CONINGTON & HOLME INTERNAL DRAINAGE BOARD

Special Meeting of the Conington & Holme Internal Drainage Board
hosted at Holme Village Hall at 4:30pm on Wednesday 6th March 2024

PRESENT

R Elmore D Elmore J Racey P Keates T Alban

Paul Burrows, clerk to the Board was also in attendance

Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from T West and T Simpson.

B.1151 Declarations of Interest

The Clerk reminded Members of the importance of declaring an interest in any matter included in today's agenda that involved or was likely to affect any individual on the Board.

B.1152 Confirmation of Minutes

RESOLVED

> That the Minutes of the Board held on 8th June 2023 were recorded correctly and that they be confirmed and signed.

B.1153 Matters arising from the minutes.

None raised

B.1154 Board Viability & Membership

The Clerk summarised his actions on behalf of the Board since their last meeting. He confirmed that he had both spoken and written to Defra, the Environment Agency, the Association of Drainage Authorities (ADA) and Huntingdonshire District Council concerning the Board's viability as well as both landowners within the pumped district and Network Rail.

He reported that Defra had verbally confirmed that in order to function a Board needs to have an appoint a Chair. Therefore, given J Racey's view and position articulated at the Board's previous meeting, the clerk wrote to all Board members seeking their self-nomination for the Chair role.

In response to this G Bliss wrote back to announce he was stepping back from all is local IDB membership now he had retired from farming.

Savill's also wrote to the Board regarding A Glanville's appointment to confirm that the Rochester Bridge Trust had not given Savills the instruction to represent them on the IDB and therefore have removed A Glanville as a member. D Elmore was surprised by this given the longstanding membership from Savills on behalf of the Trust, with one member even coming from London for a previous meeting. The clerk confirmed he had subsequently written on behalf of the Board to the Trust asking them to consider nominating someone to fill the vacancy given their substantial landholding interests in the district.

The Clerk confirmed that currently the Board had two elected member vacancies from a composition of eight. T Alban is the one eligible member appointed by Huntingdonshire District Council and the quorum for a meeting is five. The Clerk outlined that the Board could co-opt members in-between election periods. J Racey highlighted that given the size of the district there was no-one else he could think of that had an interest or would be willing to join the Board. T Alban asked about Parish Council membership and the clerk confirmed that the Board could co-opt members from the Parish Council into elected member places.

P Keates outlined how active he had been in his first year within the Board's district and how important the pumping station was to his business interests. He stepped in as Vice Chair at last year's meeting, given he was new to farming in the Fens. He added that in order for the Board to continue to function he would be willing to nominate himself as Chairman as long as he could draw on the knowledge and expertise from other members. J Racey seconded P Keates' nomination and it was carried unanimously.

RESOLVED

P Keates appointed as Chairman

B.1155 Conington Pumping Station Works

The Clerk started by reiterating the MLC's assessment of Conington Pumping Station in that in their view it is an asset at the of its reliable working design life and needs replacing. He added that his and MLC staff time working on the Board's viability issue will be billed to the Board as it is considered over and above their normal service provision. He added that the MLC Exec Committee have agreed for this to be paid back in a phased manner. The clerk reported that between June 2023 and Jan 2024 he had invested 17.5 hours of time on behalf of the Board.

The Clerk outlined that Network Rail had completed a modelling assessment and were currently digesting it. P Keates mentioned that he had facilitated two visits from engineers and ecologists employed by Network Rail and they came at a time when flows were high and the culvert under the railway under stress. D Elmore added that Network Rail were reportedly concerned regarding the Great Fen project and its impact on the mainline so should realise they benefit from local drainage. R Elmore added that he understood the railway to be built on wooden foundations.

He added that the electrical works undertaken at landowner expenses on the pumping station before Winter had seemingly solved the issues and that the pumps had been working well over the extreme winter weather. He added that he had undertaken at his expense significant amount of drain maintenance works through winter to ensure conveyance of water and to reduce the pressure on channel banks.

