

8<sup>th</sup> March 2016

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

Held at Prickwillow Village Hall, Prickwillow, near Ely, on Tuesday 8<sup>th</sup> March 2016 at 2.30 p.m.

**Present**

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

G. Allison, Esq.	Downham Market Group
C. Beeston, Esq.	Downham Market Group
D. Boughton, Esq.,	Middle Level
R. Bowen, Esq.	Environment Agency
Mrs. F. Bowler	Bedford Group
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
C. Crofts, Esq.	Upwell
R.G.T. Dean, Esq.	Swaffham
Mrs. F. Dunne	Old West
M.J. Gilbert, Esq.	Littleport & Downham
J.J.F. Graves, Esq.	Old West/Swaffham
Mrs. J.E. Heading	Ely Group
R. Hill, Esq.	Middle Level
B.K. Jarman, Esq.	Mildenhall
A.L. Lee, Esq.	Cawdle Fen
W.P.L. Legge, Esq.	Downham Market Group
J.W. Lloyd, Esq.	Cawdle Fen
J.S. Martin, Esq.	Waterbeach Level
D. McMurdo, Esq.	Bedford Group
Ms. S. Moeed	Environment Agency
I. Moodie, Esq.	ADA
A. Newton, Esq.	Ely Group
B. Norman, Esq.	Mildenhall
J. Oldfield, Esq.	Bedford Group
H. Raby, Esq.	Bedford Group
H. Ross, Esq.	Middle Fen and Mere
E.P. Rice, Esq.	Padnal & Waterden
B.H. Sanders, Esq.	Waterbeach Level
I. Smith, Esq.	Middle Level
D.C. Thomas, Esq.	Middle Level
Ms. C. Weightman	Natural England
S. Wheatley, Esq.	RFCC (Central)
K. Wilderspin, Esq.	Swavesey
A. Williamson, Esq.	East of Ouse
C.J.H. Wilson, Esq.	Burnt Fen
C. Wright, Esq.	East Harling
A. Yarrow, Esq.	Haddenham/Littleport

### **CHAIRMAN**

Upon a proposition from Mr. C.J.H. Wilson, seconded by Mr. C.D. Wright, Mr. A.J. Morbey, was unanimously re-elected Chairman of the Branch for the ensuing year.

### **VICE CHAIRMAN**

Upon a proposition from the Chairman, Mr. Harry Raby, was unanimously elected Vice-Chairman of the Branch for the ensuing year.

### **ELECTION OF BRANCH REPRESENTATIVES TO BRANCH EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

It was unanimously agreed that Mr. Doug McMurdo and Mr. Simon Cole be elected as replacement representatives to the Branch Executive Committee for the Upper Reaches in place of Mr. H. Raby (now Vice-Chairman) and Mr. B. Huckle (due to ill-health) (appointments to remain in place until the next election of the Executive Committee in 2018).

### **APOLOGIES**

J.A.R. Chrisp (Ramsey), S. Cole (Bedford Group), J. Fenn (Middle Level), Ms. J. Foley (EA), R. Means (Downham Market Group), I. Thomson (ADA), A.W. Peacock (Padnal & Waterden), A. White (Downham Market Group) and G.L. Woollard (Swaffham)

### **MINUTES/MATTERS ARISING**

The Minutes of the Thirty-sixth Annual Conference held 17<sup>th</sup> March, 2015 were presented as circulated. There were no other matters arising.

### **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman confirmed that a very successful Branch Executive Committee meeting had taken place in October, with Ian Moodie and John Heading in attendance. Discussions had taken place regarding eel regulations, PSCAs etc.

### **IAN MOODIE, TECHNICAL MANAGER, ADA**

Mr. Ian Moodie gave an update on policy matters over the last six months and recent flooding events.

Mr. Moodie stated that the recent floods in the north of the country this winter had given an opportunity for ADA to promote itself in the media, emphasising the importance of total catchment management together with the six key points to managing FRM that ADA was trying to get across to Government. A £171m government spend was now protected for the next five years (together with inflationary increases). He said that reviews/enquiries into flooding had taken place with the EFRA Committee, with one ongoing at present, and thanked Boards for their responses. Following storm Desmond in December the Government announced a National Flood Resilience Review and Mr. Moodie stated that ADA would be taking the opportunity to get involved, with Henry Cator and Innes Thomson meeting with Oliver Letwin (Chair of the Review).

