

ADA ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2017 REPORT

The 80th Annual Conference and AGM of the Association of Drainage Authorities was held on 16 November at One Great George Street in Westminster, London. This report presents an extended summary of the Conference proceedings. The report includes Association business, reports from the Board, Committees and Chief Executive, keynote presentations, and a summary of the open discussion forum.

WELCOME BY HENRY CATOR OBE

Henry opened ADA's 80th Anniversary Conference to a full house of 235 delegates, as well as a number of students from the Flood and Coastal Engineering degree programme at Brunel University, who had been invited as guests. This was a fitting tribute to Henry in his last duties as ADA Chairman. As has always been his style, Henry encouraged everyone to celebrate past achievements but most importantly, look forward to new opportunities.

He said that a rather sombre discussion with Great Yarmouth's police chief on the subject of business priorities got him thinking about the three important priorities for our own industry.

The first one he touched upon was over-regulation of the environment and the danger that it could undermine what it is actually intended to do. He said that many view (over) regulation to be strangling good practice in environmental protection.

His second point focussed on productivity and the need to embrace and invest in innovation and technology. He was particularly concerned about protecting and conserving the UK's Grade I agricultural land, and its ability to produce our food of the future. He highlighted significant differences of approach between the Netherlands where the Dutch

spend 0.15% of their gross domestic product on water level management and the UK where we spend 0.015%.

The final point was the need to "sort out our planning system" and Henry went on to add "we cannot keep building houses and waiting for them to flood because nobody has thought to actually build in water level management into the long-term plan. It is a charter for developers..... they're not interested in staying around to see the long-term consequences of water level management, and I don't think that that is acceptable going forward, at a time when we're told we need to increase the amount of house-building."

Henry expressed concern at the lack of engagement on sustainable drainage by the Department of Communities & Local Government [now MHCLG] and insisted that they need to be engaged urgently in the conversation.

Henry finished with some stark messages about the risks of not working more closely together and seeing our flood defence and water management infrastructure declining. He said that the gathered delegates and wider industry were all poised, ready to lead in managing our drainage, water levels and flood risks in true partnership to contribute to a better, more prosperous future for

us all. To do that, they need Government's continued support.

ASSOCIATION BUSINESS & AGM

ELECTIONS

Lord De Ramsey was unanimously re-elected as ADA's President along with ADA's Vice Presidents; Baroness McIntosh, Neil Parish MP, David Riddington OBE, and Jean Venables CBE. These were proposed by Councillor Doug McMurdo (Bedford & River Ivel IDB) and seconded by Sir Edward Greenwell (East Suffolk IDB).

Robert Caudwell was unanimously elected to succeed Henry Cator as ADA's Chairman proposed by John Hoyles (North Level District IDB), seconded by Michael Sly (North Level District IDB).

On behalf of ADA, Robert Caudwell thanked Henry Cator for his years of service as chairman of ADA. Robert explained his aims, and ambitions as chairman of ADA. He wanted to see strong partnerships between ADA's members at every level, from local communities to national government, and with a range of wider interests involved as well. He wanted these to be true partnerships, of equals, achieving more and better outcomes in managing water levels and flood risk.

ACCOUNTS

The audited accounts for the year ending 31 December 2016 were presented to the Conference and approved as proposed by Frances Bowler (Bedford Group of IDBs), seconded by Councillor Gordon Bambridge (Norfolk Rivers IDB), and passed unanimously. The auditors Streets Audit LLP were reappointed as auditors of ADA's 2017

accounts as proposed by Charles Pudge (River Lugg IDB) and seconded by Tony Bradford (Parrett IDB).

SUBSCRIPTIONS

The subscriptions for 2018 proposed by ADA Board of Directors were presented to the Conference as reported in Appendix C. There was an increase of 1% for ADA Members' subscription fees and an increase to £395 for ADA Associate Members in 2018.

MEMBERSHIP

ADA's membership in 2017 was noted as reported in Appendix D as 106 IDBs, 4 national agencies, 1 water company, 6 Welsh internal drainage district advisory groups, 12 RFCCs, 34 Local Authorities, and 69 Associate Members.

