

4th March 2014

**MINUTES of the THIRTY-FIFTH ANNUAL CONFERENCE
of the RIVER GREAT OUSE BRANCH of the
ASSOCIATION OF DRAINAGE AUTHORITIES**

held at Prickwillow Village Hall, Prickwillow, near Ely, on Tuesday 4th March 2014 at 2.30 p.m.

Present

A.J. Morbey, Esq., in the Chair

J. Anderson, Esq.,	Bluntisham
Mrs. L. Campbell	Downham Market Group
H. Cator, Esq.,	ADA
M. Church, Esq.,	Haddenham Level
G. Cirillo, Esq.,	Southery & District
C. Crofts, Esq.,	Upwell
G. Dann, Esq.,	Kings Lynn
Ms. P. Denham	Environment Agency
Mrs. F. Dunne	Old West
B. Easom, Esq.,	R.F.C.C. (Central)
J. Fenn, Esq.,	Middle Level
W.L. Forbes, Esq.,	Burnt Fen
M.J. Gilbert, Esq.,	Littleport & Downham
A. Gosling, Esq.,	Environment Agency
J.J.F. Graves, Esq.,	Old West
J. Heading, Esq.,	Manea & Welney
Mrs. J.E. Heading	Ely Group
R. Hill, Esq.,	Middle Level
C.A. Holman, Esq.,	Burnt Fen/Southery
H. Hurrell, Esq.,	Swaffham
B.K. Jarman, Esq.,	Mildenhall
A.L. Lee, Esq.,	Cawdle Fen
W. Legge, Esq.,	Downham Market Group
J.W. Lloyd, Esq.,	Cawdle Fen
J.S. Martin, Esq.,	Littleport & Downham/Waterbeach
A. Newton, Esq.,	Ely Group
J. Oldfield, Esq.,	Bedford Group
A.W. Peacock, Esq.,	Padnal & Waterden
E.P. Rice, Esq.,	Padnal & Waterden
B.H. Sanders, Esq.,	Waterbeach Level
I. Smith, Esq.,	Middle Level
D.C. Thomas, Esq.,	Middle Level
Dr. J. Venables	A.D.A.
P. Walker, Esq.,	Downham and Stow
A. White, Esq.,	Stoke Ferry
A. Williamson, Esq.,	East of Ouse
K.O. Winters, Esq.,	Littleport & Downham
C. Wright, Esq.,	East Harling
A. Yarrow, Esq.,	Haddenham/Littleport

WORKS OF THE ENVIRONMENT AGENCY – Ms. Peta Denham, Area Flood Risk Manager

Peta Denham informed Members that following news and media reports it would be pertinent to talk about the recent flooding. She said that David Rooke, EA's Director of Flood and Coastal Risk Management had been invited to the NFU Conference on 26th February and she would like to go through the main points of his presentation with Members.

Ms. Denham said that matters had kicked off with the East Coastal Tidal Surge on Wednesday 5th December which caused extensive coastal flooding, worse than 60 years ago.

The Thames Barrier was installed 30 years ago and had been deployed a total of 165 times – 41 times of which had been this winter – that is a quarter of the total closures, within the last three months.

Met Office statistics showed prolonged heavy rain from early December – and more tidal surges – breaking records of the last 100 years. The hardest hit area was the South of England.

Record river flows and ground water levels contributed to flooding and land was still sensitive to any rainfall even now.

In December 2013, 650 properties on the East Coast were flooded and as at 20th February, 2014, a total of 1,800 in England properties are known to have flooded.

Since the beginning of December the EA have protected 2,500 square kilometres of farmland and over 1.4million properties, by working day and night, utilising 5,000 members to include manning pumping stations, looking after defences and clearing blockages.

Ms. Denham visited Somerset following the 2012 floods but the 2013/14 were worse and Somerset had been hardest hit. She reported that the EA had done all it could to prevent flooding including utilising 64 pumps night and day, costing in excess of £6m. The £10m. earmarked by Government was a drop in the ocean.

