

ADA South East Branch

Minutes of the Meeting of the ADA South East Branch held on Wednesday 29 April 2015 in the Stock Pot Meeting Room, Hobbs Parker Offices Ashford Cattle Market, Monument Way, Orbital Park Ashford, Kent. TN24 0HB

Present

N Botting, P Boulden, M Burgess, D Chalcraft, P Coe, L Cooke, F Cooke, M Dobson, P Dowling, A Eastwood, A Hicks, A Hills, P Howard, R Langrish, D Lewis, R Monje, M Tapp, M Watson.

In Attendance

Innes Thomson (Chief Executive, Association of Drainage Authorities), Lisa Lennox (Environment Agency), Bill Gower (Pevensey & Cuckmere WLMB Steering Group).

Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from H Cator, A Clifton-Holt, A Cragg, P Dyas, D Furnival, A Ganly, C Jenkinson, D Lovejoy, S Marshall, I Moodie, R Nickerson, I Nunn, N Ramus, D Smith, R Tillson.

Welcoming

L Cooke welcomed Innes Thomson, Lisa Lennox and Bill Gower to the meeting and asked each attendee to introduce themselves.

Election of Branch Chairman

N Botting took the Chair and asked for nominations for the position of Branch Chairman; it was proposed by F Cooke and seconded by A Hills, 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 F Cooke, seconded by A Hills 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 30th April 2014 were received. It was proposed by M Tapp and seconded by M Dobson and agreed unanimously that the minutes be signed off.

Matters Arising from Minutes

There were no issues raised.

Matters for Discussion

ADA General Update

The new Chief Executive gave a brief resume of his professional life and informed the room that he had experience of working with IDBs in the Trent Valley. He explained that he had worked concurrently with Dr Jean Venables for a number of weeks prior to her retirement from ADA and this had help ease him into his new position. Mr Thomson stated that ADA had relocated to Stoneleigh Park in Warwickshire with their new premises within throwing distance of the NFU offices; the main purpose of the move was to situate the ADA office in a more central location. He added that new staff had been recruited for both administration functions and communication and PR work.

Auditing Arrangements

A question was raised by D Chalcraft on the availability of the revised Practitioner's Guide which would confirm best practice regarding completion of the Audit Return, particularly the changes regarding the valuation of Fixed Assets. Innes Thompson advised that he was aware that work was taking place but would need to report back when this was due to be completed. *Following consultation with Peter Bateson, Innes Thompson later advised that the revised Practitioner's Guide was due to be available in the summer.*

EA Operations Update

In the absence of Ian Nunn the Branch Secretary read out a brief statement given to him by the EA Operations Manager; it was suggested that Lisa Lennox could relay any comments back to Mr Nunn. The statement included information on the operation team's budget for 2015/16 which was similar to the previous year, meaning that maintenance activity would be broadly the same. However, early indications suggested that cuts equal to or more than 15% were envisaged for the following financial year. The EA had bought a multi-functional work boat which would be used in the Stour and Romney areas; the Appledore Pumping Station would be fully refitted to reduce increasing pressure on other pumped catchments; sea defence work at Broomhill, Camber was on-target to be finished in the autumn and PSCA work with the River Stour IDB was progressing well. A Hills made comment on the planned shingle recharge at Littlestone and the proposed works to raise and partially realign the Eastern Wall of the tidal River Rother; the Branch Secretary informed the room that he and the Romney Board's Vice-Chairman were to sit on the working group for the Rother scheme. A Hills expressed concern on the condition of the shingle defences at Dengemarsh; L Lennox said she would report back to Ian Nunn. M Watson updated the Branch on the Lower Medway Board's partnership working with the EA on the single replacement pumping station for the Bells and Mocketts pumping stations. It was agreed that this type of combined approach demonstrated how well the authorities could operate together in finding a resolution to an ongoing problem.

