

7<sup>th</sup> March 2017

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

held at Prickwillow Village Hall, Prickwillow, near Ely, on Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> March 2017 at 2.30 p.m.

**Present**

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

C. Beeston, Esq.	Downham Market Group
P. Burrows, Esq.	Environment Agency
P. Burton, Esq.	Bluntisham IDB
Mrs. L. Campbell	Downham Market Group
H. Cator, Esq.	ADA
M. Chenery of Horsbrugh	Southery
M. Church, Esq.	Haddenham Level
Mrs. F. Dunne	Old West
B. Easom, Esq.	RFCC (Central)
J. Fenn, Esq.,	Middle Level
M.J. Gilbert, Esq.	Littleport & Downham
J.J.F. Graves, Esq.	Old West/Swaffham
P. Hatley, Esq.,	Waterbeach Level
J. Heading, Esq.	Manea and Welney
Mrs. J.E. Heading	Ely Group
M. Heading, Esq.	Middle Level
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. L. McShane	Middle Level
Ms. S. Moeed	Environment Agency
A. Newton, Esq.	Ely Group
B. Norman, Esq.	Mildenhall
J. Oldfield, Esq.	Bedford Group
O. Palmer, Esq.	Lakenheath
A. Peacock, Esq.	Padnal and Waterden
N. Pratt, Esq.	Stoke Ferry
D. Prosser, Esq.	Buckingham
H. Raby, Esq.	Bedford Group
E.P. Rice, Esq.	Padnal & Waterden
R. Rockcliffe, Esq.	Norfolk CC
B.H. Sanders, Esq.	Waterbeach Level
W. Sutton, Esq.	Middle Level
D.C. Thomas, Esq.	Middle Level
I. Thomson, Esq.	ADA
Ms. C. Weightman	Sawtry
T. White, Esq.	Stoke Ferry
K. Wilderspin, Esq.	Swavesey
A. Williamson, Esq.	East of Ouse
C.J.H. Wilson, Esq.	Burnt Fen
G.L. Woollard, Esq.	Swaffham
A. Yarrow, Esq.	Haddenham/Littleport

### **CHAIRMAN**

Upon a proposition from Mr. G.L. Woollard, seconded by Mr. A.L. Lee, 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 re-elected Vice-Chairman of the Branch for the ensuing year.

### **APOLOGIES**

G. Allison (Downham Market), Mrs. F. Bowler (Bedford), J.A.R. Chrisp (Ramsey), C. Beardall (Environment Agency) and S. Wheatley (EA).

### **MINUTES/MATTERS ARISING**

The Minutes of the Thirty-seventh Annual Conference held 8th March, 2016 were presented as circulated. There were no matters arising.

### **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS - ELECTION OF BRANCH REPRESENTATIVE TO BRANCH EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

It was unanimously agreed that Mr. David Thomas be elected as a replacement representative to the Branch Executive Committee for the Middle Level in place of Mr. I.A.D. Smith (following his recent retirement) (appointment to remain in place until the next election of the Executive Committee in 2018).

### **MR. INNES THOMSON, CHIEF EXECUTIVE, ADA**

Mr. Thomson began by thanking Members for their invitation to the AGM and said that he had visited the Prickwillow Engine Museum beforehand. He stated that the office at Stoneleigh Park was at full strength now with Ian Moodie, Sue dealing with administration, Heather events and Amy assisting Ian to take some pressure off and they could provide a full and proper service going forward. Mr. Thomson commented that ADA was there to assist the Great Ouse Branch as well as all other branches in the country.

Mr. Thomson then went on say that he had been approached by the National Audit Office with various enquiries concerning the operations of IDBs. He said that the report was going live on 21<sup>st</sup> March but that ADA had been privy to see the report already. The report referred to a few minor tweaks but Boards needed to ensure that seats were filled, democratic process was followed and flagged in a positive way and generally check all was in order.

Regarding Health and Safety, Mr. Thomson reported that the NFU had informed him that 10 deaths had taken place on farms, in February only, of this year. He stated that Health and Safety must sit at the top of Boards' and the committee's agenda.

Concerning Branch membership, Mr. Thomson stated that this needed to be widened. He said it was fantastic to see the Ops Manager and Flood Risk Manager's attendance at the meeting and see the EA's partnership with the Branch. He said that Council Members should be encouraged to get involved with Branches to represent Councils interests too.

