

2nd March 2021

**MINUTES of the FORTY FIRST ANNUAL CONFERENCE
of the RIVER GREAT OUSE BRANCH of the
ASSOCIATION OF DRAINAGE AUTHORITIES**

hosted remotely on Tuesday 2nd March 2021 at 2.00pm

Present

H. Raby in the Chair

J L Brown	Middle Level
Lorna McShane	Middle Level
S Hawkins	Environment Agency, Area Director
P Burrows	Environment Agency
C Jouvrey	Environment Agency
M Davenport	Bedford Group
D McMurdo	Bedford Group
J.H. Fenn	Middle Level
J Harrison	Burnt Fen
J E Heading	Manea & Welney
M E Heading	Middle Level
P Hirons	Bedford Group
C Holman	Southery/Burnt Fen
A A D Morbey	Ely Group/Middle Fen & Mere
E P Rice	Padnal & Waterden
D C Thomas	Middle Level
I Thomson	ADA
R Cauldwell	ADA
I Haddey	
J Woodward	Environment Agency
I Smith	RFCC

The Chairman welcomed Members to the Great Ouse Branch Meeting and stated that he was standing down as Chairman from this meeting.

A possible successor had been identified as Marc Heading Esq, the current Vice Chairman.

Marc has recently finished his tenure as Chairman of the Middle Level Commissioners. He farms in Chatteris and sits on a number of Internal Drainage Boards and would be pleased to work with the Association of Drainage Authorities to deliver the wishes of the Branch.

1. Election of Chairman

It was proposed and seconded that Mr Marc Heading be elected Chairman of the Branch for the ensuing year. All were in favour.

Harry Raby congratulated the Chairman on his appointment and wished him good luck in his new role.

2. Election of Vice Chairman

It was proposed and seconded that Mr Doug McMurdo be elected Vice Chairman of the branch for the ensuing year, continuing with the balance of having one of the two roles from the Upper Ouse and one from the Lower Ouse areas.

3.Election of the Executive Committee

It was proposed and seconded that the Executive be elected en block.

The Members of the Executive Committee are;

H Raby, M Heading, J Fenn, J Brown, W P T Legge, A A D Morbey, D McMurdo, P Hirons, T Matkin, J Heading and B Long.

4. Appointment of Branch Representative on the ADA Board

John Heading was the current representative of the Branch on the ADA Board and he had indicated his willingness to continue in this position.

It was moved and seconded that John Heading be appointed as the Ouse Branch representative on the ADA Board for a further term of 3 years.

5. RFCC Chairman's proposal for the Branch Chairman to site on the RFCC as an Environment Agent Appointee.

Brian Stewart explained that he hoped this new appointment would help to strengthen the link between the Great Ouse and the Environment Agency and looked forward to welcoming the next Chairman Marc Heading to the next RFCC meeting on 6th April 2021.

6. Apologies for Absence

T Matkin (Robinson Farms), B Agass (Bedford Group), J Crisp (Ramsey IDB).

7. Minutes

The minutes of the Fortieth Annual Conference held on 3rd March 2020 were presented as circulated and approved.

8. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

9. Chairman's Announcements

Marc Heading welcomed Robert Cauldwell (ADA Chairman) to the meeting and Ian Moody of ADA.

He also welcomed the Environment Agency representatives Paul Burrows and Claire Jouvrey.

The Chairman stated that 2020 had been a difficult year for the farming community – in fact it had been a difficult year for most people and organisations. The Christmas flood event had reminded us of the powers of nature and the amount of work still to be done in raising the profile of flood risk management. This reinforced the importance of the work being done by ADA who help focus the minds of politicians on the issue of flooding.

10. Reports from ADA

Robert Cauldwell reported on an extraordinary year and thanked ADA staff for their services provided largely from home during the period. Staff had continued to provide an excellent service in what had proved to be a very busy year.

He referred to the Environment Bill which contained provisions to amend the land valuation process for drainage rates and would provide for the creation of new Internal Drainage Boards and facilitate the expansion of district boundaries for Boards who felt this appropriate.

The Bill had been delayed in the legislative process and it was hoped that it would be reintroduced in the new parliamentary session.

Robert commented on the Government's announcement in March 2020 that it will remove the entitlement to use rebated red diesel from most sectors from April 2022. This was a significant issue for all Internal Drainage Boards and the idea that public bodies should use white diesel instead of red diesel was considered a madness and without logical basis.

ADA had been corresponding and lobbying with HM Treasury and Defra on this matter. It was felt by them that there were easier ways of moving the green agenda forward and this proposal would put extreme pressure on revenue spending for all Boards.

He also referred briefly to events held during the year, including one with the Country Landowners Association at the Lincolnshire Show which had highlighted the need to maintain lowland systems working in partnership with the Environment Agency and Defra.

Other work which he wished to highlight was the production of the Good Environmental Guide which was being prepared on a similar basis to the Good Governance Guide and it was hoped to present this to Branch meetings and Internal Drainage Boards in the near future.

Questions to Robert Cauldwell:

Doug McMurdo asked whether, in view of the importance of the retention of access to red diesel for IDB's, what more could the Branch do as Internal Drainage Boards about the Government's proposals? There appeared to be no fairness or equity in this move to white diesel.

