

17th March 2015

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

held at Prickwillow Village Hall, Prickwillow, near Ely, on Tuesday 17th March 2015 at 2.30 p.m.

Present

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

G. Allison, Esq.	Downham Market Group
J. Austen, Esq.	King's Lynn
C. Beeston, Esq.	Downham Market Group
Mrs. F. Bowler	Bedford Group
P. Burrows, Esq.	EA
P. Burton, Esq.	Bluntisham IDB
Mrs. L. Campbell	Downham Market Group
H. Cator, Esq.	ADA
M. Church, Esq.	Haddenham Level
G. Cirillo, Esq.	Southery & District
P.S. Cousins, Esq.	King's Lynn
C. Crofts, Esq.	Upwell
Mrs. F. Dunne	Old West
J. Fenn, Esq.	Middle Level
Ms. J. Foley	EA
M.J. Gilbert, Esq.	Littleport & Downham
A. Gosling, Esq.	Environment Agency
J.J.F. Graves, Esq.	Old West
J. Heading, Esq.	Warboys, Somersham & Pidley
J.E. Heading, Esq.	Manea & Welney
Mrs. J.E. Heading	Ely Group
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
I. Moodie, Esq.	ADA
A. Newton, Esq.	Ely Group
B. Norman, Esq.	Mildenhall
J. Oldfield, Esq.	Bedford Group
O. Palmer, Esq.	Lakenheath
E.P. Rice, Esq.	Padnal & Waterden
B.H. Sanders, Esq.	Waterbeach Level
I. Smith, Esq.	Middle Level
D.C. Thomas, Esq.	Middle Level
I. Thomson, Esq.	ADA
Dr. J. Venables	ADA
P. Walker, Esq.	Downham and Stow
S. Wheatley, Esq.	RFCC (Central)
A. White, Esq.	Stoke Ferry
S. Whittome, Esq.	MLC and Ramsey 4 th
A. Williamson, Esq.	East of Ouse
P.A. Williamson, Esq.	East of Ouse
C.J.H. Wilson, Esq.	Burnt Fen
G.L. Woollard, Esq.	Swaffham
A. Yarrow, Esq.	Haddenham/Littleport

WORKS OF THE ENVIRONMENT AGENCY – Ms. Julie Foley, Area Manager

Julie Foley introduced Steve Wheatley. She then went on to report on organisational changes within the Agency, which had changed significantly over the past 12 months. She stated that there was good news so far as the flood risk and operations budget were concerned, as there was no fundamental change in budgets in these areas, which was a positive step moving forward. Ms. Foley reported that the regional tier of the EA had been removed leaving 16 EA areas across the country. Philip Dilley had been appointed Chairman in place of Lord Chris Smith, and David Jordan had been replaced by Toby Williamson as Director of Operations. Paul Lienster was retiring in September and a new Chief Executive would be appointed later in the year.

A National Audit Office review had taken place. Cost benefits of maintenance and revenue were positive but on the maintenance side, more transparency was required. The EA needed to show their reason for prioritisation and engage with communities better on their decisions.

Ms. Foley then went on to report on the important work regarding the Great Ouse Tidal River Plan. The 2010 plan needed to be updated with new strategies, which included working with partners to agree a way forward. The need for the update was due to climate change and changes in bed levels etc. and this work would commence shortly.

Ms. Foley then reported on the River Basin Management Plan. She explained that the objective of the plan was to improve water quality and to set legally binding targets. Mr. Iain Smith was the IDB sector representative. The aims of the plan were to have good ecological status/potential of 62% by 2027. However, at present, watercourses were only at 14%. Two thirds of water bodies were at good status. However, good ecological status was not the same as good ecological potential, especially where artificial/modified water bodies were concerned which needed to be unique for the purposes of watercourses and for which they are used. She commented that the boundaries were not quite right in the Plan and that it was important for stakeholders contributing to the same.

Paul Burrows then commented on capital schemes and the requirement to settle monies in the longer term rising into 2021. These were annualised at present.

Mr Burrows said a programme of investments, heavily caveated, of £2.3m capital expenditure nationally was to protect 300,000 properties, which would be a challenge with scrutiny way over that in the past.

