

ADA South East Branch

Minutes of the Meeting of the ADA South East Branch held on Thursday 28th April 2016 in the Stock Pot Meeting Room, Hobbs Parker Offices Ashford Cattle Market, Monument Way, Orbital Park Ashford, Kent. TN24 0HB

Present

N Botting, M Burgess, P Coe, L Cooke, F Cooke, J Dilnot, M Dobson, P Dowling, A Eastwood, A Hicks, A Hills, P Howard, J Langrish, R Langrish, D Linfoot, D Lovejoy, I Martin, M Martin, D Smith, H Stummer-Schmertzing and M Watson.

In Attendance

Innes Thomson (Chief Executive, Association of Drainage Authorities) and Ian Nunn (Environment Agency).

Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from D Botting, D Chalcraft, M Conolly, A Cragg, A Ganly, S Marshall, R Monje, R Nickerson, M Ovenden, P Rolfe, P Sims, J Smith, G Steed, M Tapp and G Wyant.

Welcoming

L Cooke welcomed Innes Thomson and Ian Nunn to the meeting and asked Peter Dowling to advise the Branch on recent changes at the River Stour (Kent) IDB. Mr Dowling explained that Derek Lewis, the previous Clerk, had retired in February after 24 year's service, and Peter himself was now Clerk and Engineer to the Board.

Election of Branch Chairman

N Botting took the Chair and asked for nominations for the position of Branch Chairman; it was proposed by A Hills, seconded by M Dobson and resolved unanimously that Larry Cooke be reappointed as the Branch Chairman.

Election of Vice Chairman

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

Election of Branch Secretary

It was proposed by L Cooke, seconded by M Martin and resolved unanimously that Nick Botting be reappointed as the Branch Secretary.

Minutes of the Previous Branch Meeting

Minutes of the Branch Meeting held on 29th April 2015 were received and unanimously agreed to be a correct record of the previous meeting.

Matters Arising from Minutes

The Branch Secretary made mention of a recent update on Election Notices where it would appear that their inclusion on an IDB's website would be deemed acceptable as a Public Notice at a minimum, thereby

saving the cost of advertising in local newspapers. The Chief Executive added that Defra had agreed in principle but he was waiting for further confirmation.

Matters for Discussion

ADA General Update

The Chief Executive informed the Branch that the last 12 months had proved very significant in the water level management industry and rainfall events in the North of the country had again brought the Government's attention to the need for adequate funding for flood risk management. He added that it was believed that the general public were confused by the language used to predict flood events and gave the example of the industry's use of statistics such as "a one in one hundred year event" which many would understand as an event that would only occur once in a hundred years. If householders were then flooded in successive years by rainfall described statistically as a one in one hundred year event then it was only natural that the statistics were questioned by the affected parties. Cllr D Smith suggested that ADA might produce a flyer explaining flood risk statistics which could be passed on by IDBs and shown on relevant websites; the Chief Executive agreed to consider this proposal.

The issue of long term maintenance funding for the Environment Agency was raised by the Chief Executive. He explained to the Branch that, from December, the Agency maintenance spend had been agreed for the duration of the current parliament and this would help forward planning; something that proved difficult when funding was only announced every 12 months. He continued that the EA's maintenance of Main River in areas considered low risk was again under review and stated that the possible de-maining of Main River was being investigated with a number of pilot schemes to be announced nationwide. For the South East area, the River Stour (Kent) IDB was to be included in the pilot studies with approximately 50 kilometres of Main River under review; the Chief Executive underlined the fact that this was a possibility only and thorough scrutiny of asset condition and long term funding would be essential. Debate on the matter focused on the cost to an IDB should it adopt de-mained watercourses for maintenance and water level management; discussion was primarily concerned with the effective cap of 1.99% on the Special Levies presented to Councils meaning funding would likely have to be found elsewhere.

Water Transfer Licensing

The Chief Executive informed the meeting of ADA's response to Defra's review of Abstraction Licensing where it was proposed to impose the necessity of a licence for IDBs where they fed water from Main River into an Internal Drainage District. ADA had opposed the idea as the IDBs were not the users or beneficiaries of such movements but fed water into districts for the general good of the area, be it for abstraction, maintaining wetlands, wet fencing or keeping designated environmental sites in optimum condition.