Robert Cauldwell responded by stating that it was important to lobby local Members of Parliament. They needed to be made aware of the affect that this proposal would have on IDBs and their local

communities, and the impact on revenue spending. The Treasury had been keen to tighten up on red diesel for some time. ADA would continue to lobby on this issue.

11. Reports from the Environment Agency

i) Simon Hawkins, Director, Environment Agency:

Simon introduced himself to the Branch and said he welcomed the opportunity to meet the Branch at a time when so much was going on.

The Agency was currently working on the Budget for 2020/2021 and budgetary cuts would be required for revenue work.

Referring to the flooding event over Christmas, this had been a significant event and the Environment Agency were still gathering data which will be reported to the RFCC.

In the partnership world, it is not just Internal Drainage Boards and the Environment Agency who had responsibility for flooding and it was important that local authorities should keep their Council Members apprised of flooding issues. He stated that in all agencies, staff had responded well to the event, but there were things that could have been done better. One example was communication with the public – this was an area which needed improvement.

ii) Claire Jouvrey:

Claire advised the Branch that the Environment Agency were still in recovery mode following the Christmas 2020 flooding event.

Actions moving forward were to inspect all key structures.

Currently 34 assets had been identified as needing repair. The Environment Agency were using drones in some of this work. Data was being collected to assess the scale of the event which had been caused by accumulated rainfall over a saturated catchment.

Assets had been tested by the event and there had been some overtopping. There was a recovery budget in place which was a separate budget and it was estimated that some of the works required would take a year to complete.

A separate project team had been set up to review the event and it would value any information that IDB's could provide about the event.

She advised on the maintenance programme that a bid for £7 million had been made with £3.67 million awarded giving a total overall budget of £6.2 million with other money sources added.

There were currently 82 projects in hand, 57 of which had been completed.

15% efficiencies had been achieved and some changes had been made in procurement and the tendering process and the Public Sector Cooperative Agreements which were proving successful. PSCA works had been undertaken at Swavesey, Sutton and Mepal and they had gone well.

There had been delivery challenges this year with closed offices and staff working from home. Contractors had also been affected by the pandemic and it had been necessary to provide welfare facilities and PPE.

It was estimated that there would be delays of 6-8 weeks on maintenance projects because of the recovery needed by the Christmas event.

She was pleased to report that throughout the event there had been good working relationships with Internal Drainage Boards.

There had been an increase in Highland Water payments and fuller information would be provided at the Flood Recovery meeting to be set up.

iii) Paul Burrows;

Paul reflected on what a year it had been and thanked all Internal Drainage Boards and other agencies that had worked with the Environment Agency team.

Flooding events do provide a lot of useful data and information and a lot had happened since the last meeting at Prickwillow.

A National Flood Strategy had been publicised and the Fens had been given its own mention in this document.

A Baseline report was due which sets the tone for understanding the scale of asset management in the Fens.

The Environment Agency were working with Water Resources East (WRE) in looking at regional water supply and proposals for 2 new reservoirs.

It was important to look at the Great Ouse catchment, not just the Fens. There was massive growth proposed including the East-West Railway and the Oxford-Cambridge Area Development. Factors to take into account in these developments were water storage and climate change. He envisaged that Internal Drainage Boards would get involved in this and provide information and data to the Environment Agency which they could use as evidence in responding to these proposals. A spatial strategy for this growth area had been drawn up and water management needed to be taken seriously in this strategy. Highways England and Network Rail were helping fund the conversations on this.

The Spending Review had produced £5.2 billion capital budget over six years and the RFCC had consented to everything in the capital programme for the first 2 years.

It was not all about planning – delivery was equally important; Paul had recently visited Islington Pumping Station and this was a good example of the scale of investment in the area.

Mark Gilbert (Little Downham) made a comment to the Environment Agency about not missing opportunities to communicate with the public. One example was the Agitation Works on the Hundred Foot River.

David Thomas (Middle Level) said that there had been a number of comments about climate change. Everyone recognised that climate change and achieving a carbon neutral position was a massive challenge, but how was it to be achieved?

What does net zero look like in Drainage? He saw major challenges ahead especially when water in the Middle Level System was being pumped 3 times before it reached the Ouse.

Paul Burrows responded that the Environment Agency were looking at lots of local measures – electric/hybrid vehicles. Hydro power on rivers and action plans across all functions to minimise carbon, but he acknowledged that Pumping Stations are a challenge for this area; a lot of pumps were over 50 years old, but new pumps being installed would be more efficient.

Doug McMurdo asked if the Environment Agency had anything in place to assess the carbon footprint of an organisation? Paul Burrows responded and said that the Environment Agency had been looking at carbon footprint for about 10 years leading up to the announcement of Carbon Neutral by 2030. Information about this could be brought to future meetings and the RFCC.

David Thomas said he would support this and the creation of a Joint Working Group on how we can deliver carbon reduction.

Paul, Claire and Simon were thanked for their presentations to the Branch.

12. Approval of Branch Accounts To 31st March 2020

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.

13. Forthcoming Subscriptions for 2021/2022

It was recommended that there be no change to the subscription this year as there were sufficient resources in the budget to reflect the increase in workload of the Branch. This would be reviewed in future years as the work of the Executive Committee increased.

14. Date of Next Annual General Meeting

Tuesday 1st March 2022 at Prickwillow Village Hall.

15. Any Other Business

None.