

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

**Minutes of the Board meeting held on 9 November 2015 at 2pm at Vale House, Stewartby.**

**PRESENT:** R O Bennett; A D Brown; J Davison; M Egar; F Firth; D Hodgson; S Holland; B Huckle; D McMurdo; J Ream; M Towler; T Turner and T Wootton.

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

The Clerk took the chair *pro-tem* and welcomed new members to the Board: Mrs Turner, an elected member, Mr Firth (representing Central Bedfordshire Council) and Mr Towler (representing Bedford Borough Council).

**Presentation to Mr R O Bennett**

Mrs Davison, on behalf of members and officers, presented Mr Bennett with an engraved glass bowl to mark the end of his 25 year chairmanship of the Bedfordshire & River Ivel IDB.

Mr Bennett thanked members and Mrs Davison for being an excellent Vice Chairman during the past three years. He pointed out that he was only stepping down as Chairman and remaining on the Board as an elected member.

**1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE** were received from L Birt; S Hunt; R C Odell; J Scott; B Spurr; and M Weeks.

**2 DECLARATION OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

There were no declarations of members' interest at the start of the meeting.

During discussion of Agenda item 8, the Technical Report and Stewartby Park, the Bedford & Milton Keynes Waterway Park was mentioned and Mr Hodgson declared an interest as a consortium member.

**3 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN**

**Mr D McMurdo was elected unanimously and took the chair.**

**4 ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIRMAN**

**Mrs J Davison was elected unanimously.**

**5 MINUTES OF THE BOARD MEETINGS HELD ON 15 JUNE 2015**

**The minutes of the Board meetings held on 15 June 2015 were accepted as a true and accurate record.**

## **6 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES**

### **Workforce versus Contractors**

Mr Egar asked whether the Executive Working Group had examined the issue of perceived poor productivity amongst the Board's workforce and come to any conclusions.

The Clerk said that, to date, the issue had not been fully discussed.

### **Water Framework Directive**

Mr Bennett said he wished to emphasise the accuracy of the minutes regarding this issue.

### **Internal Audit Recommendation – Obtain HR advice regarding the calculation of employees pay when they are on leave (in relation to overtime).**

Mr Brown asked if there was anything further to report on this issue. The Clerk said, after discussions with the EWG and the Internal Auditor, she planned to pay to employees the additional holiday pay, based on the total overtime carried out in the year, as a lump sum at the end of the financial year. For the six or seven employees who regularly work overtime it should amount to a payment of approximately £300-£400 per employee.

### **Revised Risk Register April 2015 – Risk Level for ‘Loss of income through error or fraud’.**

Mrs Turner asked whether the Clerk had examined the issue of reducing the risk level to take account of insurance cover. The Clerk said she would be meeting with the Internal Auditor on the following Thursday (12 November 2015) and she planned to discuss the issue with him then.

## **7 WORKS PROGRESS REPORT – April to October 2015 for the Work Programme 2015/16**

The Director of Operations presented the report stating that more contracts had been awarded in an effort to catch up with carried forward work from two very wet years.

### **Kings Ditch**

Mr Bennett asked how much silt was removed from the culverts under Bedford Girls' School, as removal of silt in an urban situation could prove expensive. The Director of Operations said three lorry loads were removed. However, the contractor had provided a fixed price offer, so no extra had to be paid by the Board, despite the contractor only envisaging two loads would be removed.

### **Sick Leave (Bedford based work team)**

Mr Firth said without the long term sickness of the one employee the sickness rate would be quite low. Other members requested more information on how the percentage of working days lost through sickness is arrived at.

**Members accepted the Works Progress Report but requested more information on how the workforce sickness rate is calculated.**

## **8 TECHNICAL REPORT FOR THE PERIOD JUNE TO OCTOBER 2015**

The Director of Operations presented the Technical Report.

**Members accepted the Technical Report.**

Discussion took place:

### **West of Bedford Growth Area**

#### **Fields Road (north)**

Mr Brown asked whether the developer had carried out the outstanding drainage works. The Director of Operations said the Board was still waiting and officers were working with the planners.

#### **30 Bedford Road, Wilstead**

Mr Bennett said it was extremely important that the Board's officers continue to object to any increase in discharge in this area. Some years ago drainage works were carried out to rectify a problem in Wilstead and it is important that this work is not undone as Wilstead is a flood sensitive area. Mrs Turner agreed; much of the Board's work centres around development and it was important to get the communication right from the outset.

