

ADA South East Branch

Minutes of the Meeting of the ADA South East Branch held on Thursday 27th April 2017 in the Amos Meeting Room, Hobbs Parker Offices Ashford Cattle Market, Monument Way, Orbital Park Ashford, Kent. TN24 0HB

Present

N Botting, M Burgess, P Camomile, P Coe, L Cooke, J Dilnot, M Dobson, P Dowling, A Eastwood, G Etheridge, B Gower, P Hazelhurst, A Hicks, P Howard, H Langrish, R Langrish, D Linfoot, M Martin, R Monje, D Smith, H Stummer-Schmertzing M Tapp and M Watson.

In Attendance

R Caudwell and I Moodie (ADA)
J Foley, I Nunn and A Pinfold (Environment Agency)
M Tant (Kent County Council)

Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from D Chalcraft, M Conolly, A Cragg, D Lovejoy, A Hills, C Jenkinson, S Marshall, R Nickerson, R Patten, G Steed, P Sims, C Solley, C Wadham, S Walker, P Williams, , D Wimble and B Wrout.

Welcoming

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and made special mention of Ian Moodie and Robert Caudwell from ADA, Julie Foley, Ian Nunn and Alice Pinfold from the EA, Priscilla Hazlehurst and Gary Etheridge from the North Kent Marshes IDB, and Phil Camomile and Bill Gower from the Pevensey and Cuckmere Water Level Management Board.

Election of Branch Chairman

The Branch Secretary took the Chair and asked for nominations for the position of Branch Chairman; it was proposed by M Watson, seconded by M Burgess and resolved unanimously that Larry Cooke be reappointed as the Branch Chairman.

Election of Vice Chairman

It was proposed by M Tapp, seconded by M Burgess and resolved unanimously that Mike Dobson be reappointed as the Branch Vice Chairman.

Election of Branch Secretary

It was proposed by P Camomile, seconded by P Dowling and resolved unanimously that Nick Botting be reappointed as the Branch Secretary.

Election of Director to ADA Board

It was proposed by M Burgess, seconded by P Camomile and resolved unanimously that Mike Watson be reappointed as an ADA Director for the next three years.

Minutes of the Previous Branch Meeting

Minutes of the Branch Meeting held on 28th April 2016 were received and unanimously agreed to be a correct record of the previous meeting.

Matters Arising from Minutes

There were no matters arising.

Matters for Discussion

ADA General Update

Robert Caudwell introduced himself as the new Vice-Chairman of ADA and informed the room of his background as a farmer, a Chairman of the Regional Flood and Coastal Erosion Committee, and a district councillor. He explained that it was expected he would replace Henry Cator as Chairman of ADA when Henry retired later in the year, and he looked forward to helping ADA increase its influence and grow as an organisation. He emphasised the need for ADA to get across the importance of Boards' work via lobbying governmental departments and promoting exhibitions such as Floodex which brought together all aspects of the water management industry.

New South East Boards

The Chairman asked the new members to speak on the recently-formed Boards in Kent and East Sussex. Bill Gower informed the Branch that he was the Chairman of the Pevensey and Cuckmere Water Level Management Board which had been running since 1st April 2017. He thanked the EA for helping to understand how his district worked and made special mention of the local assistance provided; on a different note he expressed a degree of frustration in the Board's dealings at higher level with the Agency with regards to the actual handover procedure.

Priscilla Hazlehurst explained that she was the Clerk/Engineer to the North Kent Marshes IDB which had been running since October 2016; the Board had eleven members and covered 10,000 hectares. She stated that the Water Level Management Plan for the district was due for renewal as the original dated from 1999 and such practicalities are being gradually addressed as the Board moves forward.

National Audit Office Report

Ian Moodie informed the room of the recently-published report by the National Audit Office on IDBs, particularly with regards to their governance procedures and their composition; he added that the report was very much a high level desktop study. He continued that there was a not unexpected critical element to the report which commented on Board size, expertise of members and possible conflicts of interest in some cases. Mr Moodie reported that ADA had responded to the report detailing areas where the report appeared to not fully understand how Boards operated, he added that there was a likelihood of pressure for more Board amalgamations. The Chairman stated that membership of amalgamated Boards was often greater to allow for proper representation of districts, he also made the point of stating that members are unpaid, something the report appeared to miss completely. Mr Moodie agreed with the comment and added that ADA were looking to produce a guide that new Board members could be given to help explain their role. Robert Caudwell told the branch that ADA was there to support Boards, not govern or dictate, but there were issues of clarity on some Board's websites and ADA would look to assist if requested.

Phil Camomile thought the report was "shocking" as it appeared to stem from issues discovered with a very small percentage of Boards rather than taking the sector as a whole. He added that the report had caused problems at a local level with regards to working with the EA on Public Sector Cooperation Agreements who were back-peddalling in some cases, citing the contents of the report as a reason. Julie Foley replied that the EA were fully behind the PSCAs and partnership working, she added that local issues should be addressed promptly as they did not reflect the beliefs of senior management at the Agency.

De-Maining Pilot Schemes

Julie Foley introduced herself as the EA's Area Manager for Kent and South London, a position she had previously held at Cambridge and Bedfordshire; she then asked Alice Pinfold to give an update and overview on the de-maining pilot scheme being worked on by the Agency and the River Stour (Kent) IDB.

