

HADDENHAM LEVEL DRAINAGE COMMISSIONERS

At a Meeting of the Haddenham Level Drainage Commissioners
held at the Baptist Hall, Station Road, Haddenham on Thursday the 7th November 2019

PRESENT

M Church (Chairman)
C H Bidwell Esq
T B Chambers Esq
S G Cheetham Esq
A W J Darby Esq
Mrs M E Darby
R J Darby Esq

J Dennis Esq
W Dennis Esq
K J Furness Esq
P Mappledoram Esq
N E Tebbitt Esq
R B Waddelow Esq
N R W Wright Esq

A R Yarrow Esq

Miss Lorna McShane (representing the Clerk to the Commissioners) and Mr David Jordan (District Engineer) were in attendance. Mr Geoff Beel attended the meeting, as agent for the Dennis family. with regard to minute no. C.293.

Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from C G Chambers Esq, I Chambers Esq, T Hughes Esq, H C Hurrell Esq, R J Lee Esq, G L P Wilson Esq and G R W Wright Esq.

C.288 Declarations of Interest

Miss McShane reminded the Commissioners of the importance of declaring an interest in any matter included in today's agenda that involved or was likely to affect any of them.

Messrs J and W Dennis declared interests in minute no. C.293.

C.289 Confirmation of Minutes

RESOLVED

That the Minutes of the Meetings of the Commissioners held on the 25th April 2019 are recorded correctly and that they be confirmed and signed.

C.290 Land Drainage Act 1991 East Cambridgeshire District Council

Further to minute C.287, Miss McShane reported that East Cambridgeshire District Council had re-appointed Councillor S Cheetham and appointed Councillor G Wilson to be Commissioners under the provisions of the Land Drainage Act 1991.

Miss McShane also reported that Councillor Smith had not been re-appointed.

C.291 Appointment of New Commissioners

No new Commissioners were appointed.

C.292 Proposal to Culvert at Third Bridge Farm, Hillrow, Causeway

Further to minute C.259, Miss McShane reported that a letter had been sent by the Clerk to Mr Johnson concerning the request to consider consenting for piping and filling of a ditch. The Chairman reported that planning permission had now been granted for the stables which made no reference to the culvert. Further correspondence regarding this planning application had been sent to the Ely Group of Drainage Boards.

RESOLVED

- i) That the Clerk write to Rebecca Saunt at East Cambridgeshire Planning Authority to advise that Haddenham Level DC is not part of the Ely Group of Drainage Boards and that future correspondence regarding planning applications should be addressed to the Chairman of the Commissioners, Mr Michael Church, to his home address or via the Middle Level Commissioners' office.
- ii) That the Clerk also write to Jean Heading, Clerk of the Ely Group of Drainage Boards, to request that she redirect any correspondence she receives for Haddenham Level DC.

C.293 Construction of Irrigation Reservoirs, Willow Hall Farm

Further to minute C.260, the Chairman reported that he had sent a letter, on behalf of the Commissioners, on the 5th October 2019 to Cambridgeshire County Council and that a copy of the letter had been sent to the Commissioners by e-mail for their information.

Mr Beel, as agent to the Dennis family, made the following submissions on behalf of his clients.

He was disappointed in the content of the letter sent to Cambridgeshire County Council regarding the application, in particular the last paragraph of the letter which stated that Haddenham Level DC would continue to object to the planning application until they were satisfied that, should planning permission be granted, there would be no adverse effect on the operations of the Commissioners or on their ratepayers. Mr Beel referred to the Stantec report which had been commissioned by the Commissioners and noted that the report stated that when finalised the reservoirs would improve the IDB network adding extra surface water storage and therefore reducing flood risk and that in summer the reservoirs would reduce pressure on the IDB network as less water would be needed to be abstracted for irrigation from the Board's watercourses. Mr Beel stated that the proposed development would need a licence from the Environment Agency and it was at this stage that the Commissioners' concerns could be addressed. Any abstraction licence will have conditions imposed which would address the Commissioners' concerns and the Commissioners would be consulted at this stage by the Environment Agency and any further concerns could be addressed at this stage.

The Commissioners discussed their continuing reservations about the application and supported the letter that had been sent to the Planning Authority about the construction of the reservoir and agreed that the Commissioners' objection should remain in place for the following reason:-

The applicant's expert hydrogeology report (produced by Enzygo) focused only on desktop calculations and any on-site monitoring programme had been minimal. The Commissioners expressed their concerns that this was not adequate considering the effect the gravel extraction could have on a large area of the fen, cropping and for the farmers interests. The Commissioners requested that a full on-site monitoring programme needed to be carried out on the site for at least 12 months so that they could consider actual results and requested that the Chairman obtain further information on this option from Stantec, the appointed consultants. They also suggested that the number of monitoring sites should be increased to give a fuller picture of the effect on the area. The Commissioners wished to see monitoring extended to give a more comprehensive coverage of the area which could be affected by the proposals. The Haddenham Level Drainage Commissioners' area extends to 7,300 acres with many different land levels and it was important that the applicants expand upon their proposal on how they intend to winter fill the reservoirs or transfer the water for irrigation from reservoirs without flooding other farmers with low lying land and the Commissioners requested that this detail was made available to them.

