6th March 2018

**MINUTES** of the **THIRTY-NINTH ANNUAL CONFERENCE**

of the **RIVER GREAT OUSE BRANCH** of the

**ASSOCIATION OF DRAINAGE AUTHORITIES**

held at Prickwillow Village Hall, Prickwillow, near Ely on Tuesday 6th March 2018 at 2.30pm

**Present**

H. Raby, Esq in the Chair

C. Beardall, Esq. Environment Agency

Mrs F. Bowler Bedford Group

J.L. Brown, Es q Middle Level

P. Burrows, Esq. Environment Agency

M. Chenery of Horsbrugh Southery

G. Cirillo, Esq. Southery

P. Duffield, Esq. Stoke Ferry

Mrs F. Dunne Old West

J.H. Fenn, Esq Middle Level

J.J.F. Graves, Esq Old West/Swaffham

Mrs J.E. Heading Ely Group

J.E. Heading, Esq Manea & Welney

M.E. Heading, Esq. Middle Level

P. Hirons, Esq. Bedford Group

B. Hobbs, Esq. Middle Fen & Mere

B.K. Jarman, Esq Mildenhall

W.P.L. Legge, Esq. Downham Market Group

J.W. Lloyd, Esq. Cawdle Fen

B. Long, Esq. Kings Lynn

J.S. Martin, Esq. Waterbeach Level

Miss L. McShane Middle Level

Ms S. Moeed Environment Agency

A.A.D. Morbey, Esq. Ely Group, Middle Fen & Mere

B. Norman, Esq. Mildenhall

J. Oldfield, Esq. Bedford Group

A. Peacock, Esq. Padnal and Waterden

N. Pratt, Esq. Stoke Ferry

E.P. Rice, Esq. Padnal & Waterden

B. Stewart, Esq. RFCC (Central)

W. Sutton, Esq. Middle Level (FDC)

D.C. Thomas, Esq. Middle Level

I. Thomson, Esq. ADA

A. White, Esq Stoke Ferry

A. Williamson, Esq. East of Ouse

C.J.H. Wilson, Esq. Burnt Fen

G.L. Woollard, Esq. Swaffham

**CHAIRMAN**

It was proposed and seconded that Mr Harry Raby be elected Chairman of the Branch for the ensuing year.

**VICE CHAIRMAN**

It was proposed and second that Mr Marc Heading be elected Vice Chairman of the branch for the ensuing year.

**ELECTION OF BRANCH REPRESENTATIVE TO THE ADA EXECUTIVE BOARD**

It was proposed and seconded that Mr John Heading be elected to continue to represent the Branch on the Board.

**ELECTION OF BRANCH EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

It was proposed and seconded that the following members be elected to the Branch Executive Committee:-

Middle Level: Mr J. Brown and Mr J. Fenn

South Level: Mr W.P.L. Legge and Mr A.A.D. Morbey

Upper Reaches: Mr D. McCurdo and Mr P. Hirons

Outfall: Mr J. Austen and Mr B. Long

**APPOINTMENT OF BRANCH SECRETARY**

It was proposed and seconded that Mr David Thomas be elected Branch Secretary.

Mr Thomas thanked Members for his appointment and stated that in saying that the Branch needs to be more active he was echoing the views of the late Mr Anthony Morbey. We need an active Branch which represents the interests of the Great Ouse catchment working hand in hand with the Environment Agency. The format of the Annual Conference would continue as is as Prickwillow was a convenient venue for most Members but there would now be Executive meetings at least twice a year with issues of interest to the Branch on the Agenda. He would therefore welcome items for the Executive Agenda from Members. Mr Thomas thanked Jean Heading who had been Branch Secretary since 2004 and acknowledged all of the hard work she had done on behalf of the Branch during this time.

**APOLOGIES**

J.S. Austen (Water Management Alliance), R. Caudwell(ADA), A.G. Darby (Sawtry), W. Forbes (Burnt Fen), D. McCurdo (Bedford Group) and O. Palmer (Lakenheath).

**MINUTES/MATTERS ARISING**

The minutes of the Thirty-eight Annual Conference held on 7th March 2017 were presented as circulated and approved. There were no matters arising.

**CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman introduced Mr Innes Thomson, Chief Executive of ADA, who gave a report from ADA.

