

BLACK SLUICE INTERNAL DRAINAGE BOARD

MINUTES

of the proceedings of a Meeting of the
Environment Committee

held at the Offices of the Board on Wednesday 20th May 2015 at 2pm

Members

Chairman - * Mr J R Wray

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| * Mr R Leggott | Mr R Welberry |
| Mr M J Scott | * Mr P Robinson |
| * Mr P Holmes | * Mr K C Casswell |
| * Mr J F Atkinson | * Mr V A Barker |

(* Member Present)

In attendance: Mr I Warsap (Chief Executive)
Mr P Nicholson (Operations Manager)
Ian Nixon (Scarborough Nixon Assoc)
Celia Commowick (Scarborough Nixon Assoc)

The Chairman introduced and welcomed the representatives above and thanked them for their attendance. He also stated Cllr David Dickinson has not stood for Council re-election and therefore resigned from the Committee and he expressed sadness for the passing away of Mr C Fretwell who was a valued member of the Environment Committee.

743 **APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Mr M J Scott and Mr R Welberry.

744 **MINUTES OF LAST ENVIRONMENT MEETING**

The Minutes of the last Meeting of the Environment Committee held on 14th May 2014, copies of which had been circulated, were considered and it was agreed that the Minutes should be signed as a true record.

745 **MATTERS ARISING**

(a) **North Forty Foot Fishing Platforms - Minute No 375(d)**

Mr R Leggott stated he has witnessed disabled anglers using these platforms.

745 Cont.....

(b) Lincolnshire Show Schools Challenge - Minute No 538 (g)

The significance of agricultural land drainage is involved in this year's schools challenge albeit with a lower emphasis on land drainage than last year, those members attending this year's show were requested to take a look and report back.

746 REPORT ON ENVIRONMENTAL WORKS COMPLETED 2014/15 - Agenda Item 4

Details of the environmental works completed were circulated with the agenda the Chief Executive highlighted the following areas;

(a) Barn Owl Boxes

The Chief Executive reported that three pole mounted Barn Owl boxes were erected last year at Kirton Meeres and Kirton Marsh, this makes a total of thirty six boxes financed by the Board.

The 2014 annual box survey completed by the Wildlife Conservation Partnership is attached for information, 2014 being assessed as a record year with twelve successful broods.

(b) Tom Tom Data Recording of Environmental Sightings

The Chief Executive stated all information recorded is passed onto the Lincolnshire Environmental Records Centre (LERC), Mr R Leggott requested if it was possible to introduce this at a future meeting.

(c) Water Vole Monitoring Surveys

Scarborough Nixon Associates (SNA) have carried out monitoring surveys on six pre-agreed established sites, SNA will report on these under Agenda Item 6.

(d) Fish/Eel Passability Studies

The ten high priority pumping stations have been assessed with the appraisal studies being delivered to the Environment Agency (EA) before the 1st January 2015 deadline.

(e) Kingfisher Nesting Sites

The site is now so well established a pair of Mute Swans are nesting on the site, therefore the reed cutting has been left until a time they hatch and leave.

(f) RSPB water abstraction for Frampton Marsh Nature Reserve

The RSPB were advised to stop their water abstraction earlier in the year following signs of pollution on the surface of the water.

746 (f) Cont.....

The Committee asked if the polluter had been identified, the Operations Manager stated the EA had been investigating but to date no one had been identified, the situation continues to be monitored.

(g) Bat Surveys

SNA will be reporting under Agenda Item 6, it should be noted that during the survey at Trinity College Pumping Station there was evidence of an Otter spraint.

(h) North Forty Foot Drain

Following the recent de-silting works and fish removal prior to our works the EA have requested due to the large number of fish recorded that a length of drain is categorised as a fish nursery area. The EA have paid the Board to position gabion baskets filled with brash for nursery protection and barley straw to help reduce weed growth in these areas all to assist in encouraging continuous high numbers of coarse fish along this drain. The EA will study this area and any findings will be reported back to the Committee.