Mr. Moodie went on to report on DEFRA's proposals for water abstraction reform, which would introduce a new abstraction management system from the early 2020s. Aspects of concern included removal of exemptions for IDBs to transfer water, together with cost implications. However, there was very little details about what counted as a transfer and whether the cost was £1,500 per transfer or a one off fee. A meeting between ADA, DEFRA and EA and IDB representation was being held on 14<sup>th</sup> March to better understand the implications for IDBs.

Concerning PSCAs, Mr. Moodie reported that 45 agreements had been signed between the EA and IDBs, with two between the EA and LAs. The message from Mr. Ian Russell (EA/ADA) was that he wanted this number to increase and was keen to press for more support in carrying out works for the EA more locally.

Mr. Moodie commented on moves to change advertising of elections in local newspapers, which was proving to be a costly burden for some IDBs. DEFRA was keen for advertising to be carried out in

an alternative way to reduce this financial burden and were currently drafting a letter for the Ministry of State to sign in the next month or so.

Finally, following the work in Cumbria, Mr. Moodie wanted to emphasise the value of IDBs in that area. He reported that there was some work ongoing with the EA looking to withdraw from the pumping station in that area. Valuation of non-agricultural land was proving to be a sticking point as lists were hard to come by. Better ways of valuing non-agricultural land needed to be explored and Innes Thomson would be involved in discussions with DEFRA to see how we could review and modernise the method to be consistent with other areas of local government.

Mr. Moodie then went on to comment that ADA was keen to look at sub-national scale projects to draw external funding into works – especially for environment enhancement. ADA was in the process of discussing ideas with Fens for the Future and Natural England for giving nature an edge. Two way channels would give additional storage and enhance wildlife habitat. Barriers included valuation of land and loss of land. External funding for projects was being investigated and ADA wanted to open up discussions with Boards in the Great Ouse area, together with the North Level IDB. He stressed that discussions were at an early stage for an external funding bid but that there would be a need for local community involvement. Cambridgeshire Acre were keen to be involved for the biodiversity of species etc. Mr. Moodie then introduced Catherine Weightman to Members.

Ms Weightman explained that she had been involved with Natural England for a number of years, working with partners such as the Great Fen Project, Wildlife Trust, National Trust and the RSPB etc. and believed there was lots of good biodiversity still in the Fens in ditches. She stated that there should be connectivity between the sites. She felt Cambridgeshire Acre were good at getting people involved and was looking into Heritage Lottery funding. She stated that there had to be a link with community and wanted to start a small pilot scale project to see if it worked and move on from there.

The Chairman asked about the impact and being able to do our job. Mr. Moodie replied that we would look at different ways of doing things – creating connectivity between sites where Boards wanted extra storage and expanding rivers. Creating two stage channels (instead of raising embankments) would provide a lower section for flow and additional bank area for habitat.

Mr. David Thomas (Middle Level) understood the drive for more natural channels but felt that the Fens were a different catchment. Slowing flow in uplands, tree planting encouraging soil percolation and increasing storage capacity was not appropriate. Mr. Moodie said he agreed that not all upland methods were suitable everywhere but a pilot project would scope out the benefit.

Mr. Peter Burton (Bluntisham) asked if the Woodwalton Fen was no longer a flood area. Ms. Weightman replied that it was a wetland habitat and the water was being held back to see how the area would develop. Mr. David Thomas added that nothing had changed, the area could still be flooded if necessary and Middle Level were actually looking at the opportunity to increase flood storage as enshrined in the project aims.

### **HENRY CATOR, CHAIRMAN, ADA**

Mr. Henry Cator stated that it hardly seemed like a year ago since he had spoken to Members at last year's AGM. He said in the last 12 months ADA had moved from Surbiton, to Stoneleigh Park where Innes Thomson and Ian Moodie had seamlessly taken over at the helm. Heather Bailey (Communication and Events Officer) was now on maternity leave and Ellie Cave had joined the team in her place.

