paid by Highways England contactors at this stage. The income from these consents will not be paid to the Board as

the Bedford Group officers will carry out the work. However, the Board will get income from the issue of any temporary consents.

Members accepted the Technical Report.

Discussion took place:

Alconbury Brook Flood Management Briefing

The Director of Operations commented on the Alconbury Brook Flood Management Briefing note produced by the EA and included in the technical report. He said natural flood management projects, such as have recently been carried out in Pickering, were appropriate for highland catchments locations but not necessarily appropriate for lowland locations such as Alconbury. He said drainage boards were trying to steer the EA away from such natural flood management solutions as leaky dams and the planting of woodland in drainage districts in favour of good soil management, as recommended by the Royal Agricultural Society at their Floodex 2017 presentation. Good soil management can hold back water and is more appropriate for the Alconbury catchment given it is in an agricultural area.

Mr K Baker asked who would carry out the project. The Director of Operations said farmers would be required to be involved and there would be consultations and grants obtained.

Mr K Baker said at present there was a problem with a lack of water in Alconbury Brook. There was no flow, it was stagnant and Anglian Water have been involved as it was thought it could be sewage, due to the smell. The EA have taken samples and are not taking any action.

Members were agreed there was too much vegetation in the watercourse and for many years very little maintenance work had taken place.

The Chairman mentioned the de-maining of Main River which was currently taking place in other areas. The Director of Operations said there were about half a dozen Main River de-maining projects being carried out as a pilot scheme. None of them local, with the nearest being in Norfolk.

The Clerk said the Board should not take on responsibility for the maintenance of any Main River if it was not put in good order first. She said officers would raise the issue of lack of maintenance of Alconbury Brook with the EA and suggest work is carried out under the Local Choices initiative where the Board can have a say in how its precept money is spent.

9 FINANCE

(i) FINANCE REPORT as at 30 September 2017

The Clerk presented the Finance Report which included:

- a) Receipts and payments through the Board's individual bank account with Nat West from 1 April – 30 September 2017;
- b) Cheque list for 2017/18;
- c) Investment and Bank accounts balances as at 30th September 2017;
- d) Income and Expenditure Account for the period ending 30th September 2017 and
- e) Balance Sheet as at 30th September 2017.

Income & Expenditure Account – The Clerk referred to the Maintenance of Watercourses under the Expenditure heading and said the £60,000 estimate was greater than the likely expenditure following the tender process. She expected there could be a saving of approximately £25,000 by the end of the financial year.

Members approved the Finance Report.

Discussion took place:

The Chairman asked if the balances had increased and if they were presently too large. The Clerk said they had increased due to the reduction in maintenance costs. She said officers would consider this in the 2018/19 estimates and possibly the Board could consider putting some money into the maintenance of Alconbury Brook, despite the fact that it is Main River, or a drainage rate reduction. At present the balances were acceptable to the auditors as they provide the funds in case of a major incident.

(ii) EXTERNAL AUDIT FOR FINANCIAL YEAR 2016/17

The Clerk presented the External Audit report for the financial year 2016/17 and reported that an unqualified opinion had been given.

There was one other matter not affecting the auditor’s opinion which was that:

‘We note that the smaller authority did not comply with Regulation 15 of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 as it failed to make proper provision during the year 2017/18 for the exercise of public rights, since the approval date was after the start of the period for the exercise of public rights. As a result, the smaller authority must answer ‘No’ to Assertion 4 of the Annual Governance statement for 2017/18 and ensure that it makes proper provision for the exercise of public rights during 2018/19.’

The Clerk explained that she had made an error on the ‘Notice of Public Rights and Publication of Unaudited Annual Return’ and had put the commencement date as 5th June 2017 when the Annual Return had not been approved by the Board until the 6th June 2017. This error means that the 2017/18 Annual Return, Annual Governance Statement, No. 4 (We provided proper opportunity during the year for the exercise of electors’ rights in accordance with the requirements of the Accounts and Audit Regulations) will need to state ‘No’: that the Board did not comply.

Members approved the External Audit report.

Discussion took place:

The Chairman asked whether the Boards’ website, on which Public Notices are posted, was visited much. The Clerk said it was. Consent applicants use it a lot and also those seeking Freedom of Information data. The website is hosted by the Boards’ IT consultants and the Office Manager/Committee Clerk updates it.