Some concern was expressed by Committee members regarding reductions in flows along this area. The Chief Executive informed the Committee he had agreed with the EA that if this was the case the gabion baskets would be removed by the Board.

(i) Wildflower Seeding on Risegate Eau bank.

The results have been disappointing; the Operations Manager is to speak with the Hydro Seed contractors to identify a more adaptable seed mixture.

747 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROPOSED ENVIRONMENTAL SURVEY AND DRAIN WORKS TO BE CARRIED OUT 2015/16

(a) Water Vole Surveys

The Chief Executive requested Committee approval to continue to employ SNA to undertake further surveys for water vole evidence at the six established monitoring sites and on any significant sites prior to desilting or capital works. In addition, post desilting surveys will be carried out following the works where water vole activity has been found to confirm whether or not our works have had any effect on these populations. Environmental mitigation works may be required should results give evidence of disturbance. The Committee AGREED to recommend approval to the Board.

Mr P Holmes stated that a member of the public from Drain Side on Kirton Woodside stated that this site due to historic commercial activities had been in a poor state for over ten years but thankfully they have recently seen water voles in this area following the Boards continuous maintenance works which they believe had enhanced this area.

(b) Bats

The Chief Executive explained that various species of bat had been recorded at our pumping stations during SNA surveys and a full report will be received in Agenda Item 6.

The Committee AGREED to recommend to the Board that further surveys should be carried out on the bat population by Scarborough Nixon.

(c) Summer Cutting and Vegetation Clearance

The Chief Executive stated that the initial programme of works has been posted on the website and will be reviewed on a weekly basis. The workforce will be briefed regarding channel management in relation to balancing the benefits of flood risk, agriculture and the biodiversity values.

The Board's summer cutting programme will commence on the 13th July with the mechanical flails going out a few days before. Where bird nests are encountered a minimum 10m length of bank will be left un-cut, Ian Nixon agreed with this distance.

(d) Bird Nesting Boxes

The Committee discussed the long standing relationship the Board has with erecting Barn Owl boxes/pole boxes and agreed it may be the right time to focus on other endangered bird species, with the knowledge we could always return to focus on the Barn Owl.

The Committee AGREED to recommend to the Board to complete a maintenance regime to the Boards existing boxes, agree with SNA which new endangered bird species we should erect nesting boxes for and liaise with the Wildlife Conservation Partnership about modern Barn Owl box design and replacement of older existing boxes.

(e) Eel and Fish Passes

The Chief Executive stated the Board with other Lincolnshire Board's have entered into an agreement with the EA for them to carry out our Eel Regulation Compliance for 'Pumping Station Passability', this is being funded through DEFRA Grant in Aid to levels of £7,000 per pumping station.

The EA are responsible for making sure compliance with these regulations is achieved. A report by the EA in September 2012 prioritised pumping stations in the Anglian Northern region for facilities for the passage of Eels and other fish.

747 (e) Cont.....

Thirty four pumping stations within the EA Anglian Northern region have been identified on the Medium Priority list and we have seven pumping stations on this list:-

Bicker Fen, Heckington, Helpringham, Swaton, Trinity College, Billingborough and Kirton Marsh. At this time we need to assume all will require works, we will plan for further EA investigations in this financial year again being funded through DEFRA Grant in Aid.

Grant in Aid funds are being allocated to every pumping station for future 'safe passage works'. Where 'major improvement/replacement works' are being planned to go ahead within the next five years the 'safe passage' works should also be included.

The works were being planned to go ahead until an unclassified project update was received from the EA which states; 'at this stage we intend to only undertake further eel investigations on the medium priority sites once the EA has addressed the challenges to ensure any work undertaken is fully aligned. We will provide an update as soon as we are able.'

Due to the above we do not intend to proceed any further with these works until a time we are further notified from the EA to proceed.

(f) Water Levels

The Chief Executive reported that water levels are continually required to remain higher in the summer months in order to assist trickle feed irrigation onto the land.

