12th March 2019

**MINUTES** of the **FORTIETH ANNUAL CONFERENCE**

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

**ASSOCIATION OF DRAINAGE AUTHORITIES**

held at Prickwillow Village Hall, Prickwillow, near Ely on Tuesday 12th March 2019 at 2.30pm

**Present**

H. Raby, Esq in the Chair

Mrs F. Bowler Bedford Group

J L Brown Esq Middle Level

P. Burrows, Esq. Environment Agency

P Burton Esq Bluntisham

R Caudwell Esq ADA

M. Chenery of Horsbrugh Southery

M Church Esq Haddenham Level

S Custance Esq Sawtry

R Dean Esq Swaffham IDB

P. Duffield, Esq. Stoke Ferry

J.H. Fenn, Esq Middle Level

M Gilbert Esq Littleport & Downham

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.K. Jarman, Esq Mildenhall

Ms C Jouvray Environment Agency

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

J W Lloyd Esq Cawdle Fen

J.S. Martin, Esq. Waterbeach Level

Miss L. McShane Middle Level

T Matkin Esq Kings Lynn Group

R Means Esq Downham & Stow/Nordelph/Upwell

A Newton Esq Ely Group/Downham Market Group

B. Norman, Esq. Mildenhall

J. Oldfield, Esq. Bedford Group

E.P. Rice, Esq. Padnal & Waterden

R Rockcliffe Esq East of Ouse IDB

W. Sutton, Esq. Middle Level (FDC)

D.C. Thomas, Esq. Middle Level

C Thorpe Esq Southery IDB

A. White, Esq Stoke Ferry

K Wilderspin Esq Swavesey IDB

C Wright Esq East Harling IDB

A Yarrow Esq Haddenham/Littleport & Downham

**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 seconded that Mr Marc Heading be elected Vice Chairman of the branch for the ensuing year.

**ELECTION OF BRANCH EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEMBER FOR OUTFALL DISTRICT**

It was proposed and seconded that the nomination of Mr Tim Matkin be approved to replace Mr J Austen who had now retired.

**APOLOGIES**

Dr C Beardall (Environment Agency), S Bywater (Sawtry), S Calton Esq (Churchfield & Plawfield & Hundred Foot Washes), J Chrisp (Ramsey IDB), A Darby Esq (Sawtry IDB), A Lee Esq (Chair, Cawdle Fen), B Long Esq (Kings Lynn), D McMurdo (Bedfordshire & River Ivel), O Palmer (Lakenheath), I Thomson (ADA), P Wagstaffe Esq (Ramsey IDB), R Wright (Whittlesey IDB)

**MINUTES/MATTERS ARISING**

The minutes of the Thirty-ninth Annual Conference held on 6th March 2018 were presented as circulated and approved, subject to one slight amendment;

Chair of the Trustees of Ely Museum should read Ms Liz Every not Avery

There were no matters arising.

**CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman thanked Paul Burrows and his team from the Environment Agency for the morning session which had been very informative and had allowed discussion of matters of importance to board members. He also recorded his thanks on behalf of the Branch for the excellent lunch provided by the Environment Agency.

Mr Raby stated that as part of the move to make the Branch more pro-active Executive Meetings had been held at the Middle Level offices in March, one of which was attended by Paul Burrows of the Environment Agency and Innes Thomson had attended to brief the Executive on ADA matters and activities being carried out at other Branches.

**ADA -MR ROBERT CAUDWELL**

Robert Caudwell on behalf of ADA thanked the Environment Agency for the workshop session which he felt had been very useful to board members who had attended the sessions.

Good Governance Guide

Mr Caudwell referred to the Good Governance Guide which had been circulated to all board members and to the Good Governance workshops for internal drainage board members. ADA were running a series of five workshops to build on the learning available in the new guide good governance for IDB members. These were to be held over the next few weeks between the 19th March and the 3rd April. The workshops for the Governance Guide have been funded with the support of the Department of the Environment Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) and Mr Caudwell stated that DEFRA would be taking notice of attendance at these sessions.

The Chairman stated that he would like at least one member of each board to attend a workshop session. The sessions were free and booking could be made online at [*www.ada.org.uk/events*](http://www.ada.org.uk/events). Following attendance at the workshop sessions it was his intention to revisit the publication and pick up on any issues raised by members at the sessions.

External speakers were lined up to talk about insurance matters and a solicitor from private practice with experience working with local public bodies will discuss accountability and transparency.

Floodex

The Floodex exhibition which was held on the 27th and 28th February 2019 had been an excellent event this year and had included two event partners; A.S.A. (Association of Suds Authorities) and Irrigex UK. The seminar speakers were all of a very high standard. It was intended to organise a similar event next year.

