

BLACK SLUICE INTERNAL DRAINAGE BOARD

MINUTES

of the proceedings of a meeting of the Environment Committee

held at the offices of the Board on
4th May 2016 at 2.00pm

Members

Chairman - * Mr P Holmes

* Mr R Welberry	* Mr P Robinson
* Mr R Wray	Mr R Leggott
Cllr C Brotherton	* Mr K Casswell
* Mr V Barker	* Mr J Atkinson

* Member Present

In attendance: Mr I Warsap (Chief Executive)
Mr P Nicholson (Operations Manager)
Mr I Cappitt (Fishing Syndicate)
Mr C Reed (Fishing Syndicate)
Mrs H Scarborough (Scarborough Nixon Associates)

The Chairman welcomed Mrs H Scarborough from Scarborough Nixon Associates, Ian Cappitt and Chris Reed of the Fishing Syndicate.

943 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Mr W Ash.

944 TO RECEIVE A PRESENTATION FROM THE FISHING SYNDICATE REGARDING LEASING THE FISHING RIGHTS FOR BORROW PIT 2 AT BOURNE NORTH FEN, TWENTY

Questions & Answer Session

The Chairman invited questions on the presentation. Mrs H Scarborough said that the proposal could be a good opportunity to get some work done at the lake. Mr I Cappitt stated that they might have a boat with reed-cutting facilities. They would work very closely with Mrs H Scarborough.

Mr P Robinson asked why there needed to be fishermen there. Mr I Cappitt responded that the key thing was that there would be a publicity ban on the site. They would select people that they knew on the basis of their ethos and interest in conservation. They would use the membership fees for fishery management and conservation of that site.

Mr I Cappitt said that they were thinking of conserving both lakes. The Chief Executive stated that the Board did not own the smaller lake.

Mr V Baker asked about the weir adding water to the lake. The Chief Executive said that there was an overspill. Mr I Cappitt said that the ditch looked like it was blocked when they had been at the site.

Mr R Welberry enquired about access to the site. Mr I Cappitt replied that vehicles could access the sites. The Chief Executive said that they accessed the site through the permission of land owners. They would probably have recorded original depths, but he had seen an aerial photograph of the freshly dug ponds, which would give them an indication of the original depths. The full presentation would be circulated to the Committee Members for review.

Mr I Cappitt stated that members of the IDB that fished the lake would be incorporated into what they did. The Chief Executive stated that if the lake was being fished they should have an environmental theme for it and control it along those lines.

Mr K Casswell stated that he was concerned about unwanted visitors affecting the conservation of the area. Mr I Cappitt said that he did not think the lake would be known about and if anything the lake would be policed by members. The Chairman added that news would get round in the community. Mr I Cappitt noted that they would have to look at insurance for the site. They could make the lake lower-key if there were concerns about unwanted visitors.

The Chairman enquired as to whether there were any other sites being looked at. Mr I Cappitt responded that there were very few sites in the area. They had been looking at a site with Nick Morris, but this was their preferred option because it had a conservation dimension to it.

Mr P Robinson asked if the members would be local in order to monitor the lake. Mr I Cappitt replied that they would be.

Discussion Session

The Chairman invited opinions on the presentation. Mr R Welberry asked if there was a set rate. The Chairman responded that they would receive £300 a year for the site. If they received nothing from the site, they would still benefit from the conservation work. They could still fine-tune the proposal at that stage.

Mr K Casswell asked about the excavation of the pond. The Chairman stated that it would be monitored by Mrs H Scarborough. The pond had clearly been deeper in the past because there had previously been fish.

The Chief Executive said that Mr I Cappitt and Mr C Reed both worked for the Environment Agency (EA) and were not doing it to make money. They would want to put a control mechanism into the lease that there would be an annual meeting.

Mr R Welberry stated that there might be a problem with the access to the site. The Chief Executive said that that would be for Mr I Cappitt and Mr C Reed to resolve.