Responses after flooding included the IDBs, other authorities and DEFRA being involved in the Somerset Plan to look at managing water levels in the future. Somerset County Council was managing the Plan. Dredging, run-off, community, economic impact, finances and short term/medium and long term plans would be part of the discussions. Dredging would start in Somerset this month when it was safe to do so and 8km. of key stretches of the Rivers Tone and Parrett near Boroughbridge where silt dredging was needed.

Funding for FCRM activities – for Great Ouse as at 6.2.14, 14/15 period – Grant in Aid £6.4m for capital works and £0.5m capital grants for IDB works. £6.4m. revenue for E.A. giving a total of £13.3m. for 2014/15.

The EA worked to DEFRA/Treasury guidance which had changed since 1980s/1990s following food mountains when FRM Grant in Aid moved away to urban areas. Agricultural benefits are based on land value and not crop values. It will be difficult in the future to gain funding to spend on defences in the Fens.

EA have had to field large number of enquiries from policy change to dredging. DEFRA have issued a briefing note to RFCC Chairmen that states that current FRM funding policy has not changed on dredging/partnership funding. It may be reviewed in light of the recent flood events. However, we still needed to demonstrate value for money.

WORKS OF THE ENVIRONMENT AGENCY – Mr. Adrian Gosling, Area Operations Manager

Mr. A. Gosling started by saying that the EA had been very busy recently and that he wanted to give an overview of the current position regarding maintenance.

- **East Coast Surge** – 5 Dec, 2013 Levels in Kings Lynn were above levels recorded in 1953 and 1978. This tested defences, especially in Kings Lynn, along the tidal river and the coast from Snettisham to Hunstanton where 75% of the width of the shingle bank was washed away. Additional money was allocated to the recovery and works had now been completed on the shingle bank. The tidal defences in Kings Lynn had been re-inspected and the additional works identified are included in the tidal defences project starting in April. At the Denver Little Eyes, dam boards were fitted before Christmas to prevent further damage. Repairs are planned to be undertaken in the first quarter of the next financial year. Current high tides have passed without too many issues.

- **Incidents this year** – mainly SE and SW regions. The local EA have provided support whilst retaining own resilience. This included a Team Leader, Field Team Members and technical staff which equated to 85 man days, so far, which was still ongoing.
- **State of nation’s flood defences** – Central Government had asked for details of the state of the nation’s EA and third party flood defences, giving six weeks for this task to be completed. All assets were to be inspected and reported on. Military support had been provided for this task; in our area two consultants and eight military staff started work on Friday 28th February. There was uncertainty as to what the Government would do with this information when received.
- **Maintenance** – Due to uncertainty over budgets the programme of planned work has only just been completed and will be circulated this week and details of the same then published on the web. The good news was that there was a slight increase in allocation this year:

<u>2013/14</u>	<u>2014/15</u>
Total – £4.422m.	Total – £4.824m.
GIA – £2.122m.	GIA – £2.549m.
IDB Precept – £1.372m	IDB Precept – £1,444m (includes 5% increase)

There was no change in policy for 2014/15 so allocation had been made as in previous year in line with RFCC guidance/principles.

- **Good Ecological Potential for Fenland Watercourses** – Workshop to be hosted by South Holland IDB on Friday 14th March, 10am to 3:30pm. Aim of the workshop was to help establish a common standard to achieve Good Ecological Potential for Fenland Watercourses. Point of contact: Richard Bowen: richard.bowen@environment-agency.gov.uk
- **Public Sector Cooperation Agreements** – PSCA provide arrangements for an IDB or other Risk Management Authority, and the EA to deliver maintenance by a partnership approach. Good start in our Area with a number of discussions taking place. The Downham Group have now signed an agreement. Point of contact is ian.russell@environment-agency.gov.uk