RESOLVED

- i) That the Chairman write to Helen Wass, Planning Officer at Cambridgeshire County Council to state that the Commissioners objection should remain in place and until some of the concerns raised by the Commissioners were addressed the application for the reservoirs should not be allowed to proceed.
- ii) That the Chairman go back to the Commissioners' appointed consultants, Stantec, to obtain further information to address the concerns raised by the Commissioners and ask for readings from the boreholes to be carried out by the consultant.
- iii) That, if necessary, an extra-ordinary meeting of the Commissioners should be called to discuss this further information from Stantec.

C.294 Restricted access to District drains

Further to minute C.262, Miss McShane reported that Mr Tyrrell had removed the trees and the Commissioners would continue to monitor the situation regarding the conifers.

C.295 Ouse Washes Section 10 Reservoir Middle Level and Level South Barrier Bank works

Further to minute C.265, Miss McShane referred to the Newsletters from the Environment Agency dated May and September 2019.

C.296 Clerk's Report

Miss McShane advised:-

- i) Middle Level Commissioners and Administered Boards Chairs Meeting

That a fourth Chair's Meeting will be held on the 26th November 2019.

ii) Association of Drainage Authorities

a) Annual Conference

That the Annual Conference of the Association of Drainage Authorities will be held in London on Wednesday the 13th November 2019.

b) Annual Conference of the River Great Ouse Branch

That the Annual Conference of the River Great Ouse branch of the Association will be held on Tuesday the 3rd March 2020.

c) Further Research on Eels

Further to minute C.190(a), ADA have advised that the valuable research work being carried out by Hull University on eels and eel behaviour in pumped catchments will be continuing for at least another two years. ADA consider that the financial support to the project to date provided by the IDBs has been positive and noted by the regulator (EA), leading to positive engagement on finding practical solutions at pumping station sites. They therefore consider that it would be useful if IDBs could consider whether they would be willing to continue their annual contributions to this research over that period.

RESOLVED

That the Commissioners contribute £100 over the next 2 years towards further research on eels.

d) Floodex 2020

That Floodex 2020 will be held at The Peterborough Arena on the 26th and 27th February 2020.

iii) Environment Agency consultation on changes to the Anglia (Central) RFCC

That a consultation took place on the constitution of three RFCCs following a formal proposal for two new unitary authorities to be formed in Northamptonshire (West Northamptonshire and North Northamptonshire) and was submitted and approved by the Government. These authorities will come into existence on the 1 April 2020.

In Buckinghamshire the decision to create a single unitary authority replacing the existing five councils has been made by the Government, subject to Parliamentary approval. Again this will come into existence on the 1 April 2020.

Each new authority will be a unitary authority, delivering all local government services in their respective areas, including their functions as a Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFAs).

The membership of Thames RFCC, Anglian (Central) RFCC, and Anglian (Northern) RFCC included representation from one or both county councils. To reflect the changes, membership of all three RFCCs will be varied before 1 December 2019.

At the same time to better reflect a catchment-based approach the name of Anglian (Central) RFCC has been changed to Anglian (Great Ouse) RFCC. ADA stated that it supported the naming revision

v) Tactical Plans for the Fens Agreement

That the Environment Agency have set up a multi-partner group (FRM for the Fens) to steer work on developing strategic plans for managing flood risk in the lower Great Ouse catchment. This work is considered necessary to address the impacts of population growth and climate change, which are particularly relevant in this area. The EA is requesting approval to the approach being taken in principle and follows the letter sent in January 2019. The perceived value of this work is that it pre-apportions the benefits (land and property which would flood if not defended) so that applying for grant should be more straight forward and the amount of grant possible clearer. This should give increased certainty and clarity and resolves the issue of double counting benefits where for example a property is protected from flooding by both EA and IDB assets. Work on developing the strategy could take up to 15 years though and the proposal also therefore includes a mechanism for allowing grant-in-aided works to progress during this time on a hold-the-line basis.

RESOLVED

That the Commissioners approve in principle

C.297 Cambridgeshire Flood Risk Management Partnership Update

Further to minute C.276, Miss McShane referred to the most recent matters raised by the Partnership.

C.298 District Labour
District Engineer's Wage Increase

The Commissioners gave consideration to the District Engineer's wages for 2019/2020.