Mr V Barker added that they must insist that there was an appropriate insurance policy in place.

Mr P Robinson stated that the agreement had to be on an organisation basis rather than personal, in case Mr I Cappitt moved away. The Chairman stated that there would be a 12-month break clause on the agreement.

Mr J Wray enquired whom the lease would be between. The Chairman replied that it would be between Black Sluice and the Fishing Syndicate.

The Chief Executive stated that it was coincidental that Mr C Reed and Mr I Cappitt worked for the Environment Agency.

The Committee agreed that they would continue to review the proposal.

945 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE MEETING AND MATTERS ARISING

(a) Tom Tom Data Recording - Minute No 746(b)

The Chief Executive stated that on page 2, item 746(b) Mr Leggett had requested that they introduce the findings from their Tom Toms and other recordings. The Chief Executive presented the results of bats, otters and water voles. He did not think the bat survey recording data had gone back to Lincoln. Mrs H Scarborough said that they had passed the records on to Annette Faulkner, but it took about a year or so to verify the data and pass it to GLNP.

The Chief Executive stated that there had been a substantial increase in water voles. There had been 32 individual otter recordings for the past three years. They did not have any Black Sluice otter sightings. Mrs H Scarborough suggested asking for mink records as well. The Chairman asked how many of the otters might be mink. The Chief Executive replied that very few of those sightings were their own sightings. There had been one or two water vole sightings on their machines but he would be surprised if they recorded any otters on them.

(b) Wildflower Seeding on Risegate Eau Bank - Minute No 746(i)

Mr V Barker asked about item 746(i) on page 3. The Operations Manager stated that he had talked to their contractor and he had said that wildflowers could look like weeds and it was critical to remove the cuttings, which they had done, to stop the soil becoming enriched with nutrients. They had been led to believe from members' comments at the last meeting that potentially the soil was already enriched with nutrients. They would have to discuss the issue of the choice of area going forward.

The Operations Manager said that the contractor had also said that the option going forward was to spray off smaller areas and to try to introduce wildflowers into smaller areas. That was a way forward that was fraught with difficulty in terms of controlling the areas they had sprayed off. Mrs H Scarborough added that there were not any wildflowers that would withstand enriched soil. The Operations Manager said that they believed they had managed it under the guidance given. Mr V Barker stated they had to act soon if they were going to do something. The Chairman said that the site was not suitable.

Mr V Barker added that the mowing there last autumn had been much better because it had removed the nettles, so in the spring they could see the snowdrops and daffodils that grew along there.

(c) High Profile Watercourse Assets - Minute No 747(g)

The Operations Manager said that on item 747(g) page 6 the question had been asked about rapeseed and mustard seed that was growing on Board maintained watercourses. He had taken that question to the Lincolnshire Drainage Board Engineers' Forum and he had been told 'pretty unanimously' that the control

should be down to the landowner and the Board were not forced to do anything if it was not a noxious weed. Mr V A Barker stated that the issue was that it was smothering out the natural vegetation underneath. Mr P Robinson added that he had raised the same issue regarding the North Forty Foot Bank.

The Chief Executive said that it was a fantastic idea to cut down the mustard seed but they had 1,000 miles of bank they were responsible for. They could identify high profile banks. They could try to flail the banks without destroying bird nests. Mr J Atkinson said that there was not much nesting in those weeds. Mr Robinson stated that there would be nesting waterfowl in the weeds on the stretch in question. He suggested that it would have to be a chemical control rather than a physical one because they wanted to leave the grasses in place and remove the rapeseed.

The Chairman said that it was a question of timing. They would need to do it in spring when it was coming into flower, but that was a critical time of year when all the birds were nesting. They had to consider what to do and whether it was their responsibility to do it. Mr J Atkinson added that the smaller birds did not nest at all. Mrs H Scarborough stated that all nesting birds were legally protected. If they did not damage the nest they would be legally compliant.

