

Lincolnshire IDBs Engineers Forum

Thursday 30th January 2025 – Meeting Notes

A meeting of the Lincs IDB Engineers Forum was held at Black Sluice IDB office, Swineshead, Boston, on Thursday 30th January 2025 at 9.30am

Present:

A Gilbert (AG), Witham and Humber IDB
M Kettley (MK), Witham and Humber IDB
J Neill (JN), Witham and Humber IDB
A Civello (AC), Witham and Humber IDB
P Noon (PNo), WMA
K Vines (KV), South Holland IDB
L Taylor (LT), South Holland IDB
P Nicholson (PNi), Black Sluice IDB
S Harrison (SH), Black Sluice IDB
L Whelan (LW), Black Sluice IDB
N Morris (NM), Welland and Deepings IDB
C Shinkin (CS), Welland and Deepings IDB
A Boden (ABo), WMC
J Boden (JB), WMC
E Johnson (EJ), Witham 4th IDB
D Braddy (DB), Witham 4th IDB
R Wright (RW), Witham 4th IDB
J Stubbley (JS), North Level IDB
M Redding (MR), Middle Level Commissioners
P Hazelhurst (PH), Lower Medway IDB *
O Pantrey (OP), Upper Medway IDB *
R Towse (RT), Yorkshire and Humber IDB *
J Thomas (JT), Lower Severn IDB *
D Pitcher (DP), Environment Agency
I Moodie (IM), ADA *
A Baptie (ABa), Lincs County Council
T Holmes (TH), Lincs County Council
S Glover (SG), Lincs County Council
A Myers (AM), Lincs County Council
K Nettle (KN), Lincs County Council
G Nichols (GN), Lincs IDBs

Via Teams *

1. Introduction

The Chairman welcomed attendees, including those who were attending via Teams.

2. Matters arising from notes of July 2024 meeting

- Things had not progressed with the GIS Group since the last meeting. HS was not in attendance at the meeting so no further update was provided.
- KV raised to the group that further discussions around the ADA proposal of the Engineers Forum moving over to a formal ADA meeting would be covered further down the agenda of the meeting.
- No update to the LCC asset management project was provided as NW was not in attendance. **KN agreed to liaise with NW for an update on the project and share with the forum.**
- A specification for LCC gully outfalls into open watercourses, to be discussed and agreed between IDB's and LCC, had not progressed. **AG to share the current specification with the forum for discussion at the next meeting.**
- KV reported to the group that he had raised concerns with the EA regarding lack of sea bank maintenance on the South Holland tidal frontage through 2024, with only top cuts having taken place between April and September, and then only one full cut which took place in October. Feedback from the EA was that the reduced maintenance had been directed by Natural England, but the EA had managed to get an agreement from Natural England to a return to 6 full cuts between April and October 2025. **Action Complete.**
- KN confirmed to the group that contact details for external Ecologists had been shared. **Action Complete.**
- KV informed the group to contact RD for any further LCC Riparian Watercourse leaflet requests. **Action Complete.**
- With regard to central government funding to assist in asset management work to scope the extent, and determine responsibility for assets, EJ raised to the group that he was prepared to put together a scope for this, which would be needed if funding were to be sought. **EJ to produce wording detailing what is required. Anyone with input into this to contact EJ directly.**
- EJ shared with the group that a webinar to demonstrate the new National Underground Asset Register (NUAR) will be communicated to IDB's in the near future. **EJ to also liaise and include LCC.**
- KN shared with the group that there was a change to the planned LCC Drainage Champions. Once in place, KN will share the information with the group. LCC officer area maps for the county had been shared with the group since the previous meeting.
- All other matters arising from the previous meetings minutes were agreed without additional comments.

3. Proposed change of the name of the Lincs Engineers Forum to the ADA Technical and Engineering Forum

- KV updated the group on the progress that had been made to convert the current Engineers Forum meeting to an official ADA meeting, widening the scope of attendees. KV addressed concerns that the new format would lose focus on Lincolnshire IDBs, with additional wording having been added to the new forums proposed Terms of Reference, whereby the meetings will still be held in or close to Lincolnshire, with options for other attendees to travel or attend online. IM provided an insight to the group, explaining how current ADA committee groups have seen duplication in matters arising in different meetings, and how other areas such as the Environmental Forum had seen positive changes from having environmentally focused meetings with an appointed person raising key matters to the ADA committee. The idea is for the Engineering Forum to follow suit, allowing the meeting to be opened up nationally. EJ reiterated IM's points by also raising that with the meeting moving to a formal ADA committee, there would be further potential for issues raised in the meetings to be acknowledged and addressed by ADA. IM agreed with this point and also added that it was important for the knowledge and experience in the Engineers Forum to be utilised on a larger scale. KV asked the group if there were any concerns, or if anyone opposed the change. In the absence of any concerns or opposition, the group agreed to the change, and the group will now be known as the ADA Technical and Engineering Forum. **KV to share list of current Engineer Forum invitees with IM to see if others need to be added**