### **Wixams**

Mr Brown asked if the commuted sum stage payment for 2015 was still awaited from Gallagher. The Director of Operations said it was.

Mr Huckle suggested the system regarding the payment of commuted sums should be more robust in the future, with a particular date set for payment and interest being charged on late payments. The Director of Operations said most agreements were simpler than the Wixams. Most require at least 50% of the payment on signing the agreement and the remaining 50% following the completion of the defects correction period. Only the Wixams agreement has involved the commuted sum being paid over five payments with the fifth and final payment having some indexation included. Mr Hodgson said he thought the indexation should be charged.

**Members asked officers to set specific dates in the Legal Agreements as to when the payment of commuted sums should be made.**

**Members also asked to be informed when the outstanding Wixams commuted sum is received.**

### **Pix Brook, Flooding in Stotfold**

Members discussed various aspects of the flooding in Stotfold.

Mr Bennett said there are a lot of riparian owners upstream of where the incident occurred and a fair amount of water is carried in the watercourse including sewage works discharges. He added that the photographs of some of the debris appear to show neatly cut prunings. Also, he was concerned about the way the police insisted on the trash screen being removed.

The Chairman said it was a maintained watercourse and there was an extraordinary amount of rainfall.

Mr Hodgson suggested asking the police authority why their officers ordered that the trash screen be removed.

The Board's officers said they were awaiting the outcome of the insurance claims against the Board prior to carrying out any works and the Director of Operations said he would provide an update to Members at the next Board meeting.

### **Stewartby Park**

Mr Brown said he hoped officers of the Board were fully aware of the Bedford to Milton Keynes Waterway project and would not agree to any works in this area which would compromise the project. Mr Hodgson declared an interest as a consortium member of the Bedford to Milton Keynes Waterway project.

### **IDB Schemes funded with EA/Defra Grant In Aid under the Medium Term Plan (MTP) – Kings Ditch**

Mr Brown asked whether the £50,000 contributions from each Risk Management Authority Partner had been received. The Director of Operations confirmed that the Risk Management Authority Partners had made a commitment, however, officers were still working on justifying the scheme. The Chairman said he had discussed this issue with the Director of Operations at a recent Regional Flood and Coastal Committee meeting and will be following it up.

### **Consultations – Members of Parliament – Letter to Rory Stewart MP, Under Secretary of State for Water**

The Director of Operations said there had, so far, been no response following the letter sent to Rory Stewart MP regarding the poor condition of the Main River System, the lack of Grant in Aid funding for maintenance and the risks this poses on development in the Upper Great Ouse catchment. However, Mr Stewart was to be a keynote speaker at the ADA Conference on 11<sup>th</sup> November 2015 and officers were hoping for an opportunity to speak with him there.

Mr Towler asked if a map could be provided with the Technical Report showing the whereabouts of places referred to. The Clerk said officers were planning to purchase a screen for the boardroom so that plans could be projected on to it.

## **9 EXTERNAL AUDIT 2014/15 - OPINION AND ISSUES ARISING REPORT**

The Clerk said the Board's external auditors, BDO, had given an unqualified opinion and two separate issues had been raised:

1. The Clerk explained the issue raised regarding accounting for fixed assets. She said for some years there has been conflicting advice as to how fixed assets should be accounted for. Net book value (NBV) had been considered appropriate, but several years ago the Audit Commission said historical cost should be used and last year ADA advised Boards that, as the auditors were of the opinion that historical cost should be used, then that was the procedure which should be followed. The Boards' accounts were all changed to historic cost, as requested. The Beds & Ivel auditors, BDO, made no comment during the audit but raised the issue on their audit report stating fixed assets should be historic costs, less depreciation or NBV. The Clerk said she had written a letter to BDO expressing her dissatisfaction and asked for consistency, pointing out that the other two Boards' external auditors had not raised the issue.
2. Internal Auditor's recommendations were reiterated and all that is now outstanding is the market testing of engineering consultancy services. Officers have tried to ascertain the rates which other drainage boards pay for such services but been unsuccessful. Also, since the issue has been raised, the Bedford Group have not had a new scheme with which to test the market. The Clerk said that when a new scheme is proposed market testing will be carried out.

