

Environment Agency, Anglian Region

Minutes of the Anglian (Eastern) Regional Flood & Coastal Committee / Internal Drainage Board Liaison Meeting

Held on 21 January 2015 at Dragonfly House, Norwich

Present:

Paul Hayden, Chairman, RFCC
Cllr Angie Fitch-Tillett, RFCC
Cllr Richard Bird, RFCC
Cllr Mick Castle, RFCC
Giles Bloomfield, Broads IDB
Ben Blower, Clerk to Waveney IDB
John Carrick, Vice Chairman, Norfolk Rivers IDB
Bryan Collen, Chairman, Waveney, Lower Yare and Lothingland IDB
Simon Daniels, (Broads (2006 IDB)
David Papworth, Chairman, Norfolk Rivers IDB
Tony Goodwin, IDB
Paul Mitchelmore, Broadland Flood Alleviation Project (BFAP)
Diane Monsey, NE
Nick Johnson, Norfolk County Council
Graham Brown, Norfolk County Council
Jane Burch, Suffolk County Council
Graham Verrier, EA, - Area Flood & Coastal Risk Manager
Peta Denham, EA – Operations Manager (Norfolk and Suffolk)
Tim Gornall, EA
Debbie Sheldrake, EA – PA to Area Flood & Coastal Risk Manager

Apologies:

Debbie Rayner, RFCC
Henry Cator, Chairman, ADA
Phil Camamile, Chief Executive, Water Management Alliance
Peter Cargill, Vice Chairman, Waveney, Lower Yare and Lothingland IDB
Rob Wise, NFU
Andrew Brasnett, EA Accountant

1. Welcome and Introductions

- 1.1 The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions were made. He apologised that the meeting scheduled for November 2014 did not take place. It was agreed that the next meeting should be held on the same day as the Eastern Branch ADA meeting so that a venue could be shared. Nick Johnson offered to host the meetings at Norfolk County Council offices.

2. Minutes of last Meeting and Matters Arising

- 2.1 The Minutes were agreed as an accurate record of the meeting.
2.2 Point 1.5 There was a separate agenda item to discuss EA structures.
2.3 Point 4.9 Phil Camamile had produced a paper for the RFCC to explain the role of IDBs. This will be repeated as new RFCC members need to be kept informed.

- 2.4 Point 9.5 Graham Verrier had spoken to Mark Johnson about withdrawal of maintenance. It was also confirmed at the January RFCC meeting that consultation would take place with landowners before the Committee are asked to consider implementation of the maintenance protocol.

3. ADA Update

- 3.1 In Henry Cator's absence Bryan Collen gave the update from the ADA October meeting.
- 3.2 He advised that the transfer to a limited company was complete and the number of Board members had reduced to 14.
- 3.3 Jean Venables, who had been acting Chief Executive for the past nine years, was retiring and the Board decided the post should be split. Innes Thompson, formerly FCRM Manager at the EA, has been appointed Chief Executive and Ian Moody, formerly NFU, has been appointed in a technical advisory role.
- 3.4 There was a 4% increase in the subscription level.
- 3.5 Bryan Collen advised that there was concern about the cost of installation and running of pumps when replacing with eel friendly versions. Jane Burch expressed concern about additional money having to go towards delivering Eel regulations and asked if the IDB chairs were doing anything collectively to raise this issue. Giles Bloomfield advised that the maintenance issue has been put forward as part of a national trial. Graham Verrier said he was reluctant to commit further local RFCC money to a national project when other funding is not forthcoming to supporting this work. The Chairman said it would be useful if ADA made their concerns known as well. Bryan Collen advised that ADA had asked if all members would supply costs back to them where pumping stations were being replaced with eel friendly pumps.
- 3.6 Ben Blower raised the question of whether there could be derogation for the pumping stations that need to be replaced as there was derogation for those marked as priority. Graham Verrier said they would need to find out what the criteria were for the derogations.
- 3.7 Tony Goodwin advised that they had an expert investigating whether there were eels in the catchments.
- 3.8 The main debate at the ADA meeting was the proposal to form a new body for the Somerset river basins, which, it was felt, would add a further layer of bureaucracy in decision making but would not have ADA's level of local knowledge.
- 3.9 The Chairman advised that the RFCC were also looking closely at what was happening in Somerset. He advised that in Essex, where there were no IDBs, the option of using Public Sector Cooperation Agreements (PSCA) was being explored. A meeting between Henry Cator, Phil Camamile and some Essex landowners had been held to discuss if the PSCA could be used to fund works in Essex. RFCC have supported part funding a post which should facilitate this.

4. Demaining Update

- 4.1 Tm Gornall gave a brief update on the main river variations. There were five stretches of watercourse about to be demained last year when the process was put on hold as a consequence of the Water Act.
- 4.2 For designation changes the EA board would now sign off a Main River Variation instead of Defra. Once signed off, the changes can be made to the main river map. Graham Verrier advised that in the case of errors in the map he could approve any changes that need to be made. When the external consultation has been completed a paper will be prepared for the RFCC.
- 4.3 The variations would be ready to be progressed as soon as the process was confirmed locally as all the preparation had been done.