4. Appointment of representative to the ADA Policy Committee

- KV asked the group if anyone would like to step forward to be the ADA Policy Committee Representative for the next 3 year period. EJ, who has fulfilled this role for the last 6 years, stated that he was willing to continue. There were no other volunteers, and it was agreed that EJ will continue in the role.

5. Operational Issues

- **IDB Flood Recovery and Asset Improvement Fund - Tranche 1 and 2 projects** - EJ asked the group how progress was being made across the boards with regards to delivery of Tranche 1 and 2 funded projects, with the delivery deadline of the end of March 2025 fast approaching. The common feedback from across the group was that due to delays in EA funding confirmation and general communication, IDBs had been left with very little time to procure, plan and deliver these projects. Two boards have been audited by the EA in relation to the funding, both providing their concerns of the current deadlines in place, with both boards receiving different responses. Individual boards are approaching projects differently, with some utilising contractors so as not to strain IDB labour resources. Several other boards highlighted issues with procuring materials and equipment, with a small pool of contractors and suppliers available to the industry, resulting in delays to all boards, and putting at risk project delivery with the current deadlines. Other areas presenting issues to project delivery involve the current time of year with rainfall increasing water levels in drainage networks and IDB resource being utilised in emergency activities. In light of these issues it was noted that many of the

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projects that are in progress across the county would not normally be carried out through winter months. Also raised was the risk to IDBs losing funding if works cannot meet the current deadlines, leaving boards with high financial risks. IDBs need to inform the EA by 7 February if they do not think projects are going to be complete by the end of March deadline. **It was agreed after a long discussion that IM will draft a letter to the EA detailing IDB project delivery concerns and reasons for their concerns. IM will look to seek a deadline extension for IDBs. IM requested that all IDBs share their EA update in early February with IM.**

- KV raised concerns over increasing numbers of badger setts in the South Holland area, with others in agreements, noting they had seen a significant increase in badger activity over the last decade. KV further reported that badgers had been found in the tidal banks of the South Holland area, and that this was a growing problem. Although reported to the EA last June, these setts were still in place as the current legislation makes it very difficult and expensive to move badgers. Taking into account the increased flood risk posed by the presence of such setts, KV suggested that a change in legislation should be proposed to make it easier to deal with badgers in flood defence and drainage assets. There was little support within the group to take this to ADA for further consideration, as it was generally felt that a change in legislation was unachievable. KN raised that at the LCC they have had issues overcoming badger related problems. They are now having to work with ecologists a year in advance, to plan and organise their works to ensure delays are limited.
- KN consulted the group with regards to the recent rainfall event in mid-January 2025. The feeling across the room was that the rainfall received was not as significant as during other events in 2024, and so the reaction of the drainage networks was surprising, including record high water levels in the South Forty Foot Drain. Ideas as to the reason for this were discussed, including high levels of soil saturation, the soil moisture deficit being very low at this time, and the fact that following recent storms, local land owners have been actively clearing out riparian watercourses more regularly, increasing flow into IDB maintained watercourses and assets. Individual cases were shared with the group including flooding to a Witham & Humber Pumping station, and flooding in Doncaster due to blocked culverts. ABa updated the group on recent Section 19s, stating that up to 30 of the 129 cases reported, were repeats from Storm Babet and/or Storm Henk.
- There were no other operational issues to report.

6. Asset Management

- ABa requested that the group share IDB asset information with LCC via shapefiles (ESRI/GIS) to allow LCC to update the County Water Asset Information. Information required includes, Location, Type of Asset, Owner, Condition and Last Inspection Date. **ABa to send a formal request to the group via email.**

7. Health, Safety, and Welfare

- Witham & Humber Boards reported a fire to a John Deere tractor. The fire was caused by a buildup of grass cuttings around the exhaust that had not been cleared. It was also noted that the design of John Deere tractors, unlike other manufacturers, locates the tractor exhaust next to the flail leading to an increased likelihood of vegetation build up. The board have implemented frequent checks and cleaning routines for the machines during operation. JBo stated a similar tractor fire had occurred on a WMC board.
- An open discussion was held by the group in relation to Lone Working and systems used. Methods and systems used were shared across the group with all parties happy with their current systems in place. Many Boards are using a “People Safe” type option, either through an app on employees’ phones, or by the use of fobs or id card type units, depending on the job role. Where check in type arrangements are in place, it was generally agreed that the fewer of these specified per day, the easier and more easily accepted the system is amongst users.