Mr V Barker said that if they sprayed early enough in the season they would not cause a massive amount of damage. It was too late to spray now. The Chairman stated that they did not have any kit to carry that out. Mr K Casswell said that he did not know what chemicals they were cleared to spray. The Chairman stated that if they had agreed it was not their responsibility there was no point discussing it any further.

Mr V Barker said that they had to look at it more seriously where there were silt banks because they were not going to maintain the right kind of vegetation to keep the banks stable. It was in their interest to do it. The Chairman enquired whether it was their responsibility. Mr J Atkinson said that if they were responsible for mowing the banks they were responsible for looking after it.

The Chief Executive said that if maintaining the bank included reducing the heavy growth of vegetation it could be tied in. They controlled 1,000 miles of river bank and they could clearly not deal with all of it. They had two different focus points in terms of one area that was populated and one that was farmland.

The Chairman stated that he did not know if the spray had clearance to be sprayed next to a watercourse. The Chief Executive said that it would introduce another problem that they currently do not have the equipment because they very infrequently sprayed. The Chairman added that he would think if the weeds were flailed on 1st March the weeds would still establish, flower and seed. They would need to be flailing on 1st April to stop the weeds from flowering and seeding.

The Chairman stated that they would have to obtain a machine, access and a chemical to spray. Mr J Atkinson added that if they did not do anything it was going to become worse. The Chief Executive stated that if they were spraying they could only remove the vegetation when it was there and if they were flailing there was not a very big window to flail in. Mr R Wray said that they could identify the sites and then over time they could target them when there was not rapeseed there.

The Committee agreed that it was their responsibility to do something about the mustard seed and rapeseed issue. The Committee agreed that they should focus on the most elevated sites that had been brought to their attention as to mustard seed and rapeseed and identify the most suitable spraying technique to remove that growth.

(d) New Members - Minute No 751(a)

The Chairman stated that on item 751(a) page 10, Mr W Ash had put his name forward to be a member of this Committee. The Chairman proposed that Mr W Ash would join the Environment Committee. Mr J Atkinson seconded the proposal.

The Committee agreed that the minutes were an accurate reflection of the meeting.

946 ENVIRONMENTAL WORK REPORT

Completed Works 2015/16

(a) Owl Boxes

The Chief Executive stated that they had carried out, as requested by the Committee, a cleaning and prepping regime to all their owl boxes attached to pumping stations. They had attended every pumping station except Gosberton as a result of an access issue. They had been pleased by the number of owls in the boxes. They had reported the findings to Alan Ball. The boxes had been cleaned out and bark had been introduced.

(b) Tom Tom Data Recording

The Chief Executive stated that mink control had remained the same. Mr P Robinson asked if they kept records of mink. The Chief Executive said that they just recorded what they had been told. They had recorded half a dozen in the year.

(c) High Profile Watercourse Assets

The Chief Executive stated that high profile watercourses were included every year. The RSPB was still unhappy with their continuous cutting on the Wyberton Marsh drain.

(d) Control of Mink

The mink monitoring remained the same. They recorded when mink had been caught and dispatched, which was around half a dozen a year.

(e) Hedgerow Bushes

The Chief Executive said that they had not been able to complete a significant survey programme but that was proposed in the new works.

They had carried out their normal bushing work but without any burning that year.

(f) RSPB Water Abstraction for Frampton Marsh

The Chief Executive said that there had been a request to draw more water out for Frampton Marsh. They and the EA did not have any problems with the proposal, but they had set a level below which the drawing of water would have to stop.

(g) Kingfisher Nesting Site

The Chief Executive stated that a mute swan had resided at the kingfisher nesting site last year.

(h) Big Boston Clean Up

They had carried out the big Boston clean-up.

(i) Grass Snake Breeding Sites

The Chief Executive stated that Mrs H Scarborough's team had introduced some recommendations to them, which they had followed, as to grass snake breeding sites.