He was currently awaiting confirmation from government for budgets. Looking nationally and locally, this showed 33% of the programme nationally would be delivered by local authorities and IDBs. IDB schemes will deliver 50% of the house benefits in the Central Area. Mr. Burrows reiterated the need to work collectively to deliver commitment and gain efficiencies out of the programme. He repeated that he was waiting on a final announcement from government but it was hugely likely there would be strict rhythm on how to implement this.

Mr. Iain Smith (Middle Level) stated that the River Basin panel had gaps in getting back information from the National panel within the EA.

He also asked about the Section 10 report on the Ouse Washes reservoir status following recent discussions. Ms. Foley said she would provide this information as soon as it was available. She stated that there would be an update at the April RFCC meeting.

Mr. G.L. Woollard asked Ms. Foley if she thought Sir Philip Dilley would be an improvement on Lord Smith. She replied that she thought both were wonderful! Mr. Woollard commented on his disappointment in Lord Smith, who gave the National Trust a pat on the back for flooding 14,000 acres of land between Cambridge and Wicken but would not even pay a visit to the Swaffham IDB whose District included this area of land.

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

Mr. A. Gosling commenced his report by stating what a different position we were in compared to last winter. The weather had been kinder and additional works had been carried out on the ground. An additional £703k of work had been carried out on the Ouse Washes from a recovery fund following from the bad winter.

The bushing carried out in the autumn had been better than in the last two years, also confirming our better position compared to last year.

Mr. Gosling stated that there was a significant new approach to maintenance – Local Choices Approach – which, coupled with Grant in Aid of £131k the Great Ouse catchment was starting with more money. The IDB Precept money was to be spent separately this year in areas where it was raised giving direct benefit. This would be carried out in consultation with IDBs as a joint venture. He thanked the IDBs for all their hard work. He stated that the RFCC had agreed the principles at their Local Choices meeting last June, and the EA would be holding more one-to-one meetings in the autumn before the RFCC would move forward on agreeing a six year programme at their October meeting, with an even longer programme for larger projects. At the IDB Liaison Meeting in November it was hoped to agree a maintenance agreement with a view to developing a six year programme at their meeting in June. He felt that this was a really positive step forward in the right direction. The first year required input from the IDBs and following allocated funding, results would be seen on the ground. He was really pleased but there was work to be done. Mr. Gosling felt the Public Sector Corporation Agreements would assist in arrangements and the EA could pay for works where appropriate. He said that all strands were coming together.

Mr. P. Cousins (King's Lynn) referred to the matter of the flooding of land by the National Trust and stressed that this area of the world was crucial to farming. He said that with rising sea levels the wash barrier was imperative. He said there was a near disaster last year with the tidal surge when the raised river bank just kept the sea out. A barrage could be built, which could create energy and be self-financing. When are we going to put the wash barrier back on the table? Huge areas were at risk and the EA needed to put it back on the table to protect the Fens.

Ms. Foley replied by saying that she noted the situation and how quickly sea levels were rising but that we needed proper statistics. It is something that could be added to the Tidal River Plan.

Mr. Peter Burton (Bluntisham) welcomed the new team to the AGM. He stated that he farmed along a 20 mile stretch of the Ouse Valley up to Little Paxton. He said the Hall Green Brook had been cleaned out every three years by the EA until it was declassified 12 years ago. He said this had not been looked at since and was now overgrown with trees and had suffered bank erosion. He requested that somebody be sent to look at the situation.

Mr. Burton then went on to report that at a previous AGM he had asked a lady representative from the EA why Flood Plain maps were getting larger. She had apparently replied that this was done to "cover her backside". Mr. Burton had now been informed by his insurance company that he had two houses within a flood plain, for the first time.

Mr. Burrows replied that changes to the flood maps was a rolling programme of modifications and in 2013 the maps had been rebranded. He informed the meeting that these maps were for planning purposes and they should be seen as precautionary. He said they were presented as if there were not any defences and did not account for the reality of structures.