Mr. J. Oldfield (Bedford) asked Ms. Denham who was advising DEFRA on land drainage, flood defence and flood risk management. Who advises? Ms. Denham said she did not know but that the EA was one of many. She said that Mr. David Rooke said maintenance was seen in different ways and we needed to account for costs/benefit – houses being easy to quantify as flood risk benefits – it was not so easy for agricultural land. Things needed to be revaluated. Dr. Venables said she was disappointed at the misunderstanding that IDBS only protected agricultural land. She reiterated that 53% of all generating capacity of this country was within IDB Districts as well as extensive significant parts of the transport network. Value to economy benefit showing value to economy in IDB areas – food processing being one of the largest manufacturing industries in this country. She said that IDBS were there for a whole variety of purposes – DEFRA needed to understand that – we were not just there for agriculture and therefore we do not do it – don’t realise what is within IDB areas.

Mr. J. Heading (Manea & Welney) commented on Mr. Gosling’s report concerning Snettisham beaches which had taken funding in excess of £1m. How many houses did that protect – 3,000 properties? Funding works until this year – partnership funding will have to pay for works from 2014/15.

Mr. D. Thomas (Middle Level) said that regarding revenue spend this year’s allocation was better than last year but was still underspent by £15m last year and will be just under £15m this year. What would the EA be looking to spend on necessary maintenance but also the “stitch in time” maintenance? What was the shortfall? We manage the current year on a year’s spend. Mr. Gosling said he did not know – we have ageing assets. 6 years ago we had a budget of £7m.

Mr. B. Easom (RFDC Central) reported that the RFCC had promoted a need for additional funding and although they had approved the maintenance programme – it was totally inadequate. He said that we had to pursue claims that the Fens was a special case to attract future funding. Our area had the lowest

funding/local level in the country. He said that we had to help ourselves as we would not get any support from anywhere else.

Mr. I. Smith (Middle Level) said that DEFRA needed to agree that agriculture and developed areas go together. He said that although many supported a 5% increase in Precept Boards needed to know where it was being spent. A. Gosling said there had been a delay in publishing a works programme, but it would be available as soon as possible.

Mr. B. Easom asked if the EA could provide a three year rolling maintenance programme as it would be in everybody's interests. Mr. Gosling said this was difficult because of the way funding was arranged and did not think it was possible. The Chairman said he would support that approach and that people would be prepared to fund more if we knew where it was going. Ms. Denham said it was difficult as asset inspections will affect maintenance programmes and allocations.

Mr. J. Oldfield asked what would result from the asset survey. He commented that the results must be used as a basis for maintenance needs and used to justify increases in maintenance. Mr. Oldfield asked if drainage channel conditions would be surveyed by the Army also as the capacity of channels was imperative. Mr. Gosling replied that he did not know who would use the information once they obtained it. He said it would get reported and it would be interesting to know how the information would be used. Mr. Oldfield said there would be a big gap if channels were ignored.

The Chairman said that we had been lucky in this area but there was a real maintenance issue to get our heads round and we needed to work together and bridge the gap.

(Ms. P. Denham and Mr. A. Gosling then left the meeting).

CHAIRMAN

Upon a proposition from Mr. J. Heading, seconded by Mr. H. Hurrell (Swaffham), Mr.A.J.Morbey, was unanimously re-elected Chairman of the Branch for the ensuing year.

VICE CHAIRMAN

Upon a proposition from the Chair, Mr. N.B. Costin, was unanimously re-elected Vice-Chairman of the Branch for the present time, with a view to electing a new Vice-Chairman in due course.

ELECTION OF BRANCH REPRESENTATIVE TO ADA EXECUTIVE BOARD

Following ADA's impending change from an un-incorporated body to a new company limited by guarantee, under the new Constitution of the Great Ouse Branch, it was necessary to elect just one member from the current three representatives, to act as a Director on the ADA Executive Board. As the Chairman and Mrs. F. Bowler wished to stand aside, on the proposition of the Chairman, it was unanimously agreed, that Mr. J. Heading be elected to stand as the Branch's representative for the remaining one year term of office (with a possible further year due with a rolling programme of appointments due to take place from 2015).