10 UPDATING OF BOARD BYELAWS

The Clerk presented the draft Byelaws document, which showed changes to the existing byelaws recommended by the Board's officers and based on Defra model byelaws, but which also included clause 18 'Protection of Flood Plain' which is not part of the model byelaws but had been part of the most recent byelaws approved in the Bedford Group; those of the Buckingham & River Ouzel Board in 2003. Also included under '33 Interpretation' was 'Watercourse means watercourse or waterbody', this was also not part of the model byelaws.

Officers recommended that all Boards in the Group adopt the same byelaws and that all would have the 'No obstructions within 9 metre of the Edge of the Watercourse' byelaw rather than the 7 metre distance which had previously been the case with Alconbury & Ellington Board and the Bedfordshire & River Ivel Board byelaws.

The Clerk also highlighted '3 Control of Introduction of Water and Increase in Flow or Volume of Water' which the draft showed as either existing wording or new wording which was taken from the model byelaws.

Members approved the Byelaws made by the Alconbury and Ellington Internal Drainage Board for the Chairman and Clerk to sign with all changes as shown in the draft document and, in addition, to maintain the existing wording under clause 3 as follows:

3 Control of Introduction of Water and Increase in Flow or Volume of Water

No person shall, without the previous consent of the Board, for any purpose, by means of any channel, siphon, pipeline or sluice or by any other means whatsoever, introduce any water into the District or, whether directly or indirectly, increase the flow or volume of water in any watercourse in the district.

The Clerk said the final copy of the Byelaws would be signed by the Chairman and herself and will then be sent to Defra for approval.

Discussion took place:

Brampton Brook

During discussion about the 9 metre access strip, Mr Sewell raised the issue of fences which had been erected at the rear of houses on both sides of the watercourse. He felt that householders should be required to remove fences, which were within 7 metres of the edge of the watercourse, when it was necessary to carry out works and that they should cover the costs themselves. The Director of Operations said the Board could take enforcement action if necessary but he and the Chairman agreed that the historic element of the site meant it would be unreasonable to enforce the byelaw in that situation. The Director of Operation said lessons should be learnt from that site.

11 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Mr Anthony Morbey, Chairman, ADA Great Ouse Branch

The Chairman said that following the untimely death of Mr Anthony Morbey in a car accident on 13th September 2017, he, as Vice Chairman, had taken over the Chairmanship of the branch until some re-organisation takes place.

Huntingdonshire District Council - Officer Representation

The Chairman said he regretted the decision of Huntingdonshire District Council to no longer appoint their officers as Council representatives on drainage boards. He mentioned Mr Chris Allen, Project & Assets Manager from HDC who had been a previous member of the Board and had provided valuable input during Board meetings. He said that water management will be a major issue in the future and conversation was necessary. HDC Councillor, Mr White, said he would raise the issue with the Environmental Team at HDC and report back to the Board.

Retirement of Site Manager Eastern

The Chairman informed members of the retirement of Site Manager Eastern from the Board at the end of October 2017. The Clerk said that following knee replacement surgery he had decided to retire but may carry out casual work for the Boards, maintaining SuDS ponds, in the summer.

The Chairman asked that a letter of thanks be sent to Site Manager Eastern from the Alconbury & Ellington Board in appreciation of his work and to wish him well for the future.

Board Membership

The Clerk said there were vacancies on the elected membership of the Board and asked if members could inform her of any person who may be interested.

Mr K Baker, HDC Councillor Representative, said he would be retiring from HDC and would be interested in becoming an elected member once he has retired as Councillor.

Miss G Grey said she would be retiring as an elected member and that this meeting would be her last.

(After the meeting Miss Grey asked the Committee Clerk to inform members that she had very much enjoyed her time on the Board, finding it interesting and informative.)

Member Training – Tuesday 5th December 2017 – at the Boards’ offices, Stewartby, Bedfordshire.

The Clerk reminded members about the training which was to take place on Tuesday 5th December. There would be presentations from the Bedford to Milton Keynes Waterway Trust and the Boards’ Ecologist, Diana Ward.

12 DATE OF NEXT MEETING:

30 January 2018 – Board Meeting

The meeting closed at 11am.