Mr. Burton replied that this area had never had water on it and now planners – because the area was now in a flood plain – would not consider any planning.

Ms. Foley said she would take details away with her and investigate. However, she said the plans were there to advise. It was up to planners – they may not say no to planning in flood risk areas. Mr. Burrows pointed out that was freely available to the public to download for the purposes they required it.

Mr. John Oldfield (Bedford) stated that he suffered from the opposite in the Upper Ouse as areas had been reduced on the maps, putting the Boards in an awkward position when advising planners. Ms. Foley offered to provide a briefing on the maps.

Ms. Foley then commented on the Eel Regulations. She stated that there had been a 30-year decline in eel species around Europe and no elver fishing is now permitted. On 1st January 2015, assets needed to comply with the Eel Regulations with a time limit exemption until 2021 for the EA. The former Anglian Region commissioned a report 12 months ago to assess the situation. In our area, there were 31 IDBs and four EA high risk structures, and eight IDB and two EA medium risk structures.

Ms. Foley went on to report that the EA were considering the costs associated and how to apply these in regard to screening, bypasses and fish-friendly pumps but emphasised that the costs needed to be proportionate.

Since 2008, eel passages had been affixed to 36 structures, costing a total of £670,000 e.g. £10k to £20k. Costs were presently arriving at much higher figures than these at present and the EA would like to see these going down – it was also an issue for the EA too. The IDBs were not in a different position to the EA. A six year programme allocated £50k - £60k per scheme but this was not sufficient to cover the costs. Conversations with DEFRA and ADA were taking place by National colleagues but Ms. Foley emphasised that work was needed. The options were untested and there was difficulty in progressing works. There was a need to look at aligning works with pump refurbishments.

Dr. Venables (ADA) stated that year after year ADA was encouraged to follow the spirit of legislation. When the Eel Regulations came out, the easy stuff had been done. She commented that ADA had co-operated very significantly, the Technical Committee had talked about the magnitude and timing of the scheme which had now become an issue. The size of investment needed and timing was where the real difficulty was. Things needed to be carried out proportionately and discussed. There needed to be a different funding scheme and for money not to come out of the flood defence budget. Dr. Venables stated that the EA and IDBs facing bills should be helped with funding in some way with the directive's requirements.

Mr. G. Woollard stated that the eel problem has the potential to ruin every IDB represented at the meeting. Priorities had been skewed causing trouble on the horizon to protect one species. He asked what was so special about eels over other fish. He said we needed to convince the public we were trying to do what we could but what we were being asked was ridiculous.

Mr. D. Thomas (Middle Level) said the whole budget of the EA was required to protect one species, it was not a core activity, to be spent in six years. It needed to be put into perspective and he advised a soft approach proportionate to the issue.

Mr. Henry Hurrell (Swaffham) asked what the cost would be for an eel guard to be installed. He was informed it varied from £1m to £20m per pumping station.

Mr. D. Thomas stated the charge would not be so great during refurbishment. Ms. Foley stressed that these were draft reports and that the EA did not endorse the costs.

The Chairman asked about the population and Mr. John Heading (Middle Level) replied that it was at the highest ever. Mr. Ian Moodie (ADA) stated that numbers had declined during the 1900s/2000s but had increasing over the past three to four years.

Mr. I. Smith stated that the decline had been over the past 30 years but pumping stations had been installed a long time before that. Cost/benefit was not considered in line with DEFRA.

Mr. Innes Thomson (ADA) reported that he had met with DEFRA and would be meeting with the EA to work closely together. A pragmatic solution was required to go forward – we were all in the same boat. Neither side could afford to spend on this. An agreement consistent with the National approach was needed. There was an issue of time. Yes, all pumps were going to be renewed but

pragmatism was necessary for full and proper investment. This did not include taking out of service reasonable pumps.

Mr. Thomson commented that the Deputy Director of EA was very open to take this forward – give it a chance – make sure EA know what the issues are and see how it goes over the next few months.

Ms. Foley stated that collaboration and pragmatism was needed to look at all issues – working together to save money.

Mr D. Thomas said he agreed entirely – we could suffer with rushing at things at the last minute. The next thing will be fish regulations, EA need to be more open in implementing them.