REPORTS FROM ADA'S BOARD OF DIRECTORS AND COMMITTEES

The reports from ADA's Board of Directors, Policy & Finance Committee, and Technical & Environmental Committee were tabled in Appendix F of the Conference Handbook.

REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Innes Thomson reported on a successful 12 months for ADA since the previous Conference, especially around increasing collaboration amongst ADA's membership. Innes thanked the hard work of the ADA office team based at Stoneleigh Park, and their work enhancing ADA's brand, website and communications. Innes was pleased to see such a breadth of members in the audience from IDBs, EA, and local authorities, as well as Albert Vermue from the Union of Water Boards in the Netherlands and EUWMA. Innes welcomed new authorities who had

recently joined ADA including Salford City Council, Bedford Borough Council, the Coal Authority and Anglian Water. He hoped the latter was a sign that further water companies would come on board in the near future.

Councillor Doug McMurdo (Bedford & River level IDB) asked what ADA is doing to recruit local authorities as members given their important role in FCERM. Innes responded that he wanted ADA to have a clear value for local authorities, and that ADA is seeking to influence government on matters that are particularly important to local authorities, such as SuDS. Bronwyn Buntine (Kent County Council) highlighted the Local Authority SuDS Officers Organisation that has 350 local authority officers and is looking to partner with ADA in the future.

KEYNOTE ADDRESSES
DR THÉRÈSE COFFEY MP,
PARLIAMENTARY UNDER SECRETARY
OF STATE FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

Dr Coffey congratulated ADA on its 80th birthday, saying "it's right to focus on the future, and the challenges and opportunities facing us today. Not only does your strength come from the deep roots in the communities that you serve, but also from your pragmatism, your ability to adapt, and, I hope, the rising to new challenges"

Dr Coffey authorised the pilot projects now underway and the Main River Guidance which sets out clearly how de-maining should take place following the strong representations from ADA. Other de-maining opportunities may follow.

She was pleased that the IDBs are strengthening their local accountability and

governance and making sure that Local Authorities are properly represented on Drainage Boards.

Dr Coffey recognises that IDBs are working closely with the EA to achieve "best in class" status for the environment, and she stressed the government's commitment to creating a better environment whilst applying lighter-touch regulation.

She appreciated a summer visit to the South Forty Foot catchment saying "...it's good to see the excellent work being done on the ground. Not only was I encouraged to see the existing commitment and collaboration between the risk management authorities, it was also the willingness to involve the local community in these proposals."

Dr Coffey highlighted Defra's focus on the findings of the NAO report on IDBs published back in March 2017. She reassured IDBs that Defra "will be taking a more proactive approach to analysing the information that IDBs provide in their annual reports....and capture better information on governance and the environment, which we can use to highlight the excellent work that you do, and also identify areas where IDBs may need additional support"

On the subject of Public Sector Co-operation Agreements, Dr Coffey was pleased to report an increased usage and the £1.25 million of efficiency savings which had been made.

Dr Coffey went on to confirm that she wants IDBs to play a central role as Defra plan for better local and national water management. She said that Defra have decided to bring IDBs and other currently exempt abstractors

within the Water Abstraction Licensing system. Dr Coffey emphasised that “land drainage activities to prevent flooding and IDB abstractions within drainage districts will remain exempt.”

The new licencing regime will start on 1st January 2018. She went on to say that “I took on board your suggestions from last year’s consultation to improve the light-touch licencing approach. I know that many IDBs still have concerns about this change”. With IDBs ready to embrace the principles of good water resource management, Dr Coffey assured delegates that she will be looking at “effective funding streams to recover your costs from those that benefit, and I would like to work with you to make sure that this happens.”

Dr Coffey also recognises the need to ensure IDBs can adapt to new water level management challenges and be able to expand their boundaries where it is required. She added that “we know it’s necessary for new IDBs to be established but, as many of you know, it’s not always possible, because the 1990’s rating lists are unavailable.”

Encouragingly, she mentioned that the government has got legislation drafted to address this issue, and they will take it forward as soon as parliamentary time allows.