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

Mr Thomson welcomed Members to the meeting and said that it was with great regret and sadness that Anthony Morbey was not at the meeting and went on to say he had very fond memories of Anthony with his warm welcome and smile and said that's how he would always remember Anthony. Mr Thomson welcomed Alistair Morbey, Anthony's son, to the meeting. 1998 was the start of Anthony work's with the Great Ouse Branch and he hoped that Alistair would continue to have a long association with the Branch.

Mr Thomson said it had been a very busy year for ADA and the Association had covered a lot of ground during the year. The work done by Internal Drainage Boards has grown and is being recognised by Defra and the Environment Agency – both of which are showing an increased interest in the work of Internal Drainage Boards. ADA were having regular discussions with Defra and the Environment Agency. ADA was also working with other partners such as the National Farmers Union, the Country Landowners Association, the RSPB and the Canals & Rivers Trust. Mr Thomson emphasised the importance of collaboration and partnership working. Mr Thomson thanked Members for raising issues in local areas to ADA and he welcomed input requests for assistance from Boards.

Mr Thomson stated that the office at Stoneleigh Park was at full strength now with the addition of Ryan Dixon who had joined ADA in February and was to be responsible, amongst other things, for the production of the Gazette.

Health & Safety and Welfare

Mr Thomson emphasised the importance of health and safety to each Board and was asking Internal Drainage Board Members of ADA to complete a questionnaire on health and safety as ADA needed to establish trends within the Internal Drainage Boards industry on health and safety matters. He advised that the questionnaire would consist of two pages of tick boxes, and they were hoping to keep it as simple as possible to complete.

Governance of Internal Drainage Boards

This was an issue which was very much in the sightlines at the current time and ADA were producing a Good Governance Guide for Internal Drainage Board Members. This was being produced by Mr Iain Smith, formerly the Chief Executive and Solicitor at the Middle Level Commissioners. It was anticipated that this would be launched at the Annual General Meeting, Conference in November and at Floodex in February 2019 and would be followed up with area workshops for Members to attend.

Demaining

This was proceeding but the five pilots originally announced had now been reduced to three – Black Sluice, Isle of Axon and the River Stowe in Kent.

River Authorities and Land Drainage Bill

Mr Thomson reported that on Monday the 5th March 2019 David Warburton MP for Somerton and Frome, had introduced a Private Members' Bill to Parliament aimed at putting the Somerset Rivers Authority onto a statutory footing as a precepting body and enabling the reform of IDB Ratings Annual Values Lists. The first motion of the Bill would provide the Secretary the State with powers to establish Rivers Authorities. A river authority established under the Bill would be a locally accountable body with the power to issue a precept to billing authorities which would then collect the money from Council taxpayers for additional local flood risk management work. Under the Bill the initiative to establish a new rivers authority must come from the Local Flood Risk Management authorities as a means of supporting co-operation planning and delivery between risk management authorities in a defined area. The second measure in the Bill relates to Internal Drainage Boards. The proportion of drainage rates and special levies paid to each Internal Drainage Board is dependent upon the amount of agricultural and building land in that IDBs' district. In order to determine the special levy charge the Land Drainage Act 1991 refers to rateable values outlined in the non-domestic rating list of a charging authority on the 1st April 1990 and the valuation list on the 31st March 1990. In some areas the 1990's rating lists are not available. this means that IDBs in those areas cannot extend their boundaries and new ones cannot be established. The provision in the Bill would therefore allow the levy to be apportioned by an alternative methodology. Mr Thomson outlined the recent meetings he had attended representing ADA including the Liberal Democrat Chief Whip in the House of Lords and the Shadow Drainage Minister Holly Lynch MP for Halifax and he also referred to a forthcoming meeting with a Drainage Commission in Scotland which had been formed in 1696 and that the 1848 Act was their most recent piece of legislation. The Scottish Parliament in reviewing this legislation had come to ADA for some support. Mr Thomson also referred to his working with the local government group responsible for SuDs and the new proposed Association of SuDs authority. He was currently exploring administrative support through ADA and this would be useful in giving ADA more contact with Local Authorities on SuDs drainage. Mr Thomson reported that ADA had published an interactive GIS map of all IDBs around the country which was to serve as a platform for information on IDBs and could be used for public relations both locally and nationally. Mr Thomson gave a special thanks to Jean Heading for all her hard work on behalf of the Branch in addition to making a presentation of flowers to her and he read out the following limerick:-

 *"And to Jean, especially big thanks*

 *As she's dealt with the Branch and its' pranks*

 *We'll miss her a lot*

 *But replacement we've got*

 *As one of our best, she now ranks*!"