Mr. Thomson commented that the primary role of ADA was to report at government level on Members' behalf. He said that ADA was a small outfit but could swing a big bat. ADA had sat with the current government and also met with shadow government and Liberal Democrats as well as the Scottish National Democratic Party, making sure all messages concerning rating, demaining and water was being transmitted at the heart of government.

Regarding Glyphosate Mr. Thomson reported that ADA had all the evidence now to suggest that it was not such a harmful substance than has been suggested. ADA were lobbying government concerning the use of this chemical especially so far as Boards were concerned with aquatic treatment.

Mr. Thomson reported that ADA had a new business plan focussing on talking to government and civil servants. He said this would be published shortly on the website and that the onus was on ADA to deliver results over the next three years. Mr. Thomson thanked Mr. John Heading for his part in this.

Mr. Thomson reported on the wonderfully successful Floodex event held last year. This year Floodex was being held on 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> May at the Peterborough showground with a dinner on the evening of 17<sup>th</sup> at the Marriott Hotel. The event created a great success as the result of footfall. He stated that registration for the event would open next week.

Concerning Water Transfer Licensing, Mr. Thomson stated that he had not heard anything for six months and that DEFRA were deliberating on what ADA have said. He commented that there were holes in the matter and it had not been thought through properly. He said DEFRA had stopped and were reflecting on the issue.

Mr. Thomson reported that Mr. David Thomas and Ms. Alison Briggs had been representing ADA on eel and biodiversity matters and £20k had been secured from Members for further research and hopefully Hull University might come up with a pragmatic solution with regards drainage.

It was a case of “watch this space” with regards to rating reform. There was a possible opportunity for the creation of new drainage boards in Cumbria, South Lancashire and in the South, which may change the rating legislation. There may be opportunities for IDBs at a local level to expand areas of land and activity for those who want to and form local partnerships and allow IDBs to take over certain structures.

Mr. Thomson went on to report on the retirement of Mr. Steve Wheatley as Chairman of the RFCC (Central). He stated that a vacancy existed for the position, which he highly recommended and hoped for somebody from the agricultural industry to be appointed.

Finally, Mr. Thomson asked Members to look at the new ADA website, which was up to date, as much as possible and was now available to be viewed on tablets etc. He said that ADA were “tweeting” quite regularly now too, passing on snippets of messages now and then. He had found this closing limerick on twitter to close his ADA update:-

For the wonderful River Great Ouse  
As slowly to sea waters cruise  
We must keep it all clear  
With works every year  
In good state, there’s nothing to loose.

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

Mr. Henry Cator started his presentation paying tribute to Mr. Innes Thomson saying that the team at ADA was the best he could remember and was continuing to go from strength to strength and this could only be good news.

He reiterated Mr. Thomson’s words in that Members should look at the website and provide comments; as feedback was hugely important to ADA. ADA needed information to influence Ministers and they needed to know what was happening on the ground; communication was more and more vital.

Mr. Cator passed round a one-page flyer, which had been sent to Clerks requesting it be sent out with rate demands. It stated what our functions were and started to underline the importance of IDBs in committees. He reiterated that ADA could not do it alone; collaboration was needed. Stoneleigh was ideal for talks with NFU and close to CLA to enable ADA to speak with a voice representing the industry, giving it a stronger position for the future.

Mr. Cator also reported on the success of Floodex which he felt was a game changer for ADA. He stated that subscriptions had not moved and remained the same, which was due to the success of Floodex as exhibitors took orders and did business and there was networking across the industry.

Mr. Cator went on to remind Members that he was stepping down from the position of Chairman at the November AGM and that Robert Caudwell would replace him. He stated that Mr. Caudwell as well qualified, a farmer and very well connected and asked Members to work with him. Following on from this, Mr. Cator paid tribute to Mr. David Thomas and congratulated him on his appointment as Chief Executive of the Middle Level, thanking him for all he had done and will do in support of ADA.

Mr. Cator went on to comment that DEFRA was like a rabbit in the headlights at present, with Brexit and Ministers changing. He said it was difficult to pick up where you had left off on changes of Ministers, as they had absolutely no idea of the background of our talking and education process as to what IDBs do.