As well as welcoming Robert Caudwell into his new role as ADA’s Chair, Dr Coffey re-iterated the message that water level management is the very key to the future of UK Plc, but also one that protects the environment, our homes, and our businesses. She closed by saying, “I really do want to work and ensure that IDBs are on a strong footing

in the future. You are an essential part of the framework for managing water levels and flood risk, and I will work closely with ADA to make sure that you are well-represented in government” and she warmly added “Henry, thank you for the excellent leadership that you have provided to ADA over recent years and I know that you’ve played a pivotal part in promoting the work of water level management, and the work of IDBs. Thank you for all of that work, and your positive engagement with government, on behalf of ADA and the Boards.”

**COUNCILLOR DEREK ANTROBUS,
LEAD MEMBER FOR PLANNING
& SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT,
SALFORD CITY COUNCIL**

Derek introduced himself as an “outsider” but to those that know him and those that didn’t, it became clear that he was anything but! As a previous NW RFCC Chair and current planning lead at Salford City Council, there is not a lot that Derek doesn’t know about drainage, water level & flood risk management, especially in urban environments.

He started by painting an image of his much-loved city through references to literature (The Classic Slum), music (Dirty Old Town) and of course the famous artwork of LS Lowry. Derek has always seen the bigger picture and the importance of wider catchment management and he eloquently spelt out the need for joint thinking for rural/urban water management solutions. He referred back to the Gladstone era in 1877 and proposals then for river conservancy boards, which were strongly opposed by a certain Mr Arthur Pell MP. Derek recommended a read of Hansard to follow some of the colourful debates on the subject which highlighted a Commons

divide between uplanders and lowlanders.

Derek went on to say that those debates in the late-Victorian period actually fashioned some of the thinking around land drainage which is still with us today. He then went on to explain some of the great work going on in the NW and the River Irwell around Salford to help heal the rural/urban divide through wider catchment planning. Derek explained that planners in Salford and the Greater Manchester Area are turning considerations for spatial planning on their head by firstly looking at the environmental assets of an area before considering housing needs. He argued that this in turn leads to the conceiving of far more sustainable development plans which consider the environmental, social and economic criteria in close co-operation with each other.

Derek welcomed funding from Defra for Catchment Hosts but commented that it would be much more beneficial to have the funding for longer periods than just yearly. He described Salford as one of the urban pioneers of natural flood management catchment with a variety of small scale SuDS projects including roadside tree pits reducing peak flow run off by up to 70%. Sadly, planners, he said, cannot always insist on such detail and they are dependent on the co-operation of developers.

Derek also outlined work on a much larger SuDS project through the creation of a 20-acre park and public amenity space on a meander neck of the Irwell River in the city itself, as well as providing development land for economic regeneration. And this was all transformed from one of the largest spoil heaps in Europe. He also proudly featured

the joint work between Salford City Council and the EA in developing a flood basin which provides wonderful open space with wetlands adjacent to one of the most deprived wards in the whole country.

Derek concluded by hoping that the government's eagerly awaited 25-year environmental plan, which must be accepted and applied across all government departments, will lead to us all living in a more beautiful place and he poignantly added "I believe that by using catchment planning, and by making sure that we deliver SuDS, not just pay lip service to them, we can create that better environment for us all"

Derek actively supports the creation of new water management boards in the north west where there is an appetite for them and ADA warmly welcomed his announcement that Salford City Council will become members in 2018.

SIR JAMES BEVAN, CHIEF EXECUTIVE, ENVIRONMENT AGENCY

Sir James started by offering his anniversary congratulations to ADA, warmly thanking Henry for his leadership of the industry and welcoming Robert as ADA's new Chair. He continued by re-stating the EA's strong support for the de-maining pilots and added "I've seen the benefits and the opportunities that they present, and we are keen to identify with you other opportunities where we could de-main"

Sir James re-iterated that the EA will only want to de-main where there is a local desire with capacity to take on what is main river:

He then went on to support Defra's position

on water transfer and abstraction licensing and assured Conference that the EA will continue to work with ADA and IDBs to ensure that the new arrangements for licensing do deliver a fair and sustainable solution for IDBs.