5. Update on Norfolk Rivers IDB Catchment Approach

- 5.1 In Phil Camamile's absence Graham Verrier gave an update.
- 5.2 A meeting was scheduled for 23 January between Phil Camamile and EA officers. Graham Verrier confirmed that the EA were still keen to progress this with the IDBs. Phil Camamile was concerned that the highland water contributions applied through the revenue funding was being squeezed and that that money would eventually cease and the IDBs would struggle to be IDBs anymore. They were looking at other ways we might be able to do things differently. Graham Verrier expressed concern that the EA have to bid for money to fund maintenance on watercourses and if there was less main river the bid would be for less money. Any changes could not be to the detriment of funding of this area as this would make the EA field teams unviable.
- 5.3 Graham Verrier reported that there had been discussion between Phil Camamile and the EA about how maintenance is delivered on watercourses using PSCAs. In order to deliver the maintenance programme most effectively, making the money go as far as possible, instead of using contractors the EA or IDB could deliver works. The Chairman reiterated that RFCC wanted the work to be done by whoever could deliver it to the right standard at the best cost. In Essex it might be an individual landowner which would mean more money for the EA workforce to do more skilled work to which they are better suited. The PSCA obviates the need to go through the lengthy EU procurement procedure.
- 5.4 David Papworth made the point that IDB standards and frequency of maintenance were much higher than EA were able to achieve. Cllr Fitch Tillett agreed that the EA were unable to match the IDB standards due to funding issues.
- 5.5 Giles Bloomfield said that the real issue was that GDC was a tax on landowners for a service they were not receiving in their catchments.

6. Maintenance Programme 2015/16

- 6.1 Peta Denham introduced herself to the group and gave a quick overview of her background as Operations Manager in Cambs & Beds (formerly Central Area) and her previous dealings with IDBs in Great Ouse catchment. Peta asked that anyone wishing to could contact her on 01473 706532 or at peta.denham@environment-agency.gov.uk.
- 6.2 The maintenance programme had been circulated and Peta Denham highlighted some of the works carried out.
- 6.3 Following the tidal surge in December 2013 recovery works were completed by October 2014, the deadline set by Government to bring defences back into as good, or better than, before the surge.
- 6.4 Works at Blakeney Freshes, which were carried out by EA workforce at less than half the price tendered by contractors, were highly commended by many stakeholders. Peta Denham advised that the Norfolk & Suffolk field teams were relatively unique in the EA in that they were still undertaking big construction works rather than contracting out. The Chairman added his thanks to the team. Giles Bloomfield reported that the IDB had done works on desilting Blakeney Freshes drain while the EA works were being carried out.
- 6.5 Works were carried out to improve the standard of protection at Waldringfield using coastal communities funding.
- 6.6 Peta Denham advised that emergency works had started at East Lane, Bawdsey, which was a difficult area to maintain as it was susceptible to erosion and movement.

She stressed that the coast line had to be looked at strategically to see which works were economic. Jane Burch expressed the view that the definition of economic should not relate just to property.

- 6.7 The full 2014/15 maintenance programme was published on the gov.uk website. The paper would be circulated with the minutes, together with a link to the full programme.

6.8 Action: Debbie Sheldrake to circulate maintenance paper, together with link to the full programme on the gov.uk website.

- 6.9 Peta Denham advised that the 2015/16 maintenance programme was still being developed. An indicative allocation of £6.3M had been given for Essex, Norfolk and Suffolk. The meeting noted that the EA was usually fully funded for minimum needs, which were statutory requirements such as health and safety works, but not for all identified needs. Local income such as IDB precept, local levy and GDC was vital. Giles Bloomfield and members of Peta Denham's Operations team had been working together to identify partnership working opportunities across all the river systems. These discussions would continue to explore opportunities.

- 6.10 The Chairman advised there was £450k from local levy to be put into the maintenance budget. He stressed the importance of maintenance of assets and thanked local authorities who supported the raise in local levy to allow this to happen.

- 6.11 Jane Burch pointed out that the Alde Ore estuary has lacked maintenance and there should be more national funding.

- 6.12 Cllr Bird asked if people who were on community pay back schemes could help to do works. Peta Denham did not think this had been looked into because of the health and safety risks.

- 6.12 In response to Cllr Bird's question about coastal community fund Jane Burch advised that it was currently closed and did not know when it would re-open. Cllr Bird and Jane Burch to liaise on funding options. Jane Burch requested that the link to the EACG partnership funding pack was circulated to the group.