(j) Invasive Species

The Chief Executive said that in terms of invasive species they had recorded Japanese knotweed on several occasions.

The Chief Executive stated that they had awarded Martin Willing £300 towards his travel expenses to carry out Gulf Wedge Clam surveys. He had received an email from Martin Willing saying that he had revisited three sites on the South Forty Foot Drain and three on the tidal Witham. No Gulf Wedge Clams had been found on the tidal Witham, but they had found those clams throughout the South Forty Foot downstream from Swineshead Bridge through to the pumping station.

The Chief Executive noted that the South Forty Foot site was the only known site with the invasive Gulf Wedge Clam in Britain. Mr V Barker stated that he had informed the EA about the issue and they had not been interested.

The Chief Executive said that at the upstream points some of the shells had been recorded as being 60mm in size, which were the largest Gulf Wedge Clams recorded in Europe.

Mr R Welberry asked what was wrong with the Gulf Wedge Clams. The Chief Executive responded that there was a concern from the Board's point of view over the clams entering their discharge pipes and growing while they were not pumping and sealing those pipes up. The Chairman stated that there was also a concern on the impact on native species.

Mr V Barker enquired as to whether they had a responsibility to control the clams. The Chief Executive replied that it would be part of their negotiations regarding the EA being the 'river police'. The EA would have the controlling mechanisms but would probably involve them. He had no idea how the clams would be controlled. The Chief Executive proposed that they would allow Martin Willing to continue conducting the survey with the excess funds.

(k) Bat Boxes and Surveys

The Chief Executive stated that they had installed some bat boxes on pumping stations.

(l) South Forty Foot Drain Otter Holts

The Chief Executive said that they had built an otter holt. They had constructed some pads that would collect evidence of otters. There would be interest from otters because there were otters recorded in that area.

(m) Fish Friendly Flap Valves

The Chief Executive said that the fish friendly flap valves had been installed. The EA had paid for it because it protected properties from flooding. That had also allowed them to meet the requirements of the eel passage through pumping stations.

Proposed Works 2016/17

(a) Water Vole Surveys

The Chief Executive stated that they were seeking to approve the continued employment of Scarborough Nixon Associates for the water vole surveys. They had reviewed them against other providers and Scarborough Nixon represented good value for money and they had a good working relationship with them. They would carry out a post de-silting survey to look for any evidence of disturbance.

(b) Winter Bushing and Cleansing

The Chief Executive said that the winter bushing and cleansing would continue as it normally did.

The Chief Executive stated that where there was sufficient water they would identify fish.

(c) Summer Cutting and Vegetation Clearance

The Chief Executive said that they were proposing to commence summer cutting on 11th July 2016. Mr J Wray asked if they would be flailing the opposite bank where possible.

The Chief Executive said that they were trying to focus on alternating banks, but it was not always possible. They would spend more money than normal on installing side entry pipes, removing particularly awkward trees, bushes and fencing and widening bridges.

The Chief Executive said that the workforce would be presented with a summer cutting brief. They had several new employees. If they found nesting birds, they would need to leave five metres either side.

The Chief Executive stated that they would monitor increasing levels of rapeseed and mustard seed and decide what they were going to do about it.

(d) Vegetation Spraying

The Chief Executive stated that they would continue to carry out spraying at tunnel ends.

(e) Owl Boxes

The Chief Executive said that they would seek approval to spend a maximum of £1,000 to repair owl boxes.

(f) Recording by Machine Drivers

The Chief Executive stated that they had eight Tom Tom recording devices and all eight are being renewed that year. They would continue with the existing sightings data that they had on those machines. They only had 11 input fields and they would divide them into 50% environmental and 50% water level management.

The Chief Executive asked whether there were any suggestions for specific wildlife to be recorded. Mrs H Scarborough suggested recording mink sightings. The Committee agreed that mink would replace newts in the monitoring.

(g) High Profile Watercourse Assets

The Chief Executive said that they would have the same early season and repeat cutting.