Mr. Cator stressed that "Communication" was in ADA's business plan. This was communication within the industry as well as outside. He felt that we were not as good as we should have been. He stated that Innes Thomson was trying to raise the profile. Mr. Cator said that he had opened conversation at November's Conference about the name of ADA. Suggestion had been made to change to Water Level Management Authority but this had not been met with approval from all and therefore the prediction was that ADA would retain its name.

Mr. Cator felt that change was really the protector of continuity. He proposed to step down from his position in 2017. Six applications had been received for the role of Vice-Chairman, which had been reduced to three this morning by a panel set up to deal with the position. Mr. Cator stated that these

were strong candidates and would drive ADA forward in the future. Living in a world where finance from government was hard to sustain, Mr. Cator commented that collaborating and communicating with others was key - partnership was a two way thing. PSCAs had really taken off, it was about who is best economically and able to develop schemes on the ground. IDB men were not good at singing their attributes from the roof tops. They kept ratepayers dry as part of the day job but needed to get much better at telling people how good they were at it. This did not just apply to agriculture as when water gets in the wrong place everything is affected.

Mr. Cator stated that Kent and Cumbria had shown that climate change is causing circumstances where total rain is not exceptional, but it is the amount of time it falls within. 40mm of rain over a 24hr period stretches our resources. Areas not maintained properly or where dredging is banned contributes to further problems. Government concentrates on where people live. Rural constituencies do not have as many votes as urban areas. DEFRA has no commonsense – but this may be changing with two places on the Resilience Review Committee.

Mr. Cator stated further that Government was waking up to the fact that maintenance is the best money you can spend on capital investment. A collaborative approach puts pressure on Treasury. DEFRA is not strong enough alone to stop the wheels falling off and the next area being hit.

Mr. Cator went on to thank the Branch and Boards, congratulating Mr. Doug McMurdo on his appointment as Chairman of the Bedford Group in place of Mr. Dick Bennett. He made reference to Mr. Bennett's "down to earth" wisdom. He also thanked Mr. Iain Smith (Middle Level) whose post was being advertised in readiness for his retirement at the end of 2016. With the way Mr. Smith "always told it as it was" and his legal knowledge, he commented on what a wonderful Chief Executive the Middle Level had and wished him a long and happy retirement and thanked him, on behalf of ADA, for all his advice and being a star of local authority seminars.

Mr. Cator reported on a Flood and Coast 2016 Conference that he attended in Telford which the Local Authority Seminar was integrated into. The conference resulted in a highly successful session focussed on local partnership working and collaboration. David Hickman of Lincolnshire County Council talked about the strategic partnership between local authorities, IDBs and the EA and Ian Russell again emphasised the importance of PSCAs, which were being used to strengthen working relationships between risk management authorities. Mr. Cator also commented on the work carried out by Ms. Priscilla Mumby from Medway Council to transfer operational responsibility for local water level management from the EA to newly formed IDBs.

Mr. Cator stressed the importance of a positive attitude. He said that IDBs were "can do culture organisations". He said IDBs had so much to offer, they had the knowledge and needed to spread the word that they had the ability and tools to make things happen. Mr. Cator commented that we were living in a time of change. He had read in the newspapers about the East Anglia Powerhouse – the coming together of Norfolk, Suffolk, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough unitary authorities. He felt it would not be long before we were back to River Catchments Boards, which might be an opportunity for local government to get more funding, as in Somerset which received government levy on highlands also.

Mr. Cator said he was sad to see Sir Philip Dilley resign after a media witch-hunt. He felt the Association could have worked closely with him. Emma Howard-Boyd was Acting Chair at the present time.

Mr. Cator informed Members of Floodex 2016, which would take place in Peterborough on 18th, and 19<sup>th</sup> May, hoping that Members would support the same.

Mr. Cator emphasised the importance of ADA, praised the fantastic team and stressed the need to support and engage with them. He said that we were really starting to see where the industry was going. Communication needed to come from grass roots. Stories needed to be fed to local TV, newspapers, radio and other Branches – there was a lot to do. He was so pleased to hear how good biodiversity was in the Fens, which was due to the way they have been managed. More people lived in towns and they needed to understand the delicate mechanism that is management of water. Mr. Cator went on to thank everybody for the part they had played during the year encouraging Members

to keep talking and feeding opinions/criticisms to promote change and do a better job and drive the industry forward.

