

ADA – Great Ouse Branch Executive Meeting

Bedford Group of IDBs Offices 11th June 2019

*Present*

Harry Raby (Chair)

Jon Fenn

John Heading – Branch Representative on ADA Executive Committee

Paul Hirons

Brian Long

Doug McMurdo

A A D Morbey

David Thomas (Branch Secretary)

*In Attendance*

Paul Burrows – EA

Innes Thomson – ADA

*Apologies for absence*

Jonathan Brown

W P Legge

T Matkin

B Stewart

1. Introductions

Frances Bowler gave an introduction to the Bedford Group of IDBs, the area they cover and the work they do, detailing the move to new offices, incorporating a depot which was seen as a positive step in the group’s evolution.

Harry Raby introduced Innes Thompson who was representing ADA central at the meeting.

2. Previous notes and actions

DT apologised for the absence of meetings notes from the previous Executive meeting.

David Thomas agreed to supply a catchment plan for the next meeting which identifies the areas of interest of the ADA member groups. As part of this a tally of the number of IDBs will be produced for the Great Ouse district.

**ACTION- Prepare and issue a catchment plan to Executive members**

A discussion took place over smaller boards and the need to be more proactive in getting the message to them about what ADA does for them. Innes agreed to take away this action which might include a letter outlining the services provided and the recent milestones achieved by ADA. Perhaps a flyer could be included around what can ADA do for you?

**ACTION – Innes to look at providing a flyer or similar helping small IDBs have confidence that ADA were important to them**.

Several members noted that there were increasing issues in getting quorate at Board meetings citing several recent instances where this had not been achieved. Brian Long pointed out that councils were often not taking up their full quotients which was not helping. He considered that it was important for the proper operation of Boards that places were filled. It was also generally agreed that there was a need to train new members so they were able to contribute in a meaningful way on Boards more quickly. With respect to council appointees’ problems had also been experienced in election years where members stepped down but were not replaced until the next council meeting. Kings Lynn Borough Council have overcome this by introducing a policy that existing members will remain in post until replaced at a council meeting, even if the colour of the council changes. With this in mind Innes reminded members that councils can appoint anyone they wish they to represent them

**ACTION – send a letter out to councils reminding them of the need for member representation and the flexibility within the system.**

Innes made reference to the Good Governance Guide and how well this had been received and that DEFRA had endorsed it suggesting that it was an appropriate response to the NAO audit report.

Brian Long reflected on the fact that Kings Lynn Borough Council pay £3M to IDBs in special levies and wondered how many ratepayers knew this or understood why it was needed.

**ACTION – ADA will hold talks with DEFRA over the best way of getting this message out and may consider production of a pamphlet to ratepayers on the work of IDBs that can be sent out with council tax bills.**

Innes Thompson spoke on the proposed changes to RFCCs and in particular the Anglian (Central) RFCC which is likely to be renamed the Anglian (Great Ouse) RFCC. ADA supported the proposed amendments which were needed due to changes in council setup where several councils were likely to combine and become Unitary Authorities.

3. Water resources

David Thomas gave a brief resume on the work of Water Resources East (WRE), advising that this body had been set up to guide planning of water resource management in the East of England. The organisation was constructed as multi-sector and it was encouraging that agricultural needs were, possibly for the first time, being included in future planning. One example of this was the Lower Nene Water Resources Planning Group which was looking at balancing abstractions to include for environmental and agricultural requirements and looking at future water trading opportunities. Doug McMurdo asked if DEFRA was represented on WRE, David Thomas advised that he did not believe they were but understood that DEFRA and central government were fully supportive of the work of WRE which met with their aims of facilitating growth and ensuring resilience of water supply.

The work of NFU Water for Food Group was mentioned as was the proposed revision to abstraction licencing which had been delayed in part due to BREXIT. David Thomas noted that abstraction trading was being encouraged and that despite GDPR the EA had found it possible to publish details of who had abstraction licences on the internet to allow direct communication between abstractors who might wish to trade.

Paul Burrows advised that the EA were in incident response mode as a drought appeared to be pending. EA resources had been increased to deal with the issues which would arise from a drought, building upon the learning from the previous year and utilising better intelligence collection, which was bearing fruit. This would also be the first year when drones would be employed to collect information on abstraction activities. Paul Burrows also advised that he was aware of at least one enforcement case going through the system.

Regular checks were being made also on dissolved oxygen, particularly in and around the Ouse Washes to allow timely action to ensure that fish health was maintained.

Paul Burrows advised that the Central area had a new Area manager who had a police background which might help focus when considering enforcement matters.

Jonathan Fenn advised that he was at the time holding twice weekly calls with the EA (Andy Chapman) on control of water transfer and that arrangements were working well this year and that the previous Friday the EA were able to sanction maximum transfer rates for 4 hours which would have been unheard of in previous years.

Innes Thompson stated that ADA and the EA had had much discussion over transfer licencing and that they were on the cusp of securing an arrangement in which the licence fee for IDBs would be significantly reduced with the proviso that applications are submitted before 1st September. Innes also noted that the EA were only expecting around 50 applications from the whole of the IDB sector in England.

4. Partnerships, workshops and strategic planning

On the change to the branch annual meeting format the feeling was that this had been well received and it was agreed that the new format should be retained. It was suggested that next year could be less EA centric and for example WRE could be invited to speak and one of the round table discussions could be on invasive species. Barbara Young as a speaker was also suggested.