Mr. Cator emphasised the importance of reporting to ratepayers to show them we were spending their money wisely and showing how money is spent. He said the chain was only as strong as each individual link and we had to demonstrate that we were doing it properly. He also emphasised the importance of Branches and more amalgamations, the bigger they got the more responsibility there was. He stated that ADA was there to help.

“Together we are stronger” Mr. Cator stated. He said that PSCAs gave an opportunity to work alongside the EA which gave the best results for ratepayers and was the way forward – doing more work where the EA could not before. It was about getting the job done on the ground.

Mr. Cator informed Members that two new IDBs were being formed in Kent and Pevensy and it was hoped Cumbria too. Mr. Cator summarised by saying that ADA was in good shape and would stay so if members supported it. He thanked Members for coming and supporting their branch of ADA.

Mr. G.L. Woollard (Swaffham) referring to Mr. Cator retiring stated that he had done a good job. Regarding Ministers, he felt that Mr. Stewart had more intellectual strength than the present Minister, Ms Coffey but that he was less worried about her than her boss Mrs. Andrea Leadsom, Secretary of State, who stated that farmers with big fields do sheep and those with small ones do butterflies which he felt was taking us back to the 1920s.

Mr. Cator stated that he shared Mr. Woollard’s concern about DEFRA and that he was more and more convinced that an independent organisation needed to lead and act as custodian on the right way to manage farms and the countryside. He said that ADA was the mouthpiece to do this if given the ammunition to fire the bullets and was more than happy to stand up and be counted.

Mr. Barry Easom (RFCC) said that the Bedford Group of IDBs was on her doorstep and would be only too happy to invite her to visit. Mr. Doug McMurdo (Bedford) stated that she had been invited but was otherwise engaged, but wanted to bring pressure about this and get an appointment in the diary before she went also. He wanted to have a constructive dialogue with her and not that of butterflies.

Mr. Thomson stated that drainage and the water level management were in the headlights, had good healthy leads, good infrastructure and had received good comments and he was really keen to get good evidence of what we are doing.

Mr. D. Thomas stated that Mr. Thomson touched on the subject of legislation change regarding rating. He asked, with Brexit and non-essential legislation, what legislative changes were to be made. Mr. Thomson replied that he had heard that the EA were keen to find a solution and wanted to bolt some sentences/paragraphs into it. CLA needed to go to national level to put something through and enable the next stage to be enacted. He said ADA needed to get the technical content right on valuations, given it was 1990s when it was last carried out. He said there would be winners and losers.

Mr. Peter Burton (Bluntisham) said thank goodness Andrea Leadsom was not the Prime Minister. He went on to comment on a radio broadcast he had heard the day before which indicated that fines administered by the EA were given to a charity of the EA’s choice. He felt this was not transparency

in any way and that we could not accept this. He stated that Court fines went to Treasury. Members of the panel said they would look into this.

### **ENVIRONMENT AGENCY - MS. SADIA MOEED and MR. PAUL BURROWS**

Ms. Moeed reported on the organisational changes within the EA. She confirmed that Cambridgeshire had merged with the neighbouring areas of Essex, Norfolk and Suffolk and were managed by one Area Manager, Charlie Beardall. Ms Moeed said that Members would see no change as the remit was to cover the Great Ouse Catchment. She felt that this was a positive move making the EA more resilient with two Flood Risk Managers and larger teams with the ability to move resources around to support each other. There was a total of 65 IDBs across the area with more opportunity to work together on partnership initiatives across multiple IDBs, such as Local Choices . The RFCC remained within the same boundary.

Mr. Paul Burrows reported that the RFCC Chair's term ended in June 2017 following 9 years on the committee. He recorded his thanks to Steve Wheatley and commented on the significant changes over his period as Chairman to include working more closely with IDBs for the last half of this term. Mr. Burrows stated that DEFRA were currently recruiting for a replacement (20<sup>th</sup> March deadline for applications). He commented that there were also four vacancies for EA appointed members out for application – 3 general members to start in July and one coastal member for January 2018 (13<sup>th</sup> April deadline for applications). He stated that the EA were looking for a diverse range of skills and expertise across the four roles (land drainage). Agribusiness was of particular importance given the nature of the catchment). He thanked Barry Easom for bringing his land drainage and IDB expertise to the table.

Mr. Burrows went on to say that Government key priority was building new infrastructure delivering improved protection to 300,000 houses by 2021 by bringing in 15% partnership funding and 10% efficiencies. Nationally 30% of the programme delivered by LAs and IDBs and locally the bulk of improved protection is forecast to be delivered by IDBs.