P Keates outlined the latest in terms of the landowner led plan for pumping station works that is being led by Hannah Skingley of Brown & Co as land agent to Peter Davies. A quote has been received from a contractor recommended by the MLC M&E Engineer who had undertaken similar works on similar pumps within the area.

The proposal is to drain-down in June 2024, remove and overhaul pump 1 and undertake civils including piling to underpin the foundations of the station. The control panel would also likely be replaced. Pump 2 would remain in situ and available to deal with any flows through the summer period, with a temporary pump available as part of the works. A final quote is to be received soon but the estimated costs are between £120k-£150k. He outlined that the objective was to secure a 10-year benefit of the works by extending the existing asset's life.

D Elmore asked about funding and the £75m for IDBs recently announced by government. The Clerk outlined that as yet there was no clarity on what exactly the funding was for, how it would be distributed and what conditions may come with it. He added that he was liaising with ADA on this topic. He added that he anticipated the bulk of funding would be for the additional running and pumping costs pressures of the extreme wet winter and the high energy costs. Therefore, some of the Board's additional running costs may secure funding from this new money. He added that there may be funding within this for asset repairs and would keep Conington PS in mind when details come through.

In terms of funding, P Keates said that given the urgency we need to move forward on the presumption there is no government funding for the capital works to the station, he outlined that there were conversations ongoing between Sentry Farms and Peter Davies and with Rochester Bridge Trust, alongside Network Rail. He added that nothing as yet had been agreed but there was a commitment to work together. P Keates added that the option of providing the IDB with the funds had been discounted therefore the discussions that need to be had are about how the landowners undertake work on an IDB asset and then what happens to that asset once the works are completed.

The Clerk outlined that the Board needs to consider a resolution as to whether or not to agree for the landowners to lead and deliver works to the Board's asset. He reminded the Board that they had no funds available to bring in suitable legal or technical advice, so there were unknown risks and issues for the Board take account of. He added that the Board ought to consider whether the risks of not enabling the works were greater than the risks associated with the landowners progressing them on the IDB's asset. He added that whilst the works would hopefully buy the IDB and landowners time, it does not address the underpinning issue of the viability of the Board and the future of the pumping station. He added that the landowners would need to assure themselves as there are always financial and time risks associated with works of this type. J Racey acknowledged that they Board had no choice. T Alban agreed. The Clerk added that whilst far from ideal, this seems not dissimilar to how the Board has previously operated with P Davies undertaking works on Board's drain and assets at his own expense rather than via the Board.

The Clerk added that there were three aspects he had identified where the Board needs to ensure its responsibilities. Firstly, that the landowners secure appropriate consent from the Board and asked whether the Board would consider waving the fees. Secondly, the environmental screening and assurance via the MLC's Environment Officer. Thirdly, that once the works are complete that the M&E Engineer will review to determine whether MLC's service provision arrangements are available to the Board.

D Elmore added that in one way or another the landowners will have to pay, either as per this approach, or via drainage rates and/or agreements with their tenants. P Keates added that this approach also does not reduce the rate requirement for the IDB, indeed in his view the rate will need to increase so the IDB is funding the maintenance required. The Clerk added that a session between P Keates and the Treasurer ahead of the June meeting is important to develop the budget estimates and associated rate to recommend to the Board.

<u>RESOLVED</u>

> Agree for the landowners to undertake works to Conington Pumping Station and, recognising P Keates dual interests, delegate any decision making the Board may need to make to D Elmore or T Alban (subject to him checking with the Council) in conjunction with the clerk.
>
> Agree to waive any consent fee.

<u>B.1156 ADA Subscription</u>

The Clerk highlighted that the invoice for 2024/25 subscriptions had been received and highlighted the 6% increase. P Keates asked about the role ADA plays and D Elmore referred to their good work negotiating for IDBs on the white/red diesel issue. The clerk also highlighted how key they will potentially be within the surprise £75m budget announcement for IDBs.

RESOLVED

> The Clerk to contact ADA to establish if there could be a discount or other payment arrangement given the Board's financial and viability position.

B.1157 Date & Time of next Meeting

Tuesday 4th June 2024, 17:30, Holme Village Hall

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Chair

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Date