APOLOGIES

G. Allison (Downham Market), J. Austen (Kings Lynn), R.O. Bennett (Bedford), Mrs. F. Bowler (Bedford), P. Burton (Bluntisham), C.J. Butcher (Mildenhall), P. Camamile (Kings Lynn), J.A.R. Chrisp (Ramsey), N. Costin (Bedford), T. Darby (Sawtry), P. Hammett (N.F.U.), M. Heading (Middle Level), J. Henderson (Bedford), B. Long (Kings Lynn), S. Whittome (Middle Level) and P. Williamson (Downham Market).

MINUTES/MATTERS ARISING

The Minutes of the Thirty-third Annual Conference held on 18th March, 2013 were presented as circulated. After a slight amendment concerning Mr. S. Wheatley's comments on page 7, the Minutes were approved and signed by the Chairman. Dr. J. Venables informed Members that this year's ADA Conference would be held on 12th November, 2014. There were no other matters arising.

CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman reported that following the changes within ADA regarding the incorporation of the new ADA company, there would be a need for wider involvement by Branches to include the requirement to

hold two meetings a year. There would also be a new Branch Constitution and it was decided that the Branch's Executive Committee should meet to discuss the same and deal with any concerns that Members had with the new Constitution. It was agreed that this meeting would take place on 17th June, 2014.

DR. J. VENABLES – CHIEF EXECUTIVE, A.D.A.

Dr. Venables outlined further the incorporation of ADA which had been decided at recent Executive Meetings. She said that due to ADA being unincorporated it had limitations when entering contracts etc. and would become a company limited by guarantee. Dr. Venables commented that documents had been sent out to Clerks keeping them informed of steps being taken and although it had been a fairly tight timetable, ADA would become incorporated by 1st April, 2014.

Dr. Venables reported that the incorporation would affect all Branches with regards to their constitution, funding and representation on the Executive Board together with the way they operated i.e. minimum of two meetings a year. She commented that all Branches were different and that ADA was not prescribing how Branches were run.

The representatives on the Executive Committee would be non-executive directors and in practice would be limited by guarantee and therefore have less liability than previous Executive Members. The last meeting of the present Executive Committee would take place on 19th March. There would be a Special Meeting to vote for the change to an incorporated company at 11.00 a.m. followed by an Executive Committee meeting to approve the formation of the new body. 31st March would be the end of the current structure of ADA. However, Dr. Venables hoped that to everybody else ADA would look much the same as before. The company would be known as the Association of Drainage Authorities Limited but would trade as Association of Drainage Authorities. ADA would take this opportunity to slim down the current ADA Executive Committee to form a smaller version whereas each Branch would have one director instead of 1, 2 or 3 representatives as previously.

Mr. I. Smith stated that he had concerns regarding the new Branch Constitution but would leave this until the meeting on 17th June. Mr. G. Dann indicated that the Kings Lynn IDB also had concerns with the same. The Chairman stated that these issues would be dealt with by the Executive Committee of the Branch in June. Dr. Venables also stated that Members were welcome to ring her with any queries.

Dr. Venables then went on to comment on the Somerset floods. She iterated that in fact it was the River Parrett catchment that had flooded and not Somerset. This had been a culmination of high rainfall and high tidal levels but on the adjacent Axe and Brue catchment, which had suffered the same conditions – it was not flooded. She said that we must ensure that what has happened on the Parrett does not happen elsewhere with the complete devastation of homes, business and infrastructure wrecked. She went on to comment that ADA had spent a lot of time recently briefing journalists – some of which she did not recognise when in print – but it had been worth it. Phone calls, enquiries and getting in the press all helped and if ADA did not try then we would not get anywhere.

Dr. Venables reported that she had attended the EFRA Select Committee on the invitation of the Chairman, Anne Mackintosh MP and gave a presentation on dredging and maintenance. She also gave evidence last week and a three hour debate had taken place last night in the House of Commons. Again this was well quoted and pointed out that dredging was defined by different groups in different ways.