(g) High Profile Watercourse Assets

The Operations Manager informed the Committee that early season flailing of Wyberton Marsh Drain, Washdyke Lane, NFF (Cooks Lock to Punchbowl Lane) and New Hammond Beck (Chain Bridge to Tesco) will continue being carried out.

Other notable watercourses that have enhanced maintenance are Endeavour Park (12/4&5), Kirton Drainside North (5/30), Frampton Towns Drain from London Road to weir (5/1), Gosberton Risegate Eau (22/14), Bicker Eau through the village (4/67), and the Drain alongside the IDEA park at Donington (2/26).

A total of c67Km of further high profile watercourse assets (generally our larger watercourses) have been identified that require additional late summer inspections to determine whether a second flail and/or cut is required.

The Committee agreed that Officers should monitor these watercourses in relationship to early season cutting (one or both banks) and late season cutting. To also attempt to cut back as much rape/mustard seed that is growing on the banks as this is having a detrimental effect on the grasses growing below these plants, early season cutting being the recommended action.

(h) Fens Waterway Link

The Chief Executive stated as previously reported this is a long term project and the EA consultants are currently investigating the widening of the southern end of the South Forty Foot Drain near Guthram Gowt before connecting into the River Glen.

We have received no further updates from this time last year;

“Uncertainties on the FWL means there is no project budget to progress the project with. Our original proposal for this route relied on the cooperation of the occupiers of Horseshoe House. Since they have asked us not to use that route we can confirm that we have no existing plans to take forward a Fens Waterway Link Scheme which would directly affect Horseshoe House without the agreement of the property owners. We would, therefore, only reconsider this position if a future owner (the house is currently on the market) of Horseshoe House express interest in such a scheme. The EA remains prepared to speak to potential purchasers or other interested parties regarding this scheme”.

(i) Fens for the Future

The Fens for the Future Vision is to see sustainable wetlands restored, re-created and reconnected across the Fens for the benefit of people, our natural and historic heritage and the rural economy. Sustainable wetlands will help reduce storm effects, make available clean water and retain peat land soils so helping mitigate the effects of climate change, while at the same time offering a haven for wildlife, protecting our historic heritage and providing exciting areas for people to visit. Recreational access and tourism increases with more people taking exercise in the countryside. The diversity of the local economy widens and opportunities for employment in local communities are created.

The Fens for the Future Partnership Mission Statement is to make the Fens one of the main UK landscape scale wetland complexes by 2020, within a matrix of sustainable agriculture.

The Fens remain nationally important for modern productive farming. The provision for wildlife in the farmed landscape increases significantly with the uptake of environmentally friendly farming practices and sensitive ditch and drain management, thus creating a network of wildlife habitats extending throughout Fen land. The variety and abundance of farmland wildlife increases and iconic Fenland species thrive.

(j) Water Framework Directive

Meetings will take place with the WFD EA Officers over the forthcoming year and we have the following reviews to complete:-

- What actions do we undertake within our maintenance regime that can affect the water quality within our catchments (good/bad)?
- What levels of water quality information do the EA hold and what catchments does this cover?
- What longer term plans can we start to jointly investigate to further enhance our catchments working within the WFD guidelines?
- What records do you hold on the 148km of EA Main River within our catchments?
- What funding is there available to assist with future enhancements works?

(k) The Wash and North Norfolk Coast European Marine Site

The Chief Executive stated The Wash and North Norfolk Coast European Marine Site (WNNC EMS) management scheme has been running since 2002 with the aim to safeguard marine wildlife and habitats designated under EU and UK law, while encouraging sustainable use of the European Marine site. The management objectives are broken down into time scaled actions which were drawn up in consultation with the various relevant authorities and stakeholders.

Being one of the relevant authorities we have a statutory duty under the UK Habitats Regulations to report on progress against these management actions on an annual basis, and the information is presented in the Action Plan.

We report on subjects such as land drainage, shoreline management (if applicable), coastal oil spills, water framework directives, chemical weed control, non-native invasive species and water abstraction.