Public Sector Cooperation Agreements

All Boards updated the Branch on their progress with the PSCAs; The Stour Board had begun works for the EA under their agreement and outcomes to date were favourable; The Lower Medway IDB were making significant headway with their PSCA. The Romney Marshes Area IDB, in conjunction with the EA, had identified areas where a sharing of activities could take place and would be aiming to finalise the relevant paperwork in the near future. Innes Thomson explained that further work on simplifying the agreements for maintenance works was taking place and slight editing of Clause 10 regarding liability would also occur. He continued that the PSCAs were a very important demonstration of authorities combining resources to optimise efficiency and provide value for money, he added that everyone should remember that they were a two way device and not just an opportunity for one authority to offload work onto another.

Kent and East Sussex Internal Drainage Districts

Lisa Lennox gave an overview of the current situation with the IDD's in Kent and Sussex. In Sussex, six IDD's were to be disbanded by the EA and the majority were not looking to form a new Board, this decision had attracted criticism from the NFU; however the Pevensy and Cuckmere Levels were to combine and form a new IDB and this had been somewhat facilitated by a shift in the local Councils' position. The Chairman, Vice-Chairman and staff of the Romney Marshes Area IDB had attended both administrative and site meetings in the Pevensy district to assess and inform the steering group of the embryonic Board. In Kent, the West of Gravesend IDD was to be disbanded but the East of Gravesend IDD would be overseen

by a new Board to be known as the North Kent Marshes IDB. Considerable input had been provided by staff from the Lower Medway IDB and efforts continued afoot to finalise the structure of the new Board. Bill Gower (Pevensy) thanked both the councils from his area and the Romney Marshes Area IDB for the assistance they were providing. Innes Thomson added that ADA would continue to support the formation of the new Boards and noted that other areas of the country were showing considerable interest in the creation of additional Boards.

Election and Public Notices

The Branch Secretary provided a background regarding the Water Act 2014 which had amended parts of the Land Drainage Act 1991 relating to the publication of certain notices. This had effectively removed the need to place these notices in various publications and allow the same to be published on Boards' websites. It was therefore asked whether the Public Notices associated with a Board's election process were also covered by the clauses in the Water Act as the cost of placing the notices in newspapers was considerable. Innes Thomson replied that, for the present, the notice procedure for an election remained the same but ADA would be raising the issue with Defra in its June meeting and it was believed that a change should be possible. A Hills pointed out that Public Notices formed a significant funding stream for local newspapers but acknowledged that the placing of notices on a Board's website would mean a saving to Boards; he added that it was possible to link to Parish and Town Council websites to ensure good local coverage.

Pumps and Eel Regulations

With significant media attention on the Eel Regulations and the potential cost to both IDBs and the EA, the Chief Executive explained how the regulations were being applied nationally and how certain key areas were being prioritised. He added that a pragmatic approach was essential and cost-effectiveness an additional consideration. The Boards shared their experiences with the application of the regulations locally and agreed that any issues should be approached on a case by case basis. It was also suggested that the science was possibly based on erroneous data which gave an incorrect foundation on how and why the regulations were being applied in the first place.

Date of Next Meeting

It was agreed that the Romney Marsh IDB would host the next ADA South East Branch meeting. The date to be Thursday 28th April 2016; venue to be The Stock Pot Room, Ashford Cattle Market.

Any Other Business

The Chief Executive gave a list of dates for forthcoming ADA events including the Annual Conference on the 11th November 2015 and news of a Flood Exhibition to be held on the 9th and 10th of March 2016 at the Peterborough Showground. Lastly he made mention of events in Somerset where the newly-formed Somerset Rivers Authority were in the process of reviewing drainage charges and whether areas not covered by an IDB should pay a rate. It appeared the Authority were pursuing a change in primary legislation to achieve their aims; Innes Thomson stated that ADA were watching the situation closely as it was felt that changes to primary legislation may not be in everyone's best interest. Lastly, R Monje asked whether ADA might look into setting up a forum on their website for members to share information and best practice; Innes Thomson replied that the idea had its appeal but care would have to be taken over access and content.

Meeting Closed

There being no further business the Chairman declared the meeting closed at 1140am and thanked all members for their attendance.