

**BEDFORDSHIRE AND RIVER IVEL INTERNAL DRAINAGE BOARD**  
**Board Meeting**

**Minutes of the Board meeting held on 6 June 2016 at 2pm at Vale House, Stewartby.**

**PRESENT:** J Davison (Vice Chairman), R O Bennett, L Birt, A D Brown, M Egar, F Firth, S Holland, S Hunt, J Scott, M Towler and T Turner.

**IN ATTENDANCE:** F C Bowler (Clerk), J J Oldfield (Engineer) and R C Easom (Committee Clerk)

In the Chairman's absence, Vice Chairman, Mrs Davison, chaired the meeting

**1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE** were received from D McMurdo (Chairman), D Hodgson, B Huckle, R Odell and J Ream.

**2 DECLARATION OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

There were no declarations of members' interests.

**3 VACANCY ON ELECTED MEMBERSHIP**

The Clerk said since the Board Election in 2015 a vacancy had arisen on the elected membership. Mr James Russell, Director of the Forest of Marston Vale Trust has indicated a willingness to serve on the Board. The Marston Vale Trust is a land owner in the Board's drainage district and can nominate a member to stand on their behalf. Mr Russell would fill the casual vacancy until the election in 2018 and provide a valuable, conservation perspective at Board meetings.

**Members agreed to Mr Russell filling the casual vacancy on the elected membership on the Board.**

**4 MINUTES OF THE BOARD MEETING HELD ON 1 FEBRUARY 2016**

**The minutes of the Board meeting held on 1 February 2016 were accepted as a true and accurate record.**

**5 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES**

**Wixams**

Mr Firth asked whether the commuted sum stage payment for 2015 was still outstanding. The Clerk reported that the funds had been received in March 2016.

**6 UNCONFIRMED MINUTES OF JOINT MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 25 APRIL 2016**

**The Chairman presented the unconfirmed minutes which were noted.**

## **7 PROGRESS OF WORK FROM APRIL 2015 TO MARCH 2016 FOR THE WORKS PROGRAMME 2015/16**

The Director of Operations presented the Progress of Works report, referring members to the A3 plan showing works completed and said the report explained the reason why some of the works were not completed. These reasons included saturated ground conditions, which have restricted access and progress by both workforce and contractors; access restrictions due to crops, game cover and pony paddock fencing and the medium and low risk watercourses have often required additional clearing works which has further reduced progress.

### **Members accepted the Works Progress Report for the period from April 2015 to March 2016 for the Works Programme 2015/16.**

Discussion took place:

Mr Egar raised concern about the high sickness rate amongst the workforce and suggested that the policy of employing a direct labour force should be kept under review.

Mr Brown added that he would support a study into whether it would be beneficial to change entirely to contractors and that the annual works programme had not been completed for the last six years. He also believed that contractors would not have plant standing at this time of year.

The Chairman said she noted his comments but said more contractors have been employed in recent years and inclement weather had hampered completion of works. She would not wish to see a situation where the Board did not have a workforce and had to rely solely on contractors.

Officers pointed out that most of the heavy plant and machinery is not used from late spring to early summer due to legislation to protect nesting birds. Some limited machine work is carried out during this period, based on specific risk assessment. During the bird nesting period, essential handwork is carried out but no overtime or Saturday working. When machine work is carried out a banksman has to go ahead to check for nesting birds. Mr Bennett added that if the Board was found to be in contravention of the legislation to protect nesting birds this would be a criminal offence and there would be substantial fines to pay and this would, ultimately, be a cost borne by the Board's ratepayers.

The Clerk said the works programme has to be over-programmed but there had been more slippage in recent years given the recent year after year of wet winters. Mr Bennett said he had frequently heard the complaint that the programme has not been met. He said this had always been the case. Extra sites were programmed in order that enough work has been sanctioned by the Board if conditions proved favourable for works to be carried out or to provide flexibility if there were access difficulties.

The Clerk added that the ageing workforce was an issue which needed to be considered and she was working with the Boards' HR consultants with regard to how best manage the well-being of the workforce. In the financial year 2015/16 there had been two employees who have had lengthy periods of sickness.

Mr Towler asked whether the Board could have special dispensation as the Wildlife and Countryside Act allowed footpaths and verges to be cut. The Director of Operations said if there was a safety issue

then the Board could carry out works but that would only be on high risk, urban watercourses and that would only account for 2-3% on the whole of the network of the Board maintained watercourses.

Mrs Turner was concerned about the lack of access due to the resistance of riparian owners and asked whether dialogue was entered into and advance notice given. Officers said that notice is given and that they try to manage the relationship with different landowners. Also, the Board has a conservation policy to work on one bank. Although the Board has powers to enter on to land, officers do try and be pragmatic and work with the landowner/occupier.

The Chairman drew the discussion to a close saying that a workforce versus contractors report had recently been examined and it had been agreed that the balance of using the Board's own workforce with the addition of contractors was correct. But the sickness rate among the workforce was something that the Board should try to address.

## **8 TECHNICAL REPORT FOR THE PERIOD JANUARY TO MAY 2016**

The Director of Operations presented the Technical Report which he said included a post-flooding review of Pix Brook, Stotfold, adding that even there, after the flooding, the Board had recently received complaints about working in the bird nesting season, despite all measures and safeguards being in place.

### **Members accepted the Technical Report.**

Discussion took place:

#### **Pix Brook, Standalone Farm Reservoir**

Mr Birt was surprised that such a large volume of water – 79 cubic meters per second – could, in really extreme conditions, pass over the reservoir dam. The Director of Operations said that would be a maximum in a flood, probably after about 300mm of rain. The Probable Maximum Flood and 1 in 10,000 events are extreme scenarios that are considered under the Reservoirs Act. Stotfold would have been evacuated in such a scenario.