**ENVIRONMENT AGENCY – MS SADIA MOEED AND MR PAUL BURROWS**

Mr Burrows reported that Mr Brian Stewart had been appointed as the Chair of Anglian (Central RFCC) and that he had taken up this appointment on the 2nd January 2018 and although he has no background in flood management he has an extensive knowledge in the Town and Country Planning system and was very well aware of the need to encourage partnership between Internal Drainage Boards, Risk Authorities, Environment Agency and ADA. He was very much aware of the need to prepare for growth in the catchment area which could grow by 50% by the year 2050. It was a great challenge for the area and would need to be adequately resourced to ensure that infrastructure is maintained and given adequate protection. The RFCC was in the process of the second round of advertisements for new members which it was hoped would reinvigorate the Committee. Mr Stewart was a resident of West Suffolk and was committed to protecting those who live under the threat of flooding. Mr Thomas made a comment that internal drainage boards were under represented on the RFCC and felt that there was a real need for IDBs to be represented on the Committee. Mr Thomas said that he would assist any member who wished to seek election to the RFCC.

Charlie Beardall, Environment Agency Area Director for Great Ouse Catchment

Mr Beardall stated that he was responsible for all aspects of work in relation to waste, flood risk and environmental matters at the Environment Agency and that he had a keen interest in flood risk management and he felt there was a need to sharpen the partnership working as the demand for resources within the new Environment Agency were highly fought over. 75% of the schemes in the Great Ouse catchment are Internal Drainage Board schemes and the Environment Agency is looking to IDBs to help with delivery of these schemes. Mr Beardall referred to the new Defra 25 Year Environmental Plan. The plan deals with the flood risk management, flooding and drought situations and addresses climate change over the next 25 years. It is an important document and Members should find it interesting to read. The Government has a commitment to provide for flood risk by committing £2.6 billion with a target of improving protection for 300,000 houses.

The flood risk strategy

Outlined the need to strengthen joint working to deliver better outcomes for the public and it was necessary to look for funding from the private sector as well as the public sector.

De-maining

Mr Beardall reported that de-maining was very important in this area where it can be shown to be beneficial and he would like to see more de-maining schemes carried out as a result.

Mr Burrows gave an update on various topics

He stated that nationally 300,000 houses with better protection remains the target for the Agency. This target was doable but it would be very tight and the role of Internal Drainage Boards was very important to the delivery of this target. Mr Burrows reported that competition nationally for funding is fierce and therefore the Agency must deliver on all projects and he thought it was important that Internal Drainage Boards needed to focus on partnership funding from beyond their traditional sources and grants.

Great Ouse Catchment

Mr Burrows stated that he had lived in the area for 20 years and that the Fens and its infrastructure were very important to him. Mr Burrows reported on the Great Ouse Tidal River Baseline Report which had now been published and advised there were copies for Members if they wished to take one away. The report dealt with the historical background to flooding in the fenland area and looked at recent improvement works for flood risk management in the catchment. Mr Burrows commented that major growth in the area would be a challenge and that further growth could not be allowed if there was no funding for blue and green infrastructure. This was very important and there was a need to work with the planners in local authorities to get flood risk betterment. There needed to be an overall strategy for this approach and that site by site protection was not appropriate. The Oxford/Cambridge Arc is part of the Great Ouse Catchment and it was important to acknowledge the growth that this will engender.

Ms Moeed commented on the delivery of the maintenance programme

Ms Moeed stated that the total maintenance budget for the Great Ouse for 2017/2018 had been £6 million. She said that the Government had committed £40 million into flood risk management so it was anticipated that £6.5 million would be delivered by the year end. In addition, there was further funding from the Local levy funding was contributing to Environment Agency funding. Work carried out this year included some large projects such as the flood bank at Wilburton and Downham Market and repairs to the embankments on Cottenham Lode. She also referred to works carried out through Public Sector Co-operation Agreements with various Internal Drainage Boards doing works such as grass cutting and bank reinstatement. Ms Moeed referred to a health and safety incident where the grass cutting programme was being delivered by a contractor and plant had slipped into the watercourse. Unfortunately this meant that the programme had to be stopped to review practices and had resulted in delays in getting the programme started again. This had resulted in some complaints about overgrown vegetation. Ms Moeed referred to the indicative budget for maintenance embankment repairs on the tidal river and Bedford river and de-silting on the Middle Level Forty Foot.