The Chairman thanked Mr. Cator for his heartfelt and sincere presentation. He also echoed Mr. Cator's comments concerning Mr. Iain Smith.

#### **WORKS OF THE ENVIRONMENT AGENCY – RICHARD BOWEN**

Mr. Richard Bowen introduced himself to Members as standing in for Paul Burrows as Area Flood Risk Manager. He outlined changes at the top of the EA – Emma Howard-Boyd now Acting Chair, Sir James Bevan - Chief Executive, David Rooke - Deputy and Toby Williamson - Director of Operations.

Mr. Bowen confirmed that the EA were working to DEFRA strategies to 2020, namely Environment, Food and Farming, Rural and Protection from Flooding. He went on to inform Members, that at the Oxford Farming Conference, that Liz Truss announced that the EA and NE would share boundaries within East Anglia, although still working on the same river boundaries. This merger would increase the budget; make a move to one Area Manager but retaining the same level of service as well as retaining two RFCCs as present. In July 2016, public force boundaries, December 2016 local plans and budgets set as the new area and by April 2017 the new management structure would be in place. There would be no loss of service, all efficiencies would be natural. The DEFRA steer was for flood risk to be focused on flood, people and property.

Mr. Bowen then went on to report on Cambridgeshire and Bedfordshire's Investment Programme. This was a £53m six year programme, with £45m to be spent on schemes (14 EA, 28 IDB, 12 LA and two others) and £8m to be spent on support schemes. £29.7m of this money was from Grant in Aid, £4.3m local levy and £17.3m from partnership funding. This would protect 5,339 houses and avoid £320m of damages. He stated that no schemes would be allowed to exist on own but must come as part of a flood risk scheme – integrated in an efficient way so that the cost of the scheme was proportionate in relationship.

Mr. Bowen reported on Eel Regulations, stating that the EU required us to have a plan to boost eel numbers. Current regulations stipulated that “cheap” sites should be modified now, expensive sites delivered in stages and low risk sites had until 2027 to comply. Regulations would prefer to see obstructions removed if possible rather than modified. This was a slower approach than previously indicated. There were currently 124 high priority sites and a separate Group including David Thomas and Alison Briggs had been set up to work with the EA to discuss funding etc.

#### **WORKS OF THE ENVIRONMENT AGENCY - MS. SADIA MOEED**

Ms. Moeed reported that the Maintenance Programme for 2016/17 had received a £4.7m budget which was equivalent to the £4.5m budget received this year. As yet there was not a six year maintenance programme/budget but commitment was at least at a standstill level.

Ms Moeed stated that the budget was made up of £2.3m Grant in Aid was from Central Government, £1.5m from IDB Precepts and £900,000 from general drainage rates. In addition to this there was a supplement of £500,000 from the RFCC, giving a total of just over £5m for the year. However, £7m was the cost of maintenance works identified.

Ms. Moeed commented on IDB Precept Local Choices which illustrated where funds had been spent to date and included conversations on where and what projects should be included in Precept for delivery in future years. She went on to say that this was the first year that the EA had delivered on the Local Choices and that a six year programme would be ideal giving an overview of maintenance from funding. She added that we were the only area in the country to implement Local Choices.

Ms. Moeed commented on the type of works undertaken, stating that 60% (£900,000) of the Precept was spent on frequent maintenance (annual) and 40% (£0.5m) on intermittent work which included non routine projects such as reprofiling.

Ms. Moeed commented on projects planned which included reprofiling the low bank at Welney, various river clearances and agitation desilting projects which included the Tidal River and Hundred Foot River. The latter was a partnership project and was being match funded by local levy.

Ms. Moeed was looking at ways the EA could get better at providing information to Boards. The EA had produced one newsletter this year for IDBs to distribute and the next one was being prepared.

Regarding the Ouse Washes Section 10 Project, Ms. Moeed stated that being a large raised reservoir, this was subject to periodic inspections and in 2013, two safety matters had been raised regarding the design crest level of the Middle Level Barrier Bank. This project was progressing but the current findings show that the current reservoir is still at risk and needs to be raised to a 1 in 1000 flood event as a minimum. Ms Moeed stated that a number of surgeries had been held in consultation with IDBs, LAs and statutory partners. The timescale for this was for detailed design in 2017 and construction in 2021 and £10m had been identified as funding for the same.