David Thomas commented on OXCAM and wondered where ADA Great Ouse branch should position itself. Paul Burrows noted the Two Pillars of Environment Making and Place Making. Paul Burrows commented that the Bedford Group would aim to have a key role in the flood risk planning element of the OXCAM and noted that he was meeting to discuss this with Frances Bowler the following week. Innes Thompson believed that the branch should consider seizing the opportunity to take a role in the process.

Concern was expressed that multiple authorities were taking part in the planning of OXCAM but there was currently little clarity over who was taking the lead. Doug Mc Murdo advised that there was a memorandum of understanding in place and he offered to dig it out.

**ACTION – Doug McMurdo to dig out the memorandum of OXCAM understanding and pass it around for information.**

5. ADA Matters

Innes Thompson gave an update on what ADA had in train and what had been achieved recently.

1. The production of the Good Governance Guide workshops. Over the 5 workshops held 204 people had attended.
2. De-maining pilots. There will be a six-week period of notice before the IDBs take over maintenance. Out of the 5 proposed pilots 3 were progressing and the other 2 had been postponed (Wales and Norfolk and Suffolk). The 3 progressing are;
3. Black Sluice
4. Isle of Axholme
5. Kent River Stour
6. New Bill – Rivers Authority and Land Drainage Bill. Amongst other things, if passed this new Act would allow new IDBs to be more easily created and would address the issue of valuing land and property for rating purposes beyond existing district boundaries. There appears to be some resistance to the new bill in the Lords however due to perceived poor drafting and the degree of control the ministers would enjoy if passed (ie changes can be instigated with simple ministerial sign off), hence its progress is being delayed.
7. One of the issues DEFRA have over de-maining is obtaining certainty that the new arrangements will be the most appropriate ones, hence ADA are advocating the use of PSCAs to test new arrangements and once they are clearly working permanent changes can be instigated.
8. DEFRA are consulting on Costal Flooding and ADA are involved in this consultation.
9. ADA have employed David Sissons to assist in delivery of the ADA work streams which consist of 6 themes;
10. Education resources – working with LEAF to provide Key Stage 2 support.
11. Biodiversity Action Plan Guidance – this should be issued by the year end.
12. Development contributions. ADA are producing guidance and worked examples with the aim of providing a framework for IDBs to work within.
13. Byelaw and enforcement guidance which is underpinned by the legal position that exists.
14. Partnership working, particularly dealing with flood emergency response. The use of PSCAs will be important at the delivery end of this.
15. Data gathering and evidence.

Innes then spoke on ADA’s aim to get IDBs more engaged with the public and wondered if open days and tours may be one way forward and he asked members to consider how this branch might help support this activity.

Innes advised that ADA had been invited to have a local representative from ADA on the WRE board. He felt that it was important that IDBs had a chance to steer the workings of WRE given agriculture’s vested interest in water supply. He also advised that individual IDBs could opt for places on the Strategic Advisory Group and he invited members views on this. Doug McMurdo wondered if there might be a conflict of interest and asked whether LLFAs had been invited to have board members. Innes advised that although WRE had been set up by Anglian Water it had now gained independence and moving it to be an independent ‘not-for-profit company’ was part of this process. It was agreed that more information would be helpful and Innes agreed to share the terms of reference of WRE.

**ACTION – Innes to share WRE terms of reference.**

Innes mentioned the up and coming Flood and Costal Conference in June (18th/19Th) where he will be chairing a session and manning an ADA stand. He noted that the next FloodEx would be at the end of February 2020 and that the next ADA Demo would be a two-day affair in 2022 possibly in Stonleigh Park (talks with ADA and HS2 underway in this regard). He also mentioned that ADA were about to sign a service level agreement with ASA (Association of SuDS Authorities).

ADA are interviewing for a new member of staff.

6. EA Matters, including use of PSCAs

Paul Burrows advised that the consultation on the FCERM strategy would close on the 4th July and he pointed out that this was not just an EA document but instead would form a framework for all RMAs.

Locally Simon Hawkins had been appointed as area manager and Paul felt it was interesting that he was moving to live in Kings Lynn. Sadia Moeed would not be returning to her post as Operations Manager hence the post was being advertised. Claire Vouvray was standing in at present.

Paul Burrows brought up the matter of Precept and the need to increase the level of funding it generated for the area as we are one of the largest but lowest precepted. He stressed that increased funding was essential to support the progression of a catchment level approach to FRM planning and pointed out the work currently being undertaken to provide a baseline to springboard catchment wide future investment plans. Paul Hirons stated that we must have a 100-year asset replacement plan.

Paul pointed out the pressures on his teams at present with a 6 to 7 person shortfall in personnel following budget cuts.

David Thomas noted that there had been progress on Eel Regulation compliance and that a more sensible approach to providing solutions at pumping stations was emerging.

7. Health and Safety – information share

Innes Thompson reported that ADA had received an 80% response to the questionnaire it sent out, but hoped that this could be improved upon. He asked that all encourage and support this.

8. Other Matters

Building up a chest of money for future works and asset replacement was discussed as was the investment of commuted sums. It was noted that auditors are not keen on retaining large balances as IDBs are public authorities. Innes Thompson noted that Holland River Boards have a ‘Green Schemes Bond’ arrangement.

Date of next meeting 29th October 2019.