(l) Works in order to meet our BAP targets and other incidental works

The Chief Executive explained that various works are required to be completed this year in order to meet our BAP targets, these works were introduced to the Committee and discussed at length with estimated budgets being allocated to all works, the budgets fall in line with the total Environmental budget for 2015/16.

BAP Target works agreed:-

- To create 100m of new reed bed.
- Survey and map (GIS layer) all hedgerows by 2016.
- Improve a habitat/plant and establish the Greater Water Parsnip.
- Construct an Otter holt.

747 (I) Cont.....

- Complete a farmland bird study (agreed to study Wyberton Marsh and assess against the study completed in 2010).
- Carry out a Grass Snake survey.
- Erect bat boxes at pumping stations.

Incidental environmental works agreed:-

- Purchase additional Mink control equipment.
- Purchase emergency response pollution control equipment
- Invertebrate surveys

The Committee AGREED to submit the above works to the Board for approval subject to liaison and agreement with SNA.

748 REVIEW OF THE BOURNE NORTH FEN BORROW PITS STUDY TOUR - Agenda Item 5

The Chief Executive stated to the Committee how all involved had commented on the success of the Study Tour in September 2014.

The Chairman agreed with this statement and emphasised the environmental importance of the three borrow pits.

The Chief Executive then introduced the following works for this year:-

Borrow Pit 1 at Wherry's Farm, Twenty

Management objectives for the site are:

- Allow woodland habitat to develop naturally
- Increase roosting opportunities for bat species
- Maintain and enhance the reed bed habitat
- Review the management plan after five years

Borrow Pit 2 at Bourne North Fen, Twenty

Management objectives for the site are:

- Manage the wet woodland habitat appropriately
- Maintain and enhance the reed bed habitat
- Enhance and protect the site for specially protected bird species (marsh harrier and bittern)
- Review the management plan after five years

Borrow Pit 3 at Cooke's Farm, Twenty

Management objectives for the site are:

- Allow Willow Carr woodland to develop naturally
- Selectively thin trees in the plantation woodland
- Improve the ground flora in the plantation woodland
- Lay the hawthorn boundary hedgerow
- Increase roosting opportunities for bat species
- Review the management plan after five years

The management plans are in place and the Committee AGREED to recommend to the Board to continue with the plans.

749 SNA REPORTS - Agenda Item 6

(a) Bat Surveys

Ian Nixon stated the Bat surveys had confirmed our thoughts that Bats are roosting/living in and around the pumping stations which include the suction bays and gravity channels. A Bat Survey report dated December 2014 has been produced and reports that Common Pipistrelle, Daubenton's, Myotis sp., Soprano Pipistrelle, Noctule and Nathusius Pipistrelle were all present at various pumping stations.

The presence of Nathusius Pipistrelle, recorded at Cooks Lock pumping station is significant as this species is considered rare in the UK.

Swallows were also noted nesting below the pumping stations.

(b) Water Vole Surveys

Ian Nixon stated the six sites indentified for the surveys each have a healthy population of Water Voles, data is now being collated and will gradually build up a log of the success of each family unit for each site.

Ian felt that all matters had been discussed accordingly during the meeting; he stated that if any members had any questions or queries then please contact him or Helen at SNA.

750 TO REVIEW THE ADA LINCOLNSHIRE BRANCH ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE MINUTES 3rd December 2014 - Agenda Item 7

The Chairman noted that the Chief Executive had presented BSIDB's environmental practices and the role of the Environment Committee to the ADA Lincolnshire Branch Environment Committee which received a positive response.

751 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

(a) New Members

The Chairman requested any thoughts on new members.

(b) Chairman

Mr R Wray stood down as Chairman following his term of office, he recommended Mr P Holmes the current Vice Chairman as his successor, all members AGREED to recommend his appointment to the Board for approval.

The Committee thanked Mr Wray for his environmental input and guidance over the years and suggested he continued as a valued Environment Committee member.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 4.40pm.