Ms. Moeed went on to say that the Great Ouse Tidal Action Plan was still ongoing and following the findings from the Middle Level Barrier Bank, the South Level Barrier Bank would be brought up to the same standard, so there would be no detrimental impacts.

Ms. Moeed updated Members on the Flood Summit held on 15<sup>th</sup> January, which involved Julie Foley, James Bevan, Emma Howard-Boyd, Liz Truss, Henry Bellingham and Stephen Barclay. Discussions took place concerning Ouse Washes, coastal works at Heacham and Snettisham, Norfolk County Council update on the Welney road and Local Choices projects, discussions on dredging and maintenance in general and PSCAs.

Ms. Moeed emphasised the importance of the PSCAs and how the EA had lined up potential opportunities and were keen to agree programmes where works had been identified.

Finally Ms. Moeed gave an update on the winter flooding which took place in the north east between 5<sup>th</sup> December 2015 and 6<sup>th</sup> January 2016 following storms Desmond and Eva respectively. In Cumbria, 340mm of rain fell in 24hrs and several thousand homes were inundated, with Carlisle being the worst hit. Over the Christmas period, parts of Manchester, North Lancashire and Yorkshire flooded with 20,000 homes affected in the Pennines. In Lancashire 15,000 homes and 4,600 business were affected over 14 catchments. Following this flooding, the EA, with assistance from military members, carried out inspections on 6,000 structures in two weeks and since then over 750 projects have been identified at an estimated cost of £65m. which were due for completion by September 2016. £50m had been received by Government towards these costs. Ms Moeed stated that the EA were looking locally at lessons learnt and how changes could be implemented to its own local incident management arrangements.

Mr. Duncan Boughton (Middle Level) asked if there would not be a spillway. Ms Moeed replied that no there would not but the bank would be raised instead with some widening required. It was not a spillway approach.

Mr. David Thomas stated that he had been informed that the statistics for the Cumbria floods was a 1 in 300 year event and asked if climate change return periods would be changed based on historic rainfall events and such unpredictable weather. He asked what approach was being taken regarding Middle Level Barrier Bank and what factors were being taken into account regarding climate change etc. Ms. Moeed said she would take part of the question away as she was not sure how this had been factored into the design.

Mr. Michael Church (Haddenham Level) stated that the Tidal River Action Plan suggested a 1 in 20 year flood event – he asked whether a 1 in 1000 year flood event might now be used. Ms. Moeed stated that the plan may change under the Tidal River Update project.

Mr. Henry Cator, adding to Mr. Thomas' question, stated that at the Flood and Coast 2016 Conference the Dutch representatives did not expect to spend on recovery as they planned for 1 in 10000 events. He went on to say that we should do a different bit of budgeting and come to the conclusion that we should work harder to protect our structures instead of planning for recovery. He reiterated that the Dutch did it once and did it properly.

Mr. Thomas stated that with Government targets for 150,000 homes to be built, we had the potential to go backwards with more houses being at risk of from flooding than what we started with.

Mr. Boughton asked if this was a case for allowing farmland to flood with compensation being paid.

Mr. Cator said he had asked the question at the Flood and Coast Conference as this had been carried out in the provinces of Holland and it had proved key in slowing flow and was a way to achieve a result. Mr. Cator said there was a concern over shortage of water with new houses constantly being built, with Rutland and Grafham waters being the last major schemes addressing water storage. He said that infrastructure planning was not good in this country and the water industry needed to play a part.

Mr. Burton said a golden opportunity had been missed in the Ouse Valley to create a reservoir without any forward thinking on the future.

Mr. Cator said that Members, as locals, should stand up for the challenge. Members knew where to put these things and could lead the way.

**ACCOUNTS to 31st MARCH 2015**

Upon the proposition of Mrs. F. Bowler (Bedford Group), seconded by Mr. B. Norman (Mildenhall), the accounts of the Branch were unanimously accepted and approved by Members, as presented and circulated.

**SUBSCRIPTIONS FOR 2016/17**

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**

7th March, 2017 at 2.30 p.m. at Prickwillow Village Hall.

Meeting closed at 4.25 p.m.