As well as being a fan of IDBs and ADA, he also shared his liking of the Regional Flood and Coastal Committees, Local Authorities and all the others who work together to manage water levels and flood risk for the nation. Sir James makes every effort to visit projects and places when he can and through those visits, he has established a much deeper understanding of the value of water management to our rural economy.

Sir James' second message was about people and the immense value of those working in drainage, water level and flood risk management. He added "Most people don't know, but they should, that you are the people who help keep communities, and property, with us, safe from flooding, and you're the people who help ensure that the land can feed us now, and that it will be able to feed future generations."

He emphasised the importance of working in partnership and the part that ADA's members play in delivering better flood risk protection to homes by 2021. Partnerships are two-way, he said, through respecting each other's points of view, adding "It means working out how we can balance goals that sometimes conflict.so it is not surprising that we will sometimes have our disagreements."

He also warmly welcomed ADA's initiative to invite first-year Flood Foundation Degree students to Conference and spent some time with them earlier in the day.

Much appreciated by many in the audience, Sir James then went on to outline his support for dredging but making it clear that he is in favour of doing it where it makes a difference to flood risk, and where it is value for money. He added "dredging is, and will remain, an important part of the Environment Agency's maintenance program...and last year we spent £22 million on dredging."

Sir James concluded with reference to the writings of Jeremy Purseglove in his book 'Taming the Flood'. It makes the point that rivers shaped humans and human history, well before humans shaped them. Purseglove says that we admire an environment that we also depend on for food. We may reduce dredging, but if we stop it altogether, floods will overwhelm us. We're therefore committed, he says, to managing rivers, and to draining land. It is the way that we do so that counts. That depends on two things, for which the English have always had a special genius - a sense of place, and a sense of compromise.

LORD DEBEN, CHAIRMAN, COMMITTEE ON CLIMATE CHANGE

Lord Deben's lunch time speech was a very warm acknowledgement to Henry Cator's character, ethos and achievements during his time at ADA. He discussed various elements within the Water Level Management industry such as; Local people, the environment and public service.

He began by emphasising the importance of high-quality service in the community, and reflected how Henry has always been a role model for this. He said; "I think the real quality he represents is the quality of service to his community". Lord Deben Highlighted public service and service to a community is what

has been a characteristic of this country, and that England has been proud to depend on the voluntary principle. He acknowledged some of Henry's extra-curricular achievements, such as; Deputy Lieutenant for Norfolk, his OBE, his work for Norwich Cathedral, and his contribution to the Royal Agricultural Society. However he chose to focus on his work in our industry.

As a custodian of our environment, Henry has been a progenitor of the ethos: "pass something on to the next generation that's better than what we've received ourselves" he continued, and this clearly shows through in the development of our industry under Henry's leadership.

He continued by expressing that when it comes to knowledge and hard work, it is often not the civil servants or the consultants who know best, but the local people in the community. He said that Henry proclaims these value in his life, making us all aware of the importance of locality, and how local people commit to the issue at hand.

He finished by saying that as a nation, our country is rooted in tradition, continuity and evolution. The people who make evolution possible are those who have the deepest roots in our society, the longest traditions to defend, and the greatest desire to pass on what they have received; "there are few who you would put into that position, and keep this nation as it should be, so clearly as Henry Cator".

OPEN DISCUSSION FORUM

Following the Conference presentations there was an open forum to enable members to raise questions and discuss relevant topics with speakers and other experts in attendance.

TOPICS RAISED BY DELEGATES

INCLUDED:

- SuDS long-term maintenance and the planning process (David Thomas, Middle Level Commissioners / Bronwyn Buntine, Kent County Council),
- organisation of flood risk management in England (Councillor Roger Thomas, Lower Medway IDB),
- EA precept and main river maintenance (John Duckett, Danvm Drainage Commissioners / Gordon Bambridge, Norfolk Rivers IDB / Tony Bradford, Parrett IDB),
- utilisation of recycled plastic in flood defences (Rod Fox, Revaluetch),
- natural flood management within the urban environment (Paul Lockhart, EA), and
- learning from the Dutch and moving beyond reactive investment for FCERM (Peter Bateson, Witham Fourth District IDB).