Mr Brown asked whether the amount of watercress was unique to Pix Brook and should steps be taken to stop watercress from growing. The Director of Operations said it was not just watercress which caused problems there but tree branches, conifer cuttings and garden waste, etc. The brook does suffer from 'woody debris' but, last year, there was an unusually prolific growth of watercress. The Board also experiences problems with watercress upstream of Henlow Airfield. Mr Bennet added that good water quality aids watercress growth.

The Chairman asked whether, in addition to the trash screen that was removed in the flood event last summer, an additional trash screen could be used. The Director of Operations said that was one of the suggestions but the Brook Street and Hitchin Road culverts would still be vulnerable to blockage if and when debris passed over these trash screens upstream in the flood meadows. The risk needs to be balanced, some debris would be caught but there would still be an urban stretch that was not protected.

The Chairman said there was a need to work with Stotfold Town Council to raise awareness of the importance of not allowing debris to be dumped in the watercourse.

## **Consultations**

### **Con 29 and Con 290 Land Searches**

Mr Bennett asked whether officers had referred the issue to the Policy and Finance Committee at ADA and the Clerk confirmed that she had but the proposal was in its very early stages and she was trying to find out more information. Mr Bennett added that the Board is unique, amongst other drainage boards, given the amount of development within its district.

### **Planning Application Objections**

Mrs Turner commented on the 10 objections to Central Bedfordshire Council planning applications and said it would be useful to have more information regarding the Board's objections in order to check on the subsequent outcome and whether the Board's objections have been heeded.

Officers said they would provide Mrs Turner with the information. The Director of Operations said sometimes the Board object due to a lack of information on the application.

The Chairman reminded members that the Board were not statutory consultees. The Director of Operations said the statutory consultee was now the Lead Local Flood Authority and now also the Sustainable Drainage Systems (SUDS) consultee. He said he was unclear on the EA's current role but it seemed that they commented on the larger sites for development next to Main River or in flood zone 3.

### **Consents**

Mrs Turner asked what MDPE was as stated in the description of a consent. The Director of Operation said it was a type of plastic used in the manufacture of pipes – Medium Density Polyethylene.

## **9 INTERNAL AUDIT**

### **(i) To receive the Annual Internal Audit Report 2015/16**

The Clerk presented the Annual Internal Audit Report and said that the internal auditor had provided Adequate Assurance and the recommendations contained in his report had been acted upon.

**Members approved the Internal Audit Report dated April 2016.**

### **(ii) To Approve the Revised Risk Register**

The Clerk presented the Revised Risk Register adding that she had raised the issue of 'Loss of income through error or fraud' (Page 3) being at a risk level of 6, despite that fact that the Fidelity Guarantee insurance had been increased to £2M.to cover the risk. The auditor had confirmed that the risk level should remain at 6.

**Members approved the Revised Risk Register reviewed on 31 March 2016.**

### **(iii) To Approve the Internal Audit Strategy & Audit Plan 2016/17**

The Clerk presented the Internal Audit Strategy & Audit Plan 2016/17 which was a follow up to the 2015/16 Audit. The plan covered all three Boards in the Group and the total plan days were now 3.5.

**Members approved the Internal Audit Strategy & Audit Plan 2016/17**

## **10 FINANCE**

### **(i) To approve the Finance Report as at 31 March 2016**

The Clerk presented the finance report which showed receipts and payments through the Board's individual bank account, a cheque/direct debit list showing payments and investment and bank accounts balances. The Clerk added that of the £2.5M total balances £1.6M was ring-fenced for capital works and commuted sums for long term maintenance.

**Members approved the Finance Report as at 31 March 2016.**

### **(ii) To approve the Financial Statements for the year ended 31 March 2016**

The Clerk presented the Financial Statements for the year ended 31<sup>st</sup> March 2016.

**Members approved the Financial Statements for the year ended 31 March 2016.**

Discussion took place:

Mr Brown queried the £28,901 expenditure on the Office and Depot. The Clerk said it was money paid to the builders following the satisfactory completion of some of the snagging issues. A retention of approximately £10,000 was still withheld. The Clerk drew members' attention to the Balance Sheet where, under Funds Balances and Reserves a balance of £21,000 was showing against Office and Depot Development. She said that included the £10,000 retention plus additional funds for improvements to CCTV, security and gates at the front entrance.

### **(iii) To approve the Annual Governance Statement year ending 31 March 2016**

**Members approved the Annual Governance Statement for the year ending 31 March 2016 for the Chairman and Clerk to sign, answering questions 1-8 in the affirmative.**

### **iv) To approve the Annual Return for the year ending 31 March 2016**

**Members approved the Annual Return for year ending 31 March 2016, for the Chairman to sign.**

## **11 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

### **Beds & Ivel Board Policy Statement**

The Clerk said the Board's Policy Statement was due for review, however, Defra has been writing a revised, model statement for drainage boards, to take account of recent legislation, and this has not yet been released. Defra is aware that the Boards' Policy Statements are due for review.

**Beds & Ivel Board Newsletter**

Officers said that, following the requests of the Board, a newsletter had been produced and the draft copy was tabled. Members were asked for any comments prior to its distribution with the drainage rate demand notes which were due to be sent out. Copies will also be made available to local authorities, including parish councils.

**Apologies, D McMurdo (Chairman)**

The acting Chairman said that, in his absence, Mr McMurdo had asked that she pass on the message that members were welcome to contact him with any queries they may have following the meeting.

**12      DATE OF NEXT BOARD MEETING – 7 November 2016**

The meeting closed at 3.06pm.