(h) Water Levels

The Chief Executive stated that the water levels were controlled via the pumping stations. The EA main river water levels had been lifted by approximately 600mm at Easter and would drop back down in November. They had requests to hold higher water levels for irrigation, which arguably enhanced biodiversity.

(i) Fens for the Future

The Chief Executive said that the Fens for the Future programme went against the ethos of a drainage board, but it was a strong organisation. Black Sluice had a small area at the top of the South Lincolnshire Fens Partnership area.

(j) South Lincolnshire Fens Partnership

The Chief Executive said that the South Lincolnshire Fens Partnership had already developed sites. There was a conflict in terms of the land being high status agricultural land.

The Chief Executive stated that with regards to the partnership and in conjunction with the Environmental Agency there was a botanical map showing the level of species on watercourses. The more significant botanical mapping watercourses were the watercourses that the Board maintained. Annual planned maintenance went hand in hand with environmental enhancement of the fens watercourses, which they did not advertise enough.

The Chief Executive noted that one of the poorer sections had been the lower section of the EA South Forty Foot Drain because it was not maintained, but it had had an increase in status. Some of the watercourses were missing because there had not been the resources to study those.

The Chief Executive stated that they had created a map of all the local wildlife sites in their area. The majority of the sites were in the upper catchment part of their area. There was scope for increase but they had had quite a few wildlife sites without knowing that they had them. The Chairman asked whether they had to do different cutting regimes as a result. Mrs H Scarborough said that those sites were like that because of what Black Sluice had been doing.

(k) Water Framework Directive

The Chief Executive stated that at one point officers from the EA involved with the Water Framework Directive had been extremely anxious to meet them on a regular basis as to enhancing water quality but in the last year it had gone quiet. They were continuing to negotiate and deal with them.

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

The Chief Executive said that they were involved in the Wash and North Norfolk Coast European Marine Site. They had to record data and feed that back.

(m) BAP Targets and Future Works

The Chief Executive stated that there were outstanding works in their biodiversity action plan. He was looking for suitable sites to create 100 metres of new reed bed. Mr R Welberry enquired whether it was obligatory to create the new reed bed. The Chief Executive replied that it was not obligatory but it was a target they had. Mr R Welberry noted that engineers should know where the river banks needed some reeds.

The Chief Executive stated that it had to be a continuous 100 metres length of reed bed. They could introduce new reeds in the Dovehurn drain. Mr V Barker stated that because the Graft drain had been over engineered there might be some scope to introduce reeds to stabilise the bank.

The Chief Executive said that they would plant and allow the reeds to develop with continued annual maintenance.

Mr K Casswell suggested that they left it to Black Sluice's operatives to identify a suitable site. The Chairman added that there would be lots of possible suitable sites.

The Chief Executive stated that they would buy some greater water parsnip plants to introduce. Mrs H Scarborough added that it might be better to wait to plant them until after the cutting regime and possibly at the Tongue End pond.

The Chief Executive stated that they had carried out a farmland bird study in 2010 and he thought it would be good to carry out a study in the same location so they could monitor it against 2010. They could also carry out a southern fen study at the same time. Mr V Barker had given him copies of a bird study that had been carried out on his land. Birds had been seen by experts that they did not normally see.

A Bee Eater had been recorded, so that would be a good location to study. Mr V Barker suggested that they donate to the expense of conducting the study.

The Chief Executive stated that their proposed work did not take up their entire environmental budget. The Chief Executive invited members to add any environmental project ideas. The Chairman stated that they had saturated the area with owl boxes. The Chairman asked whether there were any other species they could help. Mrs H Scarborough stated that they had become very concerned that there had been a decline in the autumn surveys in water voles because of more numerous mink, so they could try to discourage mink.

The Chief Executive said that the only proposal he had been given to deter mink was to introduce otters. Mrs H Scarborough stated that otters would take too long to be introduced. The Chief Executive suggested that they could increase the number of traps. Mrs H Scarborough suggested that they could focus on certain areas where they had good water vole populations. She could provide them with particular areas that they could target to protect water voles from mink.