Mr. Henry Cator (ADA) asked if the EA had based this on sound science. Ms. Foley replied that the EA have specialists to look at best evidence. Mr. Cator asked if they had information dealing with the impact on the population. He said the science behind it was unsound – knee jerk reaction. He said that IDBs would be happy to help with observations etc.

(Ms. J. Foley, Mr. P. Burrows and Mr. A. Gosling then left the meeting).

CHAIRMAN

Upon a proposition from Mr. J.E. Heading, seconded by Mr. I. Smith, Mr. A.J. Morbey, was unanimously re-elected Chairman of the Branch for the ensuing year.

VICE CHAIRMAN

The Chairman reported on the resignation of Mr. N.B. Costin as Vice-Chairman and on a proposition from the Chair, Mr. Hugh Raby (Bedford Group), in his absence, was unanimously elected Vice-Chairman of the Branch for the ensuing year.

ELECTION OF BRANCH REPRESENTATIVE TO ADA EXECUTIVE BOARD

Dr. Venables apologised for a mistake in the new Memorandum and Articles of ADA. Wording contained within the same needed correction to allow the appointment of Directors of the Company that were not employed by IDBs. There was a resolution to the problem and the Memorandum and Articles would be changed in due course following referral back to lawyers. Subject to this change, it was proposed from the Chair, and agreed by the majority of Members, that Mr John Heading be elected to stand as a Director, for the Great Ouse Branch, on the Executive Committee of ADA for a further term of three years.

APPOINTMENT OF BRANCH EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

It was reported that nominations had been received from each Sub-District for election to the Executive Committee and it was agreed that the following be duly elected:-

Middle Level:	I.A.D. Smith and J. Fenn (re-appointments)
South Level:	W.P.L. Legge and C.J.H. Wilson (re-appointments)
Upper Reaches:	H. Raby (re-appointment) and B. Huckle (new appointment)
Outfall:	J.S. Austen (re-appointment) and P. Cousins (new appointment)

NEW BRANCH CONSTITUTION

Mr. I.A.D. Smith reported that the new draft Branch Constitution had been compiled from the previous Branch Constitution including updates required by ADA following the incorporation and the Flood & Water Management Bill. Executive Committee Members had been involved in the discussions regarding the same.

Mrs. F. Bowler commented that the new constitution suggested by ADA committed the Branch to meet at least twice a year, to be more interactive, but the new draft constitution only allowed for a minimum of one meeting per year. The Chairman said that he was happy to have more meetings if there were subject matters for other meetings to be called for. Mr. H. Cator spoke in support of Mrs. Bowler. He said there was a need for wider involvement by the Branches. Local decisions needed to be passed to the ADA Board to represent wider issues/areas. The Chairman stated that he did not want attendance to drop if more meetings were to be held but would hold more if Members had a subject matter. Mr. G.L. Woollard suggested that meetings should be called when necessary.

Mr. P. Cousins suggested it would be advantageous to discuss problems in the four different outfalls of the Branch. He said that it was a vast system and education would be beneficial across the outfalls. The Chairman said that he was happy to have more executive meetings of the Branch. Mr. Cator reiterated that ADA must hear the views of the Branches. He also suggested having meetings with adjoining Branches. The Chairman agreed to arrange an Executive Committee meeting in June.

It was agreed that the new constitution, as circulated, be adopted by the Branch.

APOLOGIES

J.A.R. Chrisp (Ramsey), G. Dann (King's Lynn), T. Darby (Sawtry), P. Hammett (NFU), B. Huckle (Bedford Group), M. Heading (Middle Level), A.W. Peacock (Padnal & Waterden), H. Raby (Bedford Group), K. Wilderspin (Swavesey) and C.D. Wright (Harling).

MINUTES/MATTERS ARISING

The Minutes of the Thirty-fourth Annual Conference held on 4th March, 2014 were presented as circulated. Mr. P. Cousins commented on the statistics at the top of page 2 which highlighted the number of times the Thames Barrier had been closed and why there is a need for drastic thinking with regards to the Wash barrier. Dr. Venables commented that the Thames Barrier had two purposes, operating at high tides and tidal surges. It assisted in prevention of flooding west London - it was not just for sea level rise surges and could be opened 14 times in a week for upstream flooding.