Mr. Burrows stated that last year benefitted from additional money due to flooding elsewhere which allowed the EA to bolster support to programme delivery and to IDBs with benefits mapping and apportionment and supporting IDB business case development more than ever before.

Mr. Burrows commented on the worry that delivery was risky and forward programming was under-developed for major capital schemes. How do we secure delivery of 300,000 extra houses? He said that a robust programme to influence Government past 2021 was needed, looking to ensure IDBs can maximise the benefit too. He was keen to see better use of GiA to help develop a programme to go to government with so that the EA could deliver and do more about forward planning.

Mr. Burrows stated that we had fantastic land drainage infrastructure but what about long term investments? He felt that realistically this would not be fully funded and needed help spelling out the long term investment requirements and challenges to Government. This could only be done by working together, strategically and thinking longer term.

Ms. Moeed then went on to report that the EA had finalised the outline design to raise the Middle Level Barrier Bank by approx. 600-800 mm. To retain a crest width of 3m the haul road would need to be moved. To ensure no adverse effects on the South Level Barrier Bank, ancillary works include raising two or three kilometres of embankment focussing on low spots. Works were currently out to tender (to be returned by 15<sup>th</sup> March) and these significant civils works would take 4 years to complete, ending just before the Safety Under Reservoirs Act 2021 deadline.

Ms. Moeed then went on to comment on maintenance and the unprecedented year for maintenance funding. She stated that the total maintenance budget for the Great Ouse is £6.4m – around £1.8m more than the budget for the previous financial year. Due to flooding elsewhere in the country the Government committed to an additional £40m nationally for maintenance over the next 4 years which has meant an extra £1.6m Grant in Aid. In addition, the RFCC for the Great Ouse has committed to supplement the maintenance programme through a local levy funding pot and have committed £350k this year.

Works carried out this year included embankment repairs on the Nar, desilting on the Old Bedford and repairs to the embankments on the Cottenham Lode. On the South catchment bushing and tree works on Padbury Brook, River Ouzel. The work this year has included approximately £200k of works through PSCAs with various IDBs delivering works such as grasscutting, bank reinstatement, dredging and tree removal.

Ms Moeed stated that funding for next year continued to look positive with a GiA settlement of £3.6m and with all funding combined, a total budget of £6m, which was sufficient to deliver all the projects identified for next year's maintenance programme. This programme would be published in April.

One of the major asset refurbishment projects for Summer 2018 included works to replace the V doors and refurbish Denver Sluice. However, one of the doors failed unexpectedly in December so the work has been brought forward and all three sets of doors will have been replaced by Summer 2017.

Incident Management – Ms Moeed highlighted one of the key successes of the PSCA, which has enabled the EA to bolster resources from IDB partners for incident response activities. This was particularly evident in January during the recent Tidal Surge when Water Management Alliance operatives worked with EA operatives on a tidal roster. Ms Moeed also pointed out that the EA were developing temporary pump deployment plans with IDBs for a national stock of temporary pumps held by them.

Concerning demaining, Mr. Burrows reported that Government had provided funds to develop a series of demaining projects. He commented that the River Thet was one of these projects and the EA were working with East Harling IDB and Norfolk CC. The EA has RFCC support for the same and papers were currently with NCC for their decision on whether to proceed (17<sup>th</sup> March). It was hoped that an announcement from the Secretary of State would be issued soon to enable other watercourses to be demained if IDBs were interested.

Ms Moeed informed Members that the next IDB Strategic Group Meeting would take place on 19<sup>th</sup> April, which would be attended by IDBs in the Great Ouse Catchment, RFCC Members and EA officers. It was an opportunity to discuss strategic issues eg agreement of IDB Precept, partnership working and legislative matters. Ms Moeed pointed out that IDB Members were also welcome to attend.

Mr. B. Easom commented that Mr. Wheatley developed the Local Choices approach and that the Central area was the only region with the same. He stated that he was keen to get a multi-year programme in place, which he felt was a better way forward. Mr. Wheatley was instrumental in close talking with officers and partnership working. In June, Steve Wheatley was leaving with a wealth of knowledge on how the system works. In addition to this, Pat Sones was leaving as well as himself.