Capital Work

Ms Moeed commented on the major asset refurbishment programme that had been carried out including replacement of the V doors at Denver Sluice which should now have a 50 year lifespan which was necessary to help manage silt build up in the tidal river.

The Ouse Wash Reservoir Middle Level Barrier Bank Section 10 works

With regard to these works the contractor now understood the working constraints and it was recognised that there was a need for a longer working window with Natural England. This project would now have a 4 year programme up to March 2021. Ms Moeed reported that the Ely depot is now the principal depot for the area and had a stock of pumps, barriers and sandbags. It was also a training facility for flood risk management and joint training had been arranged with other partners including Internal Drainage Boards. Ms Moeed referred to an example of joint working in January 2017 when Kings Lynn had joined the Environment Agency for a tidal flooding incident which had been predicted. This had worked well and they would like to widen this work in the future.

Members in the audience raised a number of questions at this stage.

1. In view of the amount of houses to be delivered in this area what about farming and the production of food in this area and the need to protect farming and farmland?

 Innes Thomson responded to this question and stated that ADA were working with the National Farmers Union and the Country Landowners Association about their concerns about loss of farmland and food production. The local catchment area approach is important and the 25 year plan is a good blueprint for this. There had been a recent article in the Gazette which had dealt with this issue.

2. A comment was made that local planning authorities were not delivering the number of houses expected and that funding would follow growth. However, there was a need to maximise funding from future development.

 Councillor Will Sutton commented that Local Planning Authorities are delivering on planning decisions, it was developers who were not building and there was now a need for local authorities themselves to deliver development and infrastructure. There needed to be a flood risk strategy for the major strategic sites so as not to affect flood risk in these areas. The Department of Communities Local Government and Defra need to be on board to manage flood risk infrastructure.

3. With regard to the health and safety incident, a question was raised were the contractors paid during this time?

 Ms Moeed informed Members that the contractors had been deployed in other areas and had delivered more de-silting work.

4. Mr Jon Fenn raised the question about floating pennywort on the towpath at Ely which had come through Denver and into the Salters Lode Lock.

 Ms Moeed recognised the concerns about floating pennywort, stating that its removal was expensive and the use of herbicide was restricted. A project however had been set up, but there was in the end an issue over the amount of resources that could be dedicated towards the eradication of floating pennywort. The operative at Denver had been tasked with taking it out and stopping it at Denver. Trials were being carried out to eradicate it and this was being carried out at different times of the year. Mechanical removal and spraying needs to be timed to when growth of floating pennywort starts.

**ELY MUSEUM**

Ms Liz Avery, Chair of the Trustees of Ely Museum accompanied by Ms Ellie Hughes, the Curator and the Assistant Curator, attended the meeting to discuss the Ely and District Museum's project.

The theme of the Museum is the History of the Fens and its heritage and it was important that this was kept secure and developed for the future. Ms Avery stated that they were starting again with the Museum and giving a complete upgrade. The role of landscape in the fens was crucial to the fens story and she reported that they had received £160,000 from the Heritage Lottery fund to assist with the architecture for the project, however it was likely to cost £1.6 million to refit and refurbish the Museum. The Museum had to find £400,000 match funding for the project. The proposal was to develop the Museum on its existing site at Market Street which would include a new education facility. On the ground floor they were going to create the story of the wild fens marshlands including early settlers and the Romans and on the first floor this was to be a totally different landscape and dealing with farming of crops on the fens.

The history of the fens was important to Internal Drainage Boards but it was generally felt that it would be inappropriate to use public funds raised for drainage to contribute to the work of the Museum. However Mr Thomson did comment, on behalf of ADA, that education about the fens and public relations and awareness of flood risk management could overcome some of the concerns of District Auditors. Mr Thomson stated he would like to give a page in the Gazette on heritage in the summer issue and he thought the work of the Museum was very important to explain to the general public what Internal Drainage Boards do in the area. Ms Avery, as Chair of the Trustees of Ely Museum, invited Members of the Branch to take the time to come and have a look at the Museum when the works were completed.

**ACCOUNTS TO 31st MARCH 2017**

It was proposed and seconded that the accounts of the Branch were unanimously accepted and approved by Members, as presented and circulated.

**SUBSCRIPTIONS FOR 2018/2019**

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**

Tuesday 5th March 2019 at Prickwillow Village Hall.