**Members accepted the External Audit 2014/15 - Opinion and Issues Arising Report**

## **10 FINANCE REPORT 1 APRIL – 30 SEPTEMBER 2015**

The Clerk presented the Finance Report which included the following:

- i. Financial Report as at 30 September 2015**
- ii. Investment and Bank Accounts Balances as at 30 September 2015**
- iii. Cheque/Direct Debit List from 1 April 2015**
- iv. Actual Income and Expenditure from 1 April to 30 September 2015**
- v. Balance Sheet as at 30 September 2015**

**Members approved the Finance Report for 1 April to 30 September 2015.**

Discussion took place:

### **Financial Report as at 30 September 2015**

Public Works Loan Board – Gt Barford - Mr Brown asked when the Public Works Loan Board loan for the Great Barford scheme would be paid. The Clerk said the final payment would be made during the current financial year.

### **Actual Income and Expenditure from 1 April to 30 September 2015**

The Clerk said she expected the deficit of £9,033 showing to date would be surplus by the end of the financial year.

Mr Brown commented on the low amount of income received in the Capital Development/Long Term Maintenance Income/Grant in Aid compared with the original estimate for the year. The Clerk said that it was not unusual for such differences to occur as, when setting the estimates, it is not always possible to know exactly when developer contributions will be received. Once funds from Wixams are received the situation will change.

Admin Charged on Capital Income - Mr Brown asked what the administration charge on capital income was. The Clerk said 16% to cover engineering and administration costs was charged as part of the developer contributions and this would also be nearer the estimate once Wixams and other development funds are received.

Board Expenses - Mr Brown asked what the Board Expenses included. The Clerk said these included the subscription to the Association of Drainage Authorities which was still to be paid. Also, the election expenses were included and there was under-expenditure on that element. It was expected that approximately another £10,000 would be spent by the end of the financial year.

### **Balance Sheet as at 30 September 2015 – Fund Balance and Reserves**

The Clerk said there was £1,283,558 in the Capital Development Account and there was still £70,940 in the Office and Depot Development fund. The build is more or less finished with a few outstanding snagging issues. A final payment will be made to the builders of an outstanding £10,000 - £12,000. The remaining £55,000 (approximately) will go back into the Board's Occupiers' Rate fund.

## **11 TO APPROVE THE AMENDED REGISTER OF MEMBERS' INTEREST FORM**

Members agreed to the addition of the following sentence to the Register of Members' Interest form:

**'I also declare that as a Member of the Board, I have read, accept and will abide by the Board's Members Code of Conduct.'**

## **12 DATE OF NEXT BOARD MEETING: 1<sup>st</sup> February 2016**

## **13 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

### **Restructuring of Board meetings, and other Committees with delegated powers**

The Clerk said restructuring of the Board meetings, the Executive Working Group and the Joint Management Committee was being considered. Officers were considering presenting a proposal to hold three Board meetings per year, every year (presently there are only two, except every third year when there is an extra new Board meeting following an election). In addition, to allow committee members to be more informed, the expansion of the membership of the EWG was being considered and to cut down on repetition and bureaucracy the abolition of the JMC was also being considered.

Mrs Davison said she supported a change as there was a lot of repetition and time wasted at present with members of the JMC not having been party to decisions made by the EWG.

The Clerk said she would be producing a paper for the Boards to consider once she had spoken with the Internal Auditor on 12<sup>th</sup> November 2015.

### **EA Precept**

Mr Wootton asked what the situation was likely to be regarding the Precept for the financial year 2016/17. The Clerk said it was unlikely to be increased. Discussions have been taking place regarding what the Boards get for their money, and officers have been arguing that statutory work should not be carried out using precept money paid by drainage boards. The Clerk added that she felt it would be reasonable for the Boards in the Group to pay more precept if there was evidence of maintenance works being carried out in their districts.

Mr Hodgson said he supported the Board seeking value for money.

### **Public Perception of Drainage Board**

Mrs Turner raised the issue of the Board's profile and how the general public sometimes have the perception that the Board causes delays. She asked how the Board's work could be more effectively communicated to the public.

The Chairman accepted Mrs Turner's point. He said internal drainage boards do a lot of good work which often does not get into the public arena. He welcomed members contributions regarding addressing this issue and mentioned the production of a newsletter.

The Chairman again thanked members for electing him and said he welcomed members contacting him direct with any drainage board matters.

The meeting closed at 3.32pm.