Dr. Venables said that ADA's booklets were proving helpful to the media and the next one to be published would be "The Value of Water Level Management to the Environment".

Dr. Venables then went on to inform Members of the EA's Public Section Corporation Agreements. These agreements between the EA and IDBs allowed IDBs to carry out works on the EA's behalf without the need for tenders. She urged Members to sign these Agreements even if there was no immediate need for works as it was a contractual way in which one organisation could do work for another and get paid for it.

HENRY CATOR, CHAIRMAN, A.D.A.

Mr. Cator returned to the subject of incorporation, stating that it was in the last ADA Business Plan and the incorporation was completing the last bit of the same. He said that ADA needed to be more efficient and more effective. ADA represented the views of the Branches and needed enough resources to do what

it wanted to do. Members did not want more subscription increases and this was another way of “skinning the cat”. A smaller central board (currently 32) could achieve this (down to 15/16) and take executive decisions that could then be rolled out to Branches.

Mr. Cator then went on to report on the importance of governance. He stated that the Caldicot and Wentlooge’s governance had not been up to scratch and the IDB has been absorbed into Natural Resources Wales. This was a wake up call for IDBs and it was no good just doing a good job in drains/dykes – governance needed to be in order. If in doubt ADA was there to help. Branch structure should be about peer pressure too, to get Boards to a place where they are all performing to a high standard.

Mr. Cator then reported on the work Dr. J. Venables and the team were doing at Surbiton, dealing with the usual round of consultations. He said it was time our side of the industry spoke out and explained what was wrong with the current system.

Mr. Cator commented on a visit to Somerset on 23rd February to see the flooding for himself before giving evidence on 26th February at the EFRA Committee. He said he was not prepared for the shock of 22,500 hectares of land being under water, some 18 feet deep in places, together with the entire village of Moorland. It smelt and cars and caravans were just wasting in a sea of flood water – an inland sea. There was no hope of farmers recovering and it was an absolute crime what was happening. Lord Smith had said that dredging would not have made any difference. The River Parrett was dredged in the 1960s and if it had been dredged 95% of the damage would have been avoided. However, it was only when Datchet and Chertsey on the Thames flooded that it was put on the news. Mr. Cator believed that the role of people like himself, ADA and branches was to stand up and tell them where policies were going wrong. The importance of people and property – there was no diversity or biodiversity now – it had all gone – flooded/polluted. Pumps had been brought in from Holland because the EA have sold all their pumps. The EA had stated there was not enough money for maintenance – there is a need to get budgets back to where they should be – this should be part of the plea. Branch structure needs to stay strong – many farmers were sending money, food etc – there needed to be a strong message to the people that we were taking an interest and care what is happening down there.

The tidal surge in December 2013 had been the greatest surge in the East since 1953. Great Yarmouth had been within 4 inches of being flooded; it was luck because the high tide and surge did not coincide, it was luck because there had been no rain beforehand, it was luck because there was no wind. Defences were severely worked and dented.

When the country was recovering from the Second World War in 1950/60s, structures were put in place, deemed to be advantageous to the country. Now they were too expensive and not worth fighting for. Food production/agriculture is so valuable in a world increasing – there was a population of less than 7 billion in 1953, now 7.4 billion and in 2035 it is expected to be 9 billion. We need to double food production.

If you drain agricultural land properly it has a better ability to deal with being waterlogged. In a high water table, structure is destroyed. If you look after the sediment in flat structures, the water will not flow through them. 86% of the great wide land in this country is under the 3m. contour. DEFRA forget these facts.

Mr. Cator went on to report that Mr. John Martin had written a letter to his local MP and he had then written a similar letter and Mr. Cator urged Members to pick up a pen and tell people who know and care to get back to catchment approach – it was great wisdom – catchments/rivers/channels – IDBs seek to extend their Districts to do a proper job – this would fit in with Pitt and Local Lead Flood Authorities. ADA needed to be professional and stand up for what is right – the current situation is not working.