Regarding the bottom of page 3/top of page 4, Mr. S. Wheatley (RFCC) commented that our area did not receive the lowest funding in the country but in actual fact there were three other areas below our level of funding. He stated that our area had actually received a 25% rise in the last two years.

There were no other matters arising.

DR. J. VENABLES – CHIEF EXECUTIVE, ADA

Dr. Venables thanked the Chairman for inviting her for the final time. She reported that ADA had retained its name (which it had been using since 1937) following the association's incorporation.

Dr. Venables went on to report on ADA's busy year, which included:-

Working through issues with DEFRA on IDB1 forms. DEFRA looked to ADA for quick answers. ADA were working hard to make sure all Boards were compliant and able to tick "Yes" in the relevant boxes. She reported on a new question on the IDB1 form asking how IDBs obtained access to environmental advice/information.

She stated that ADA had a Board meeting in the morning, a Clerks' meeting in the afternoon and a Local Authority Members meeting on Thursday at the Great Northern Hotel in Peterborough.

The last day of the month was the last day of existence for the Caldicott and Wentlooge IDB before passing to Natural Resources for Wales the next day. It would be a sad day.

Discussions were taking place with Somerset and how things go forward in the future.

Driven from Treasury/DEFRA, following last winter, cost benefit analysis on maintenance money spent on rivers was being carried out. Lengths of rivers were being looked at together with people and property protected. Where rivers had been maintained in places and not in others (due to no properties to protect) these rivers were fine for a couple of years especially during dry winters such as 2011-12 but eventually their capacity was reduced such as in Taunton. Government Minister had stated that Somerset was unique. Dr. Venables said it was not special, not unique it was due to no cost/benefit analysis. She stated that towns would flood from the back and not from overflow of rivers.

ADA had developed a good relationship with Owen Pattinson following his visit to the Bedford Group but unfortunately, now there was a new Secretary of State.

She reported that it was difficult changing DEFRA and Treasury approach. They did not count land drainage benefits and this needed to change.

River Basin Management Plans. National level had drawn attention to good ecological potential. Dr. Venables had pointed out that artificial channel was just as much a watercourse. However, you could only remeander rivers and not artificial watercourses. She had received no answers as yet.

Dr. Venables finished by saying that ongoing issues would continue with Innes Thomson and Ian Moodie whose office would be in Stoneleigh. She stated that her last day would be 31st March and thanked everybody for their support.

The Chairman, on behalf of Members, expressed his thanks and gratitude to Jean for the last 10 years. He said that she had displayed fantastic clear thinking and thanked her very much.

HENRY CATOR, CHAIRMAN, ADA

Mr. Cator started by thanking Jean for the past 10 years. He said that on writing to Clerks when she first started that only nine had e-mail addresses. She was responsible for bringing the industry such a long way forward, both in governance and credibility. Doors had started to shut in ADA's face and Jean, through her great achievements, had got us back at the table. ADA had to be part of the debate.

Mr. Cator went on to comment on the enhanced branch structure and the business plan blueprint of the incorporated company. He said that ADA were continually punching above their weight and had a whole new influence. He stated that all IDBs did quite brilliantly and put into practice delivery on the ground with what they knew. They had inside knowledge of their areas and knew where the pinch points were. They inherently knew what to do with catchments and landscapes. He reiterated the need to engage closer.

Mr. Cator reminded Members of Margaret Beckett's comment of "Do not waste my time looking after food security". 86% of Grade 1 land was within IDB districts, IDBs made up 10% of land area and contained 53% of electricity infrastructure. He was proud of what we do.

Mr. Cator informed Members that Innes Thomson came from North Yorkshire and after joining the EA worked on capital projects, was a fellow engineer and had commercial experience, which was hugely important.

