

HADDENHAM LEVEL DRAINAGE COMMISSIONERS

At an Extra Ordinary Special Meeting of the Haddenham Level Drainage Commissioners
hosted at the Baptist Hall, Station Road, Haddenham at 7.30pm on Monday 18th July 2022

PRESENT

M Church Esq (Chairman)	R Flint Esq
A Darby Esq	Mrs M Darby
R Darby Esq	N Tebbit Esq
J Dennis Esq	C Bidwell Esq
A R Yarrow Esq	J Smith Esq
G Wilson Esq	R Lee Esq

Mr John Gough – Mick George Ltd – by invitation

Mr Gary Roberts (Consulting) was in attendance.

Mr David Thomas – Clerk & Mr David Jordan – District Officer were also present

Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from:

T Hughes Esq A Lensen Esq H Hurrell Esq Cllr S Cheetham Esq

C.463 Declarations of Interest

Mr Jonathan Dennis Esq declared an interest in the matter of this meeting.

C.464 Confirmation of Minutes

RESOLVED

That the Minutes of the Meetings of the Commissioners held on the 28th April 2022 are recorded correctly and that they be confirmed and signed.

C.465 Matters arising from the minutes.

C440 – The Clerk reported that no letter has yet been sent but that this would be attended to shortly.

C443 (vi) – The Clerk reported that an order has been placed and whilst the equipment has not yet been installed it would be soon and should be operational by the end of the summer.

C445 – The chairman advised that this work was awaiting the post abstraction period when system water levels could be dropped.

C456 – The Chairman reported that he and the District Officer had reviewed several options and concluded that an electronic height limiter would be most suitable for the Board's needs. Board members had confirmed their agreement to this by a majority vote by email. The value of the order placed was £4.4K.

C464 – The Chairman noted that the District Officer had inspected the bank slip on 2nd Drain but that he had not yet had the chance to do so.

C.466 Appointment of Vice Chairman

The Chairman outlined the Background to the existing appointment which had always been seen as an interim measure. He went on to point out that ideally the Vice Chairman would be someone who was prepared to take over the role of Chairman when he retired, should the members be content with this. He considered that he had now found a potential candidate in Mr J Smith and proposed that he be appointed. The Current Vice Chairman seconded this proposal and members voted unanimously in favour. The new Vice Chairman then took a seat next to the Chairman for the remainder of the meeting.

RESOLVED

That Mr J Smith be appointed Vice Chairman with immediate effect and that it be recorded in these minutes that the Commissioners wished to thank the retiring Vice Chairmen for the significant support he had provided over the years he had been in post.

C.467 Construction of Irrigation Reservoirs – Willow Hall Farm

The Chairman introduced this item by going through its history and the sequence of events surrounding the Boards objections to the application. He wished however that it again be recorded that the Commissioners were not against the principle of the creation of water resource reservoirs, nor to the extraction of minerals. They were however concerned with the potential impacts that could arise from the scheme during and post construction. He then invited John Gough (Planning Director – Mick George) to speak on behalf of the applicant.

Mr Gough went through the plans and proposals. He noted that the original plans for dewatering had been developed before Mick George had been appointed as the contractor and that once work had started with the archaeological elements it soon became apparent that a rethink to dewatering was needed. Whilst noting that the current plans diverted from what had previously been proposed he stated that it was considered that the new proposals would still not impact negatively upon adjacent landowners. He also felt that the first stages of the works would require the largest amount of dewatering, with later phases having less need to do so.

In response to a question Mr Gough thought that it may be possible to thrust bore a pipe under the highway which could address one of the Commissioner's concerns regarding water management.

The Chairman noted that the impact of dewatering could expand well beyond what was being suggested and that as it seemed now agreed (Mr Gough did not dispute this) that the original hydrological report was inaccurate. Mr Gough noted that only in the first phase was it necessary to

dispose of water into the Commissioner's system in large quantities. After this water can be moved from cell to cell.

A question was raised as to why boreholes 13 and 14 had been taken out of the monitoring regime under the revised proposals. Mr Gough stated that this was not the intention and was unclear as to why the report suggested they would not be used. He stated that it was clear in the accompanying letter that they would be used.

The Clerk enquired why Mick George had not attempted to meet with the Commissioners prior to submitting the variation as it would be clear that they had an interest. He also noted that they were already in breach of the agreement signed by William Dennis and the Commissioners and also noted that they had not been consulted when an emergency extension had been applied for from the EA to extend the abstraction period this spring.

Mr Lee wished to express his opinion that the Commissioner's concerns may be unfounded as mineral abstractions that had taken place on the north side of the Washes had had no negative impact upon crops. The Chairman noted that there were however other examples where a significant impact had been sustained and it was this uncertainty which needed addressing. He noted that the local RSPB site required clay lining before it was possible to stabilize the negative impacts of the workings.

Mr Gough noted that irrigation should not be impacted and that the recharge trenches should help dissipate the excess water. It was however pointed out that for many crops ground water table can be very important for example barley and wheat will struggle if the water table is below 1.5/2m.

Mr Roberts noted that the new ditch line which was the subject of a recent consent was deeper and wider than it needed to be as a boundary ditch. Mr Gough stated that this was needed as the ditch was to be used as a recharge trench. Mr Roberts noted that this had not been advised in the consent application and it may be that a further consent would be required for this. The Chairman noted that this new ditch ran into the Division Drain and that he would be concerned if additional water from this new ditch had to be pumped.

Mr Gough was asked what water level would be retained in the recharge trenches. He replied the aim would be to have a minimum depth of 400mm all year round.

In response to a question on sealing the excavations Mr Gough stated that in the first year the excavation will not be sealed with clay but instead overburden. However, although the material in-situ was reasonably porous at the moment, once dug, placed and compacted he expected it not to be.

On a question on time taken to recover water table levels. Mr Gough expected that if the hands-off trigger was reached it would take a month for levels to recover. Members were concerned by this as a month with a water deficit in the critical growing period could have huge consequences to yields and hence the livelihoods of farmers. Mr Gough noted that the water table was currently around 2m below the surface.

The Chairman stated that it would be the aim of any agreements if reached that these be dependent upon a design that sought to maintain SOP levels. He also considered that the Commissioners had already been forced to give ground on water abstraction and it was unreasonable to expect them to give more.

Mr Roberts noted that the Commissioners should have been receiving borehole monitoring records every two weeks under the agreement but that this had not happened and hence needed to be addressed.

A question was raised as to why the proposed recharge trench did not extend around the whole site. Mr Gough responded that it was considered that water was moving naturally southwards from the porous river bed north of the site.

The last comment gave rise to concerns that the seepage coupled with the dewatering in winter would then lead to increases in the amount of water the Commissioners needed to pump. Mr Gough acknowledged this and believed that precedents had been set elsewhere in which an IDB was reimbursed for the extra-over pumping costs.

It was pointed out that all of this was a significant deviation from the original stated plan which was linked with planning permission which was to discharge at greenfield run-off rates.

Mr Gough stated that Mick George would be obtaining all necessary abstraction licences. He did not seem aware that the Commissioners consent would also be required under its byelaws.

The Commissioners then voted upon whether or not to object to the application to the County Council to vary the original planning permission. All were in favour, Mr Lee abstained from the vote.

RESOLUTION

Submit an objection to the variation stating the reasons for objection.

It was suggested to Mr Gough that the best course of action would be to withdraw the application and arrange to meet with representatives of the Commissioners to see if agreement could be reached on some alternative proposals.