Mr. Easom campaigned to Members to put themselves forward to join the RFCC. He stated that Council representatives had other priorities and Members were the best at water surface management and control for the area – they had the knowledge and wanted them to use it for the future. He said that surface water management grew and wanted Members to get involved, doing good for the future and future generations.

The Chairman commented that Members had heard three different speakers state how important it was for Members to get involved and what a fantastic opportunity it was to get farmers onto the RFCC.

The Chairman asked the Environment Agency if the South Level Barrier Bank would be as high as the Middle Level Barrier Bank. Ms. Moeed stated that the banks had been surveyed and identical works would not be carried out so, no, they would not be identical on both sides. She pointed out that she was working closely with Andrew Newton on the South Level Barrier Bank and David Thomas on the Middle Level Barrier Bank. She said that more modelling was to be done and works would mitigate any impact effect. The Chairman asked again if the banks would be the same when Ms Moeed said no but that there should be no impact. Mr. A. Newton pointed out that in an extreme

event there could be overtopping at Little Downham. He had informed the Project Manager of this who was going away to look at this. He felt that the area would still be at risk.

Mr. Richard Rockcliffe (Norfolk CC) asked what was happening about Stowbridge hump. Ms. Moeed replied that she was working with IDBs and an agitation desilting pilot would be starting this year, which would continue for five years. There were no issues discharging off Ouse Washes by gravity and this was constantly monitored.

Mr. Keith Wilderspin (Swavesey) asked if Swavesey bank was going to be done anytime soon? Mr. Burrows replied that the EA were looking at interim arrangements to get back to speed and offered to speak to Mr. Wilderspin after the meeting.

Mr. John Oldfield (Bedford) asked if any focus could be put on the upper part of the Ouse. He stated that this area had struggled with maintenance for many years. He said that the Upper Ouse needed to be fit for purpose as well as the Cambridgeshire end.

Mr. D. Thomas stated that he was concerned at the lack of directions for SuDs for SuDs adoption. He felt that ADA should be writing to Government to confirm the situation due to the areas of massive growth in our area and lack of direction.

Mr. Thomson said he agreed with Mr. Thomas's frustration and had vented the same on the CLG and DEFRA. He said that DEFRA had a remit to deal with it and the real focus was that CLG should ask DEFRA to help – gently but firmly. ADEPT should be lobbied to try and get SuDs back on the map again, as no action had been taken on it.

Mr. D. McMurdo said he was passionate about this issue and had been to conference and asked for SuDs clarity and offered the Secretary of State a visit to Bedford. He urged Members to respond to the Government consultation on housing called "Fix our broken housing market".

Mr. Cator asked if Mr. McMurdo could provide him with a copy of the letter to his MP

Mr. P. Burton commented that the new A14 would be coming through his farm stating that it was absolutely shocking where they had stopped the exposure. More than 300 acres had now been included in a flood plain where it had never had any water on it – all because no one has drained out the local brook. He asked if the EA could please have a look.

Mr. Burrow said that he was dealing with the A14 works there and Highland Water was dealing with consents for works. He asked that Mr. Burton let me know details so that he could deal with it in conversations.

Mr. Mark Gilbert (Littleport and Downham) stated that his Board Members would have major concerns with the raising of the Middle Level Barrier Bank and could the EA have a direct line of conversation with his Engineer, Mr. A. Newton, concerning the same. He was concerned about the level of protection to ratepayers and would like a further briefing and update. Perhaps the EA could bear the brunt of the challengers at the Board's next meeting?

The Chairman commented on what he felt had been a good conference covering Health and Safety/Floodex/the shop front/Glysohate/eels/demaining/PSCAs/localism/politics and housing. He thanked all the panel members for their presentations.

#### **ACCOUNTS to 31st MARCH 2016**

Upon the proposition of Mr H. Raby (Vice Chairman), seconded by Mr. D. McMurdo, the accounts of the Branch were unanimously accepted and approved by Members, as presented and circulated.

#### **SUBSCRIPTIONS FOR 2017/18**

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**

6th March, 2018 at 2.30 p.m. at Prickwillow Village Hall.

The Chairman then went on to thank Mr. Henry Cator on the marvellous job he had done for us and that he had been a fantastic Chairman. He hoped to see him again on various committees, who he said would be delighted to have him. The Chairman stated that he would miss the passion of Mr. Cator.

Meeting closed at 4.15 p.m.