The Chairman asked whether they could employ someone for half a day a week out of the environmental budget to check the traps. The Chief Executive stated that subject to board approval they could employ someone to do that. It was a seven day a week operation. The Chairman stated that vermin control contractors were expensive, so it would be good if they could find someone in the workforce who was very keen, even if they had to put that individual on a course.

The Chief Executive said that he thought that there would be one or two interested for an hour's overtime a day to check the traps.

Mr P Robinson asked about the monitoring of traps. The Chief Executive said that they could offer the traps out to the landowner. The mink were generally caught and the traps were returned. Mr R Welberry stated that the individual setting the traps needed to liaise with Mrs H Scarborough to find out where the best sites were.

Mrs H Scarborough suggested that they could put camera traps out at pumping stations to gather more records of wildlife. They had done it for South Holland and they had quite liked it because they could use the photographs for publicity.

The Committee approved the works for 2016/17. The Chairman said that the works were fluid, so if there was something that arose they could add a piece of work.

Mr V Barker stated that they could move banks back in a couple of locations so there were hollows where they could introduce natural flowering yellow iris. There were some boards holding the water back that were leaking and needed to be replaced. The Chief Executive said that they could develop a suitable scheme along those lines.

The Chief Executive asked whether there was a need for continuous communication. The Chairman stated that it was up to the Committee Member whether they wanted to respond to or read block emails that were sent out to seek approval for works.

Mr R Welberry asked how many kingfisher banks they had. The Chief Executive replied that they had one and they were inexpensive. The Chairman said that kingfishers were very particular about where they would nest.

The Chief Executive stated that they could create a brief for installing further kingfisher banks.

947 VERBAL PRESENTATION BY SCARBOROUGH NIXON ASSOCIATES

Mrs H Scarborough stated that they had been conducting water vole monitoring surveys of six sites and they had recorded a decrease in the autumn due to a couple of sites being drier and the increased presence of mink. That was an issue that they needed to look at and it was not due to Black Sluice's management.

Mrs H Scarborough stated that one site, on Bicker Fen, had had no water voles. They had six core areas so that over time they could observe patterns. They would carry on with those six core areas but they might shift into some of the deeper drains on the drier sites because they now had a boat.

Mr R Welberry asked whether brown rats would discourage water voles. Mrs Scarborough responded that she did not think that brown rats discouraged water voles.

Mrs Scarborough stated that they had been conducting bat surveys. They had chosen the Kent bat box design as the uptake on those had been good on other sites. They had installed eight of those on the 20 site. Over 100 bats could sleep in the boxes that they had.

Mrs Scarborough stated that the local bat group had undertaken quite a lot of work on bats on the waterways. The group had been doing a lot of work trying to find where Daubenton's bats were roosting. They were at a stage now where as a volunteer organisation they were as far as they could progress. If they wanted to find out where the bats were roosting and what made a good Daubenton's bat roost, the group would need to have some more detailed study work, which would require professional ecologists.

Mrs Scarborough asked whether it was something that Black Sluice could support. However, the roosting bridges may not necessarily be in Black Sluice's area.

The Chief Executive enquired about the level of contribution required. Mrs Scarborough responded that each radio transmitter costed approximately £200. The Chief Executive asked to be sent the costs.

The Chief Executive stated that the project would have to be associated with their catchment area. Mrs Scarborough said that that could be an issue because they could not predict where the bats would go to roost.

948 MINUTES OF THE ADA LINCOLNSHIRE BRANCH ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

There was no comment on the minutes.

949 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Chief Executive noted that the photograph at the front of their brochure was of a juvenile common buzzard that had been photographed next to the Board's offices.

The local RSPB had come from King's Lynn and had taken the buzzard. The buzzard had unfortunately had to be put down.

The meeting was closed at 16:28.