Ms Pinfold informed the room that the approach to the process was very much a learning experience between the two parties which would be relayed back to the EA's national team for future reference. The initial tranche consisted of 10 watercourses stretching for 37 kilometres that were being surveyed for condition of both watercourse and any associated assets. Pete Dowling explained that the first tranche was to be followed by the investigation of another 33 kms, again the premise would be based on the function of the watercourse in relation to those dependant on it, its condition and cost of maintenance. The Branch Chairman warned that the pilot scheme should not be viewed as a "one size fits all" study as different districts and Boards had different approaches and needs. Ian Moodie stated that the pilots were not a diminishment of Agency activity but an effort to improve efficiency between authorities, he continued that nationally four other pilots were in a similar process but the districts were varied in size and nature. Pete Dowling added that any Board would have to assess its situation on a case by case basis; Robert Caudwell stressed the five schemes were very much pilots. The question of funding was raised by Phil Camomile who queried both the cost of bringing a watercourse into adoptable condition and the future maintenance of the same. He suggested that preliminary work could be covered under a PSCA whereby a Board do the work at the EA's expense and long-term funding covered by a reduction of the precept paid to the EA. Julie Foley replied that the issue was very complex but the question of the precept was to be discussed; she added that the EA were still managing a large amount of Main River with its associated assets. Robert Caudwell cautioned that Boards will not want to take on failing assets.

EA Operations Update and Partnership Working

Ian Nunn was encouraged with the EA's positive relationship with the local IDBs and gave details on where the precept would be spent in the coming year for the established IDBs. He stated that for the Stour IDB the main focus would be on PSCAs, for the Medway IDBs the focus was on the new Bells and Mockett pumping station and lastly, for Romney Marshes IDB the work would be more land drainage based with work to EA pumping stations intended. He commented on maintenance funding that had seen £11.5m spent in the Kent and South London area in 2016/17 with an additional 5% being allocated for this financial year but cautioned that a constriction was likely in the future, he also stated that 15% of the funding was unallocated with a view of ensuring workforce numbers remained unchanged. Continuing with the topic of the EA's workforce he announced that the provision of iPads to its staff that would allow for more accurate reporting on work carried out using precept funding. The flood warning system was discussed; overall sentiment in the room was that the accuracy of predictions was very good and the cautionary nature of the alerts welcome. Ian Nunn asked that landowners who wished to carry out works to Main River on their land should ensure that they are complying with the Agency's Environmental Permitting Regulations which would avoid possible prosecution if breached. The Chairman asked if the EA's funding stream, based on the 5 year term of Government, was in danger as a snap election had been called after 2 years; Julie Foley thought this unlikely as Government departments now appeared to understand the need for long term investment in flood risk management. The Chairman then asked how the EA were reacting to the exceptionally dry winter and current lack of rainfall. Ian Nunn agreed that the lack of rainfall meant that maintaining adequate water levels in the districts was becoming a major struggle, Julie Foley stated that the domestic water supply situation was currently satisfactory however a technical group had been set up to monitor water reserves and appropriate measures would be taken as necessary.

Communication

Martin Tapp asked that agendas for upcoming ADA Board meetings should be sent out in a timely fashion to allow for comment or input from members; this request was duly noted.

ADA Business Plan 2017-2020

Ian Moodie and Robert Caudwell informed the members that ADA were looking to set up a GIS layer to show the public where IDBs were situated which would also provide information for those Boards and this would be accessed via Google Maps. They believed that the Gazette was an excellent conduit for increasing awareness of Boards' work and distribution of the magazine would hopefully become more widespread adding that larger sections on Branch news would be beneficial.

Glyphosate

Ian Moodie explained that Glyphosate was currently licensed for use in watercourses for weed control on invasive species but the licence was due for renewal. He continued that scientific research had possibly detected a link between the chemical and cancer which could mean the licence would not be renewed,

leaving no chemical method available for dealing with invasive weed species such as Floating Pennywort. Robert Caudwell advised that mechanical control of such species was not an option as it generally made the situation worse by spreading the cut material allowing greater regrowth. Peter Howard asked if the EA were making representations to DEFRA on the matter; Ian Nunn replied that they were not permitted to lobby such governmental departments, this was confirmed by Robert Caudwell, however ADA were to lobby on behalf of the water management industry.

Date of Next Meeting

It was agreed that the Romney Marshes Area IDB would host the next ADA South East Branch meeting. The date to be Thursday 26th April 2018; venue to be The Amos Room, Ashford Cattle Market.

Any Other Business

Ian Moodie and Robert Caudwell collectively announced two upcoming events; first to be announced was the Floodex Exhibition to be held at the Peterborough Showground on 17th and 18th May which they urged members to attend. Secondly, they informed the Branch that the ADA Conference would be taking place on the 16th November 2017 at the Institute of Civil Engineers Headquarters in London; the day would also mark the retirement of Henry Cator and ADA's 80th birthday.

Mike Watson asked if the concept of setting up SuDs Appraisal Boards was still valid; Ian Moodie replied that the situation was somewhat muddled but some long term agreements for maintenance of SuDs had been agreed in certain areas. Robert Caudwell added that those who represented the building industry had a strong influence on governmental thinking.

Lastly, the Chairman made a comment on the adoption by Boards of the code of conduct produced for small authorities and queried its effectiveness as there was no firm mechanism in it to dismiss a Board member if they breached the code. It was acknowledged all-round that the code lacked "teeth" but at least it gave out a message for members' responsibilities.

Meeting Closed

There being no further business the Chairman declared the meeting closed at 12pm and thanked all members for their attendance.