Mr. Cator said there needed to be a lot more initiative in the way we thought. He said climate change was upon us. Paul Linster said the idea of 4 inch rainfall in 24 hours in London and North Sea surge kept him awake at night. "Hold the line" is complacent, we need to improve. Little and often gets a long way – leave for 10 years and you cannot change it overnight. He reminded Members of Mr. J.S. Martin's letter to Ian Patterson. He was sad to lose Secretary of State, as he was best he had worked with. He commented that Liz Truss didn't know too much about drainage. He said getting somebody on the ground was a battle. There was a constant corporate memory problem due to no inherent memory – there was a lot of shuffling of the pack. He said that Philip Dilley was a good egg. Paul Lenister had not measured up. Lord Smith had been obsessed by process and not delivery.

Mr. Cator stated that actions spoke louder than words – his plan in the next year was to hear much more from Members, with more interaction between branches. Following the Somerset disaster and desperation for money to clear up, legislation had been signed up too hastily. Hasty legislation was not good legislation.

Liz Truss needed to look at wider investment on lower areas. Drainage systems do not suddenly fail. Once flooding has occurred, there are astronomical costs. If there is a flood, it is a disaster. Look after the drainage assets you have got. We were failing to get message across.

However, Mr. Cator was delighted to see eels on The One Show and the body of opinion was on our side. The British public felt it was crazy spending money on this issue. This had the public's attention. Mr. Cator said the job we do is fundamental in low lying areas of the country – we needed to tell ADA – give them the sharpened arrows, the facts. ADA needed the support of Branches across the country. ADA was not just Innes, Ian and himself, Members needed to get involved so

that ADA could push as a body. We needed to get common sense from government; Mr. Cator said he could not do it on his own.

The Chairman said Mr. Cator's impassioned speeches were the reason why we needed him.

Mr. I. Smith wished Dr. Venables well and echoed what Mr. Cator had said. Concerning the River Basin Plans, Anglian were doing their own thing. They had sent things to Dr. Venables but had not had anything back. He stated also that the Audit Practitioners Guide had not been revised for smaller Boards and he stated his smaller Boards would also welcome less domination of ADA by Lincolnshire IDBs.

Dr. Venables replied that Mrs. F. Bowler had been working on the Practitioner's Guide and this would be published shortly. Delays had been caused by new regulations.

Mr. H. Cator replied that regarding the "L" word, he hoped Middle Level would get more closely involved with ADA. He said Mr. Smith with MLC had the history, wisdom and clout. He said not to let the perception that Lincolnshire were taking over disperse him. Mr. Cator said that Lincolnshire were keen to get involved but he wanted to get passion from all. By example, we would pull the whole level up from the bottom. We were grass roots driven – please do not think ADA is discriminating against others – he wanted to hear from MLC. He encouraged getting a place at the table and speaking. He reiterated that ADA wanted to do the best for the industry and Mr. Smith would be very welcome.

Mr. Smith said he wanted clarity for Boards. Questions were not answered. Mr. Cator said the team do their best.

Mr. S. Wheatley agreed with Dr. Venables regarding the fact that we did not have continuity about what sections of rivers are maintained and what are not. There was not enough Grant in Aid and with the little the EA had, it had to prioritise where it was spent which was nonsensical. ADA, RFCC and Audit Office are all saying more money is needed in flood risk management. Recent Government are not putting us high enough on the agenda and taking us seriously enough. There was a need to continue to call for more money. It was going to be difficult to get money into this area.

Mr. S. Wheatley said that an example of partnership working was the small group consisting of Mrs. F. Bowler, Mr. Phil Camomile and Mr. Robert Hill dealing with the updated procedure for Highland Water contributions where a single payment had been agreed. The procedure was last approved in 1992 and updated again five years ago. Clarity was needed on what was eligible now funding arrangements had changed.

Mr. Wheatley also reported that there was a vacancy coming up on the RFCC and applications would be welcome from any IDBs. Mr. Cator echoed that we needed to get right people at the table.

ACCOUNTS to 31st MARCH 2014

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

SUBSCRIPTIONS FOR 2015/16

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 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

8th March, 2016 at 2.30 p.m. at Prickwillow Village Hall.

Meeting closed at 4.50 p.m.