River Authorities & Land Drainage Bill

Robert Caudwell gave an update on the current stage of the Private Members’ Bill which was now in the Committee stage. This new legislation if approved will be important for boards who want to extend their area and will enable a newly formed Somerset Rivers Board to create a rating based funding steam with a statutory basis.

Consultation on Management of Water

This consultation ends on the 12th March 2019. ADA have responded to this consultation. The result of this consultation could mean that the balance between special levy and drainage rates could be changed and Mr Caudwell felt that it was important to have at least a 10 year run in period for boards to be involved in the decisions and decisions regarding these changes.

From the floor, a question was asked about the times for the ADA workshops. Frances Bowler, Bedford Group, advised that all the seminars started at 10.30am with the exception of Peterborough which would commence at 11.00am.

A further question was asked about the current funding for the Somerset area. The funding for flood management in Somerset currently came from the County Council and a similar situation existed in Cumbria. Paul Burrows advised that if the Rivers Authorities Land Drainage Bill was enacted it was likely that a new Flood Risk Management Authority would follow in those areas.

SuDS

Robert Caudwell referred to the launch of the Association of Suds Authorities at the Floodex event on the 27th and 28th February 2019. This was a new national association of local authority drainage

Engineers and Advisors. It was hoped that the establishment of the Association would help to achieve consistency of approach within local authorities.

Bronwyn Buntine of Kent County Council who was the Sustainable Drainage Team Leader was a seminar speaker and had been instrumental in the formation of A.S.A. and had been involved with the Defra task groups for both Schedule 3 of the Flood and Water Management Act 2020 and the National Standards for Sustainable Drainage guidance. They had established close ties with ADA and ADA were currently carrying out their members services and administration on a contract basis. Existing staff resources at ADA were being used to cover this extra work with a member of staff working an extra day.

**ENVIRONMENT AGENCY – MR BRIAN STEWART, MR PAUL BURROWS AND MS CLAIRE JOUVRAY**

**Mr Brian Stewart – Chair RFCC - ADA**

Mr Steward said he was to develop a whole catchment approach from the Committee and had strengthened IDB representations by the appointment of Jean Venables and Iain Smith. Rob Wise of the National Farmers Union had also been appointed to the Committee. It was planned that Iain Smith would give the Good Governance presentation to the RFCC at a future meeting.

Growth in the Catchment

Mr Stewart said that it was important that a working brief was kept on growth within the region particularly with the development of the OxCam Arc and he was due to attend a meeting the following day on the 13th March at Milton Keynes to discuss proposals for this development. Something he had recognised as a disappointment as Chair of the RFCCU was that the Committee makeup covered Lead Flood Authorities and what was lacking was the connection with Local Planning Authorities who were responsible for the development of local strategic plans and the detailing of requirements of Section 106 agreements.

Mr Stewart referred to the changes being proposed to local authority composition in Northamptonshire and Buckinghamshire. He remarked that it was important that the name of the River Ouse should be incorporated into the name of the Committee, but that was work in progress!

**Mr Paul Burrows**

Mr Burrows reported on some staff changes that had occurred recently at the Environment Agency. Dr Charlie Beardall, the East Anglian Manager, retires in May and advertisements had been placed for his replacement and it was hoped that his successor would be appointed before he retired.

Dave Gillett had recently retired after 48 years with the Environment Agency. There had been a leaving party for him at Brampton the previous week and he thanked those from the Branch who had attended the leaving function. He said that Dave Gillett would be greatly missed by the Environment Agency and the Branch.

Nationally a long-term investment strategy was being developed which was the first one since 2014. The headline message was that in the next 35 years £1 billion per year would be required just to stand still and this was double what the Government currently put into flood risk management. The Environment Agency have to produce a strategy under the Flood and Water Management Act under which all have a duty to act in accordance with the strategy. Climate resilient places would be the theme of this work.

Local Strategic Work in the Catchment

Future development in the catchment was a very important consideration and it was likely that there would be an increase to 1.5 million households from 1 million which was a 50% increase and therefore it was important to try to influence decision makers in taking flood risk in the catchment into account. The EA were currently engaging with local planning authorities and local MPs and it was necessary to provide evidence about what was needed about the storage and the conveyance of water.

Mr Burrows explained that he was able to progress this work because there had been no major flooding events and he hoped this would continue. From a flood risk management point of view the objective was to provide 300,000 homes better provided from flood risk. They were approximately half way through meeting this requirement and they were committed to deliver this requirement. With regard to the next spending review period they were currently having informed conversations with the Government. Mr Burrows made reference to water resources in the area over the summer period following on from a dry winter and the impact this would have on agriculture. He noted that in the event of a no deal Brexit business at the Environment Agency would be disrupted and it was important to take this into account.