Miss McShane referred to the Middle Level Commissioners' pay award indicator which was 3.0%.

RESOLVED

That the wages of the District Engineer be increased by 3.0% from 1st December 2019 as indicated on the Supplementary Schedule.

C.299 District Work Report

The Chairman reported that although at the last meeting it looked as if it was going to be a very dry summer, it had been possible to supply all the irrigation water that was required.

The Commissioners took delivery of the replacement Atlas 145W at the end of July and, apart from a couple of problems fixed under warranty, it appeared to be working very well and had been used mainly on the Commissioners' drains and the Catchwater. The Commissioners were about to start work for the Environment Agency clearing Dockerell Brook between Over and Willingham. With the delivery of the new machine there was some capacity to carry out more private work and anyone wishing for work to be carried out should contact the District Engineer.

It had been previously reported that the roadway to Sutton pump was in a bad state of repair and had become difficult to drive down and the Environment Agency had now repaired the road after the work being carried out on the South Level bank between the Anchor and the pumping station.

The Chairman reported that work on the Environment Agency's wetland project at Sutton was unlikely to commence before 2021/22.

RESOLVED

That the Report and the actions referred to therein be approved.

C.300 State-aided Schemes

Update on the EA grant-in-aid position

Miss McShane reported that the EA undertook a 'refresh' of its grant allocation schedule and optimised it to increase the likelihood of meeting the government outcome measure targets. As part of this some schemes were deferred in favour of those which could be delivered within the next two years with certainty and the programme has, as a consequence, become financially oversubscribed. This effectively means that there will be little or no chance of receiving grant for any new schemes between now and 2021 (at the earliest). This date marks the end of the six-year funding commitment and whilst it is understood that the EA are pressing hard to have another six-year settlement and, if agreed to by treasury, for this to be larger than the previous one to help address the increasing investment required to tackle climate change driven impacts. At this point in time we do not know what will happen and changes could be made in any event to the funding model, what outcome targets are or the process of securing grant. What is clear is that the further ahead that IDBs collectively plan their investment needs the more likely whatever grant is available will be accessible by them.

To plan for future investment needs it may be timely to carry out an asset survey of the Commissioners' pumping stations and similarly, as it is four years since these assets were valued for insurance reasons, it is also considered worthwhile revising the rebuilding estimates to reflect construction cost inflation.

RESOLVED

That the Consulting Engineers be requested to undertake an asset survey and recalculate the pumping station valuations.

C.301 Health and Safety Report

Further to minute C.261(a), the Commissioners considered the report received from Cope Safety Management following their visit to the District on the 8th August 2019.

The report highlighted that there was no barrier at the weedscreen to prevent persons falling into the water at Sutton Gault pumping station and the Chairman confirmed that work on fixing weedscreen rails was now in progress. The report also referred to risks with lone working as the Board's employee and any Commissioner are likely to operate at the pumping station on their own. It was therefore recommended that there was a suitable system in place to ensure the safety of operatives undertaking lone activities. The Chairman had discussions with the representatives of

Cope Safety Management and he was to seek assistance from them on the completion of the risk assessments for the Commissioners.

C.302 Completion of the Annual Return of the Commissioners – 2018/2019

- a) The Commissioners considered the comments of the Auditors on the Annual Return for the year ended on the 31st March 2019.

RESOLVED

- i) That, after fully considering the internal controls put in place by their appointed administrators and the checks carried out by their appointed internal auditors, the Board were satisfied that, in all significant respects, the internal control objectives were being achieved throughout the financial year to a standard adequate to meet the needs of the authority.
- ii) That the present policies concerning risk management, budget monitoring and insured value of properties are adequate for the size of the business and that they be continued.
- iii) That the Clerk and responsible financial officer review the internal audit strategy with the internal auditor to ensure the most appropriate method is in place to ensure the Board continue to comply with the Internal control objectives to a standard adequate to meet the needs of the authority.
- b) The Commissioners considered and approved the Audit Report of the Internal Auditor for the year ended on the 31st March 2019.

C.303 Defra IDB1 Returns

Miss McShane referred to the completed IDB1 form for 2018/2019 and to the letter from the Minister and Annual report summary and analysis received from Defra dated August 2019, which the Commissioners noted and approved.

C.304 Expenditure/Estimate Update

The Commissioners considered the Estimate Update for 2019/2020.

RESOLVED

That the update be approved.

C.305 Dates of next Meetings

Further to minute C.261(ii), consideration was given to the possibility of holding meetings more frequently. The Commissioners agreed that two meetings were sufficient.

RESOLVED

That the next Meetings of the Commissioners be held at The Baptist Hall, Haddenham as follows in 2020, viz:-

- i) Thursday the 23rd April 2020
- ii) Thursday the 5th November 2020.