Election and Public Notices

As this item was picked up in Matters Arising, it was deemed a re-visit was not required.

Environment Agency Operations Update

The Kent and South London Operations Manager, Mr Ian Nunn, made further reference to the winter floods experienced in the North of England and the EA's response to it. He stated that the Agency had acted as a whole nationally with local staff travelling to the affected areas and assisting in the emergency response. He added that Defra and the Agency recognised the need for an emergency response body for any future events and the EA would be best suited to take that role; further to this the EA's depot at Scots Float, Playden, Rye had been designated as a national strategic depot. This meant the site would hold stock of plant and equipment that could be employed nationwide.

From a local perspective, Mr Nunn told the Branch that maintenance had progressed "generally well" over the last year but for 2016/17 the challenges were greater; more work was envisaged due to the increased funding allocated by the Government. He stated that Defra wanted the EA to increase desilting work by 50% and to achieve that amount of work he suggested the Agency would need to employ contractors as there were insufficient direct staff numbers. Lastly he confirmed that the EA's regional boundaries now echoed those of Natural England, which, for the South East, meant that East Sussex was included in the Kent and South London area.

De-Maining EA Main River & Transfer of Operations

Expanding on the comments made earlier by the ADA Chief Executive, EA Operations Manager, Ian Nunn, informed the Branch that a number of pilot schemes for de-maining Main River were to begin, these were collectively named the National Main River Rationalisation Project. The River Stour (Kent) IDB had been identified as a pilot area and, of the other IDBs in the South East (other than the yet to be formed Pevensey and Cuckmere WLMB) there may be possibilities for de-maining on the Isle of Sheppey (Lower Medway IDB). Mr Nunn pointed out that in the Romney and Rother areas the issue was more complicated. Notwithstanding this, dialogue on the initial pilots would start in 2016 with a view to be completed by 2018 and more areas would be targeted and discussions held from 2020. The rivers and assets identified were considered low risk by the EA but their status as Main River meant that they could not be de-mained without a suitable authority willing to take them on; this, of course, would require a funding stream which, as yet, had not been identified. It was also acknowledged that the assets would need to be in an acceptable condition before any transfer could take place; Mr Nunn again told the Branch that this was very much a case of early days and the pilot schemes would be treated as a learning experience between all parties.

Mr Nunn told the Branch that the EA was rolling out a new "AIMS" asset management system. He explained that all operatives would receive their work schedule on iPads which would contain all relevant information required for the working day. This would reduce paperwork and improve accuracy where actual job duration was concerned, allowing better scrutiny and promoting transparency.

Expansion of Internal Drainage Districts

The Chief Executive informed the Branch that Phil Camomile, of the Water Level Management Alliance, is currently looking into the legal aspects of expanding IDD's. It is thought that this may be possible under a Ministerial Order, which is relatively quick and straight forward to implement. Further details and updates will be made available by ADA as this matter progresses.

Date of Next Meeting

It was agreed that the River Stour (Kent) IDB would host the next ADA South East Branch meeting. The date to be Thursday 27th April 2017; venue to be The Stock Pot Room, Ashford Cattle Market.

Any Other Business

The ADA Chief Executive made a series of announcements regarding upcoming events, first to be announced was the Floodex Exhibition to be held at the Peterborough Showground on 18th and 19th May which Mr Thomson urged members to attend. Secondly, he informed the Branch that the ADA Conference would be taking place on the 17th November 2016 at the Institute of Civil Engineers Headquarters in London, he added that Oliver Letwin MP was due to attend.

The Chief Executive informed the Branch that ADA had a new Vice-Chairman, Robert Caudwell, who had a multitude of previous experience including work for the National Farmers Union and the National Trust. Lastly, Mr Thomson updated the Branch on ADA's recent re-branding exercise; he stated that the ADA logo would remain, as would the acronym "ADA" but the term "Association of Drainage Authorities" would no longer exist; instead, under the ADA name, would be a footnote explaining that ADA was the body representing those involved in water level management.

D Lovejoy asked if ADA were aware of any changes being considered for handing over responsibility of navigation rights from the EA to other bodies; the Chief Executive stated that he was unaware of any firm proposals.

Cllr A Hicks informed the Branch that Ashford Borough Council were to carry out an audit of watercourses in its district to ascertain their function and condition.

Meeting Closed

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