There was a question from the floor from Jonathon Brown. He asked what the Environment Agency were currently spending in terms of billions per year. Mr Burrows explained that a 1/3rd increase in current capital expenditure was required to stand still and there needs to be at least a 50% increase in revenue expenditure allocation to deliver what is needed.e aseHe as

Mr Cauldwell commented that there was no doubt that the number of extreme events would increase and at the Floodex event it was suggested that £5.6 billion was required over the next six year spending cycle, according to the National Farmers Union.

**Ms Claire Jouvray – Operational Manager**

Ms Jouvray said that she managed 97 people in her team and was responsible for maintenance projects with a budget of £6 million. She had achieved her efficiency targets of 9% and noted that this was the top performing area nationally. She referred to some of the highlights of the maintenance work currently being carried out; including the tree work at Ely and Soham Lode, the removal of floating pennywort from the Ouse Washes and work at Kings Lynn on erosion works and silt in the tidal river. In Bedford work had been carried out on the Alconbury Brook

Ms Jouvray stated that it was with sadness that she had to report the recent death of Tom Flint who had died in the last 2 weeks and that if anyone wanted details of his funeral arrangements that they should contact her.

Works on the Ouse Washes

The bank raising works had now been completed and a new wall had been erected at Welches Dam.

With regard to the agitation dredging works she advised that Stephanie Horner had now taken over from Dave Gillett following his retirement. At Denver, two of the three gates had been refurbished and that the Earith works would be finished in June.

A question was asked from the floor on the future costs of Asset inspections. Ms Jouvray advised that she did not have an exact figure but that ongoing inspection was needed.

With regard to floating pennywort this was spreading year on year and they were having to prioritise where it was taken out and were concentrating on the areas such as navigation routes

**ACCOUNTS TO 31st MARCH 2018**

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

**SUBSCRIPTIONS FOR 2019/2020**

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. The Middle Level Commissioners would, however, review the costs of running the Branch in view of the efforts being made to increase activity within the Branch and holding Executive meetings and it was likely that it will be necessary for there to be an increase in future years.

**DATE OF NEXT ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

Tuesday 3rd March 2020 at Prickwillow Village Hall.

Consideration to be given to holding further workshops and sessions by the EA or other training.

**ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

The Chairman thanked the Environment Agency for all their help with the workshops and for the excellent lunch.

NOTE:

Following the meeting, Iain Smith was asked to enquire with the EA the details of the Asset Inspections referred to by Claire Jouvray. Iain’s response was as follows:

Environment Agency Detailed Asset Inspections

Following your query raised with me after the ADA Great Ouse Branch Meeting, I have spoken to the EA staff to get more details. I have not yet seen the minutes of the ADA meeting and therefore the precise question that their Claire Jouvray was asked, or the context, but I hope that the following helps in understanding the situation.

The figure which she gave relates primarily to the EA’s detailed asset inspections, not the simple visual ones. The EA have a large number of ‘’assets’’, notably bridges, within the patch and undertook within the period

2 x CCTV culvert surveys

57 x Bridge Inspections

27 x Asbestos surveys

17 x General Detailed Asset Inspections

I am advised that these detailed inspections involve a team of specialised engineers appropriate to the type of asset, such as Bridge, Structural or Mechanical engineers, working alongside the EA’s own Asset Performance and Mechanical & Electrical staff to assess the condition of every component of an asset. This can routinely involve the use of CCTV surveys, boats, divers and Remotely Operated Vehicles to inspect those elements of an asset not otherwise visible without an expensive dewatering operation. The normal frequency of Detailed Asset Inspections, CCTV inspections and Bridge inspections is once every 6 years unless anything untoward is found that requires a more frequent inspection regime.

Bridge inspections are carried out not only on EA owned bridges, of which there are still a fair number but also on 3rd party assets that they routinely need to track over for maintenance or for access. As well as informing future investment and maintenance needs these inspections usually check that current weight restrictions are still accurate, which can have significant safety implications for their own staff as well as third parties with right of access across the EA’s owned bridges, including public highways and rights of way. These bridge inspections can routinely require the use of specialised access equipment such as rope access, cranes and man-riding baskets, mobile elevated work platforms, boats and divers as well as intrusive survey such as core samples to assess condition accurately.

Asbestos surveys are carried out where there is known or suspected asbestos within a structure to ensure that the condition of any components that contain asbestos are not deteriorating and risk of exposure is still controlled. Where possible they look to replace asbestos containing material components such as floor or ceiling tiles, sealants etc. as and when it is cost-effective to do so which over time will reduce the burden of these inspections. Generally due to best practice around managing asbestos risk these are carried out more frequently than the Detailed Asset/Bridge/CCTV inspections.

Because of the type of inspection, these detailed inspections can be fairly expensive to undertake and, within an MLC context, would be the equivalent of dewatering Salters Lode Lock to see what repairs were required or testing the weight limits of an MLC owned bridge, rather than the simple viewing of an asset.

I hope that this answers your query but, if you require anything further, please let me know.

Best wishes

Iain