Mr. Cator said that he sees E.A. staff in shiny hats and boots, taking 19 to discuss one scheme – we don’t need to be spending money like this – we want ditching buckets. ADA needs to stand up and be counted and branches supporting other branches – the East of England by the Grace of God was saved.

After a round of applause, Mr. John Martin then replied that he was grateful to Mr. Cator, we could not allow the EA, with limited resources to neglect structures our predecessors had put in place, in the future. He proposed the following resolution:-

That the Great Ouse Branch of ADA, mindful of what has been happening in Somerset and elsewhere, strongly supports the actions that have been taken by ADA to draw the attention of Government to the vital necessity of the Environment Agency doing adequate maintenance work on all rivers and structures for which it is responsible. We demand that adequate funds are made available and that the safety of people and property in rural areas is not regarded as being of less importance than environmental works, however desirable these may be.

This resolution was to be sent to the Executive Committee.

Mr. B. Easom stated that Eric Pickles MP had pulled the plug on the EA being allowed to lobby and to tell Government what is to be done and they were missing a golden opportunity. He said the EA has been working its socks off but directors had let down their staff tremendously. He stated that Barbara Young MP was no lover of dredging and stated £600m was standing still, £800m was needed to make progress. 20 years on and we are going backwards. We could not miss out on long term resources – we had escaped this time but it could have been a different matter if the rain was over 50 or 60 miles. We needed to act and needed to act together. We needed to adopt the resolution of John Martin.

Mr. I. Smith reported that he was having a meeting with two local MPs and others and asked if ADA had something in the form of words that they would like passed on. Mr. Cator replied that examples of maintenance that should be done and are not being done due to environmental precedence over river maintenance ie water voles should be forwarded on. Wrapping ourselves up in so much red tape – we are going to flood – give Dr. Venables some evidence.

Mr. J. Heading stated that the lesson has got to be learnt that prevention is better, cheaper and more efficient than the cure. In Holland they experienced similar weather and have not recorded one single incident of flooding in that country. Ten years ago they did – and sorted it out.

Mr. D. Thomas said that there had been process on EA structure, approved amalgamation with Natural England and E.A. together – the system was broken. Should we be setting further reviews to a different structure – flood risk defence for the country or is that a step too far?

Mr. H. Cator said it was not a step too far for him.

Mr. J. Anderson (Bluntisham) stated that he had places where there were known to be problems within the Board area but should we be concentrating on main problems such as the Hundred Foot River being silted up. It was ok to say you should be silting but should Boards have plans to go to DEFRA to say it needs dredging – without any evidence.

The Chairman asked which organisations should be putting this across – our umbrella is our strength – we should know what the problems are and putting them to ADA.

Mr. D. Thomas said that structures and river channels were now being surveyed, we would have a comprehensive river system survey of all our rivers. The EA will have all the information.

Mr. O. Winters (Littleport & Downham) stated that he was new to the Board and did not realise what ADA did. He had been making staunch complaints to his Board about the Hundred Foot River for a long time.

Mr. B. Easom said that the Water Framework Directive had been dealing with modified watercourses. The ICE PUBLICATION “Learning to Live with Rivers” on page 45 stated that “an assumption was made that all modified watercourses required maintenance otherwise they would clog up and not be able to flow” which would not be too far wrong.

Mr. C. Wright (East Harling) stated that his Board had commissioned their own survey on the River Thet which had allowed them to go the EA with the info to hand and had enabled them to take the river back into their own control.

ACCOUNTS to 31st MARCH 2013

The accounts of the Branch were presented as circulated, these were unanimously received and approved by Members.

SUBSCRIPTIONS FOR 2014/15

It was agreed that the subscriptions for the forthcoming year should remain at £1,000, plus VAT, calculated on the same basis as in previous years.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

17th June, 2014 for Members of the Branch Executive Committee.

Meeting closed at 4.30 p.m.