

HADDENHAM LEVEL DRAINAGE COMMISSIONERS

At a Meeting of the Haddenham Level Drainage Commissioners
held at A G Wright & Son (Farms) Ltd. Hermitage Farm, Hillrow Causeway, Haddenham
on Thursday the 3rd September 2020

PRESENT

M Church (Chairman)	K J Furness Esq
G L P Wilson Esq (Vice Chairman)	R J Lee Esq
T B Chambers Esq	A Lensen Esq
S G Cheetham Esq	J Smith Esq
A W J Darby Esq	N E Tebbitt Esq
Mrs M E Darby	E F Veal Esq
R J Darby Esq	R B Waddelow Esq
J Dennis Esq	N R W Wright Esq
W Dennis Esq	A R Yarrow Esq

The Clerk to the Board and Mr David Jordan (District Engineer) were in attendance. Mrs L Flint and Mr R Flint attended as members of the public.

The Chairman recorded his thanks to all those involved in arranging a face to face meeting at short notice.

Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from P Mappedoram Esq and K Robinson Esq..

C.339 Declarations of Interest

The Clerk 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 C.348

C.340 Confirmation of Minutes

RESOLVED

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Commissioners held on the 23rd April 2020 are recorded correctly and that they be confirmed and signed.

C.341 Culverting of a watercourse at Catchwater Drain at Aldreth – W Mappedoram & Son

Further to minute C.311, with regards to installation of a hedge/fence it was noted during a recent site visit that the required works were progressing with the line of the hedge marked out and a gate installed. The Chairman felt that this was a sign of action and that the matter would not therefore need to be reported again at the next meeting.

C.342 District Work Report

Further to minute C.320(ii), the Chairman reported that he had not yet changed the telephone account from the Commissioners' name to his own so this would be a follow-on action.

C.343 District Labour

Employees' Contract of Employment and Benefits in kind

Further to minute C.321, letters in relation to taxable benefits had now been signed by both the Chairman and District Engineer.

C.344 Conservation Officer's BAP Report

Further to minute C.322, the Chairman confirmed that the mink trap the Commissioners had agreed to fund had been delivered and that the automated system had been tested when a moor hen triggered it. He reported that the moor hen had been released and hoped the next trigger would be a genuine mink.

C.345 Health and Safety

Further to minute C.328, it was reported that some hand railing had been installed as recommended and that a further visit from Cope Safety Management was being arranged.

C.346 Resignation of Mr Richard Wright

The Clerk referred to a letter received from Richard Wright dated the 28th April 2020 and confirmed that he had responded accordingly.

The Chairman referred to Mr Wright's resignation after approximately 70 years of service to the Commissioners.

RESOLVED

That Mr Wright's decision be received with regret and that the Commissioners' appreciation of the manner in which Mr Wright had undertaken his duties as Chairman be recorded in the minutes.

C.347 Appointment of Commissioners

The Chairman advised that, following the resignation of Richard Wright, Mr Jack Smith (representing A G Wright & Son (Farms)) Ltd had agreed to become a Commissioner. Andrew Lensen (representing AgReserves) had also agreed to become a Commissioner. He further advised that both gentlemen met the pre-requisites for this.

RESOLVED

That the appointment of Messrs Lensen and Smith be approved.

The Chairman welcomed Messrs Lensen and Smith to their first meeting of the Commissioners.

C.348 Construction of Irrigation Reservoirs – Willow Hall Farm

Further to minute C.313, the Chairman summarized the most recent events. He confirmed that he had written to Mr W Dennis and that he had responded and had provided a report, as had been requested at the last meeting. The Chairman advised that he had not forwarded this onto the Commissioners as he felt there were questions raised at the last meeting that should have been addressed within the report but in his opinion were either not addressed or still lacked the clarity which was required.

It was noted by the Chairman that more boreholes were required south of the site and that the recharge trenches detailed were not in fact recharge trenches but instead infiltration (soakaway) trenches which would not function in the same manner.

The Chairman also noted that there had been an issue over a water control structure on Mr W Dennis' land which had highlighted the importance of clarity and getting agreements drawn up in writing.

The Chairman wished to make it clear that he did not personally have any objection in principal to the gravel abstraction and the post abstraction land use. He also felt that the Commissioners had to recognise that it was not their place to take any view on what the Dennis family might wish to do with their land. It was however important that the interests of the Haddenham Level Drainage Commissioners were protected both short and long term which was the primary aim of this meeting.

Mr W Dennis advised that the proposals had been changed to 'wet abstraction' this was to remove the majority of risk of lowering ground water levels on surrounding farmland. He outlined that the new proposal was to carry out localised dewatering, remove overburden then allow ground water to return to normal levels and to abstract gravels underwater. Once gravel abstraction was completed in a cell then the area would be dewatered again to allow the cell sides to be clay lined. The finished land would then be filled from the Commissioners' system as the next cell was initially dewatered. The timings of the limited dewatering to be sympathetic to the agricultural growing seasons, eg October/November time.

Then questioned on depth of working it was noted that it would vary but that an example might be 5m in one location.

Several examples were given by the Commissioners where local farming activities had been, in some instances, unaffected by nearby gravel working and alternatively significantly affected. This served to highlight the uncertainty over impacts of gravel workings.

The Commissioners were reminded that farming enterprises had co-existed for many years and would continue to do so and it was therefore important that an amicable solution should be found. To do this it would be necessary for all farmers to be convinced that the proposal would not adversely affect their operations either short or long term. To achieve this a succinct document was required which laid out what was being proposed and what control measures were in place. In addition, there should be a formal agreement between the Dennis family and the Commissioners which needed to be in the form of a legally binding agreement. The latter to reflect the fact that it will not be the Dennis family who undertake the gravel abstraction but more likely one of the large gravel abstraction companies working in the area.

Discussions followed and covered suggestions including one proposal to require that the base and sides of the new reservoirs be lined with clay to ensure they were fully sealed post working. Another was to dig and dewater a large trench around the perimeter of the reservoir, to seal the outer edges of the reservoir and then to work it dry. It was concluded however that ultimately these were matters for the applicant and not the Commissioners to decide upon.

There was discussion on the timing of the agreement and it was agreed that it was important that the document be settled and signed before planning permission was granted.

An alternative option of setting up a section 106 agreement was suggested but it was felt as this would also need to be developed and agreed before planning permission was granted, there appeared to be little extra gained by going this route and there may be planning matters which constrained what could be held within it.

Mr W Dennis confirmed that he was still prepared to install the additional boreholes to the south of the site. It was noted that these would be outside of the development envelope but nevertheless important to monitor the impacts of any dewatering. Mr W Dennis stated that he was committed to installing them but advised that, due to COVID-19, the contractors were not responding to his requests at this time, which he anticipated was a temporary issue.

RESOLVED

- i) That Mr W Dennis prepare a draft agreement for comment. This to be circulated to all Commissioners for their input within a pre-defined period. The Chairman to collate the responses and the agreement was then to be adjusted accordingly before issuing. Once settled the agreement would be signed and the Commissioners would notify the planners accordingly.
- ii) That Mr W Dennis provide a document designed specifically for adjoining farmers which outlined in detail the plans for abstraction, the phasing and the mitigation measures. The aim will be to provide clarity to them on the points which mattered to them without them needing to trawl through several hundred documents which now existed on the planning portal.
- iii) That additional boreholes be installed south of the site by the applicant.