6.13 Action: Cllr Bird and Jane Burch to liaise regarding funding options

6.14 Action: Debbie Sheldrake to circulate the link to the EACG partnership funding pack to the group.

- 6.15 Cllr Bird raised the new taxation rules allowing breaks for contributors to funding schemes. Jane Burch advised that clarification was being sought on whether a small landowner as well as a private business could benefit from tax relief. The Chairman advised that the issue of tax break was still a work in progress and RFCC have requested an update at the April meeting.

7. River Wensum Update

- 7.1 Peta Denham circulated the latest River Wensum Restoration Strategy update. John Carrick congratulated the project on winning an award for greater biodiversity but expressed concern that no maintenance has been done on the site. A number of live stock had been lost in the silt which had built up as a result. He would welcome more dialogue with EA and NE. Peta Denham gave John Carrick a list of maintenance works scheduled for the River Wensum, most of which would be carried out soon. The list would be circulated with the minutes. If there were any questions Peta Denham would be happy to deal with them on the contact details provided above.

7.2 Action: Debbie Sheldrake to circulate list of maintenance work to be carried out on River Wensum with minutes

- 7.3 Tony Goodwin advised that the upper reaches of the River Wensum were designated as an IDB watercourse under the Norfolk Rivers IDB who have taken over that part of the watercourse and retained Atkins as consultants to carry out restoration work and maintenance.

8. Broads Update

- 8.1 Paul Mitchelmore, Project Manager for the Broadland Flood Alleviation Project (BFAP), advised that the project was now in its final stages. There had been a flood event in early January when part of the new cross wall in Compartment 28 was undermined.
- 8.2 In the tidal surge of December 2013 there were two minor breaches in Broadland which were repaired by October 2014.
- 8.3 There had been an issue at Peto's Marsh where some cross piling had fallen over. Ben Blower raised the issue of maintenance of the original river wall at Peto's Marsh. Paul Mitchelmore advised that until the new cross wall was finished BFAP were maintaining responsibility but the cross piling damage occurred before responsibility was handed over.
- 8.4 The maintenance phase was about to begin with crest raising work and pile removal. Over the next five years the Broadland team would be working closely with the Norfolk & Suffolk Operations team.
- 8.5 Ben Blower raised the issue of regular overtopping at St Olaves. Paul Mitchelmore advised that the problem was seepage through the ground where tidal flaps had become silted up, rather than overtopping. Ben Blower requested that the IDB could be kept informed of what was happening in order to keep the landowner informed.
- 8.6 Ben Blower asked when White Cast work would be carried out as access to Barnby pumping station would be difficult if it was not completed. Paul Mitchelmore advised it was in the programme for March. It was agreed that Ben Blower and Paul Mitchelmore should continue discussions after the meeting.
- 8.7 Action: Ben Blower/Paul Mitchelmore to discuss Broadland issues outside of the meeting**
- 8.8 Tony Goodwin asked how undefended areas could be defended as part of the Broadland project. Paul Mitchelmore advised that there would need to be confidence that benefits were substantial enough.
- 8.9 Simon Daniels congratulated BESL on the works they had done.

9. LLFAs

- 9.1 Nick Johnson gave an update on SUDs. There was a consultation finishing on 29 January which proposed putting LLFAs back in the planning regime. He advised that there was no money or resource to provide this advice.
- 9.2 Giles Bloomfield reported that over 150 properties, including commercial properties had flooded in Norfolk since May 2014. A flood investigation report had been published which identified the frequency of the flooding. A link to the report would be sent with the minutes.
- 9.3 Action: Debbie Sheldrake to send link to flood investigation report with the minutes**
- 9.4 The LFRM partnership strategy would be going to consultation on 13 March. Anyone who wanted to feed into this should let Nick Johnson know.

9.5 Action: Anyone wanting to feed into the LFRM partnership strategy to let Nick Johnson know

9.6 Jane Burch reiterated the frustration over SUDs in Suffolk and reported that more resource would be needed if LLFAs were to be statutory consultees.

9.7 Jane Burch advised that the holistic water project on the Deben catchment was progressing well.

10. EA structures

10.1 Graham Verrier had copies of the latest EA FCRM staff structure available for members of the group to take with them. They would also be circulated with the minutes. He advised that the EA had moved from a three tier to a two tier organisation with National and Area teams. The biggest impact was on the programming team. From 1 February the programming team leader would report to Graham Verrier. Tim Gornall would remain the main point of contact for IDBs but contact details of team leaders were available on the structure charts.

10.2 Action: Debbie Sheldrake to circulate EA staff structures with the minutes

11. Any Other Business

11.1 Next meeting to be in November 2015 on the same day as the ADA meeting. If anyone had any ideas of where the meeting could be held please advise Debbie Sheldrake.

11.2 David Papworth noted that the meeting was very useful and should be continued.

11.3 Giles Bloomfield asked about the proposed move to environment permitting rather than flood defence consents. Graham Verrier agreed to bring up at November meeting.

11.4 Action: Proposed move from flood defence consents to environment permitting to be an agenda item for November meeting
Action: Date and venue for next meeting to be circulated