8. Environment and Conservation

- NM asked the group if anyone had seen delays in their Eel exemption applications. Some boards confirmed that they had received their application back promptly but others had seen delays. It was identified that different boards fall under differing EA team areas, with some areas having staffing and training issues leading to delays in approvals. AG suggested that it would be useful for EA to provide an update on their team structure. **DP agreed to see if a breakdown of EA team and district maps could be shared with the group.** MR suggested that Andy Don would be the best contact from EA if IDBs were still having issues with exemptions as he leads that department.
- There was a group discussion around the proposed changes to waste exemptions, including the importance of retaining the current exemption methods of covering full IDB districts as one exemption. IM raised to the group that ADA had responded to the recent consultation and further response may be required following the outcome, including queries around discounted rates for IDBs that have been already provided to the agricultural sector.
- EJ raised to the group, as a point to note, that Witham 4th IDB had seen delays in communication with the Marine Management Organisation and/or Natural England leading to project delays. KV reaffirmed this point having had a similar experience that caused delays to a large SHIDB project. EJ encouraged early communication with the MMO if required by an IDB in the future.

9. Planning and Consenting

- No update was available with regards to the enactment of Schedule 3 of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 and the establishments of SuDS Approval Bodies.
- EJ raised that under the proposed changes to the planning consultation process, IDBs may no longer be consulted as they are not statutory consultees. Most Boards stated

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that their current approach is to check the weekly planning list issued by local councils, and therefore pick up any relevant planning applications requiring comment without being directly consulted by the planning authority, and that any comment an IDB wishes to make, can, if necessary, be fed through the LCC, as the statutory consultee. It was felt that that current system was working well and the proposed change would not significantly impact the Boards' ability to comment on applications.

- IM informed the group that he had received email responses to the consultation on proposed reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework, and a formal ADA response had been sent in ahead of the deadline in September 2024.

10. Enforcement

- DB raised to the group, concerns around enforcement for drainage problems associated with road culverts, particularly on riparian watercourses where responsibility for the culvert is unclear. DB raised concerns around requesting land owners and residents to take on the responsibility of a road culvert where other dwellings, land further upstream, or even the highway are also seeing a benefit from the drain. KN stated that the LCC legal team are looking at this, and stressed the importance of LCC working with IDB's to reach an outcome suitable for all parties instead of activating legal proceedings, although each case must be looked at individually. **KN agreed to liaise with NW to provide an update on culvert ownership/responsibility at the next meeting.**

11. FDGiA

- GN provided an update on FDGiA proceedings. GN stated that EA were looking to save £3.5million across Lincs and Northants this year, and so were asking some IDBs to defer claiming grant funding allocated in 2024/25 until the 2025/26 financial year. NM confirmed he has deferred a funding payment and was informed that providing a IDB has a letter of allocation the funding would be honoured. GN informed the group that the EA had not given clear information on the future grant in aid programme post March 2026. Also noted is that the current capital funding programme period has been reduced to 5 years instead of 6. Some other members of the group also raised that they had been informed that EA would not currently be approving any new OBCs.

12. Items to be taken to ADA Policy Committee

- EJ gave an update from the recent ADA Policy Committee meeting, detailing several actions and statements (available in the ADA Policy Committee meeting minutes).
- No items were raised to be taken to the ADA Policy Committee.

13. Any Other Business

- DB raised to the group that Witham 4th are arranging a CAD course in the near future, stating a further two people could attend, allowing other boards to send delegates if required. **Any interested person to contact DB.**
- DP informed the group that the EA are actively working on PSCA agreements but progress has been stalled due to a bereavement in the team. **DP to share updates once complete.**
- MR suggested that Ed Tooth, conservation officer for the Wash and North Norfolk Coast may be able to help with contacts within the MMO.
- IM informed the group that Defra was planning a consultation later in the year on changes to the flood funding process in England. This has already been discussed by the ADA Policy Committee earlier in the month. IM agreed to provide an email for circulation amongst the group, and invited comments. **Any ideas or comments to be directed to EJ. On completion EJ to share outcome with the group.**

14. Date of next meeting

- The date of the next Engineers Forum will be Thursday 10th July 2025. Venue – Witham 4th IDB, followed by a site visit to the new Wrangle Pumping Station (**EJ to arrange site visit**).