

BLACK SLUICE INTERNAL DRAINAGE BOARD

MINUTES

of the proceedings of a meeting of the Environment Committee

held at the offices of the Board on
15th May 2019 at 2:05pm

Members

Chairman - * Mr P Holmes

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

* Member Present

In attendance: Mr I Warsap (Chief Executive)
Mr P Nicholson (Operations Manager)
Mr C Duku (GIS & Environmental Technician)
Ms T Smalley (Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust)
Ms S Baker (Greater Lincolnshire Nature Partnership)
Mr I Nixon (Inspired Ecology)
Mr A Scurrah-Price (Inspired Ecology)

The Chairman welcomed Ms T Smalley, Ms S Baker, Mr I Nixon, Mr A Scurrah-Price and Mr C Duku.

1434 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE - Agenda Item 1

Apologies were received from Mr W Ash, Mr R Welberry and Mr J Atkinson.

1435 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST - Agenda Item 2

There were no declarations of interest.

1436 MINUTES OF THE ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE MEETING - Agenda Item 3

The Minutes of the last meeting of the Environment Committee held on the 27th June 2018, copies of which had been circulated, were considered. It was AGREED that they should be signed as a true record with the following amendment:

- Minute 1309 (a) – ‘intension’ should be ‘intention’ as follows:
‘The Chief Executive reported that because of the Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust intention to purchase...’

1437 MATTERS ARISING - Agenda Item 4

(a) WILDFLOWER ON THE RISEGATE BANK - Minute 1311(kk)

Mr V Barker noted that the Board felt they had not been successful with the seeding, but he has recently noted various blocks of wild flower on the north side as planned, progress has been made. The Chief Executive and Operations Manager explained that they will monitor it over the growing season and determine what future course of action to take.

He further noted, in reference to the RiseGate bank, that Leslie Heckton? is no longer in a position to be able to maintain the area for them, and so Mr V Barker felt it should be maintained by the Board. A letter of best wishes will be sent from the Board.

(b) INVASIVE SPECIES - Minute 1311 (j)

Mr R Leggott suggested the encouragement of planting of wild flowers to try and compete with the 'yellow flower'. The Chairman felt that the yellow flower is too dominant at the moment and so the invasive species of yellow flower needs to be controlled first.

1438 TO REVIEW THE ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE - Agenda Item 5

The Chairman presented the Environment Committee Terms of Reference, with the only one amendment, inviting opinions of the committee.

All AGREED that the Environment Committee Terms of Reference be recommended to the Board for approval.

1439 TO RECEIVE A REPORT ON ENVIRONMENTAL WORK COMPLETED IN 2018/19 AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROPOSED WORKS FOR 2019/20 - Agenda Item 6

The Chief Executive presented this agenda item.

Completed Works 2018/19

(a) Owl Boxes

Photos of the owl boxes were presented on screen, whilst it was also noted that kestrels are also able to nest in this type of box. He further noted that the Board has been approached by the BBC regarding the possibility of covert filming of the barn owls and kestrels nesting at Holland Fen.

(b) Early Flailing Works

Opinions and questions were invited.

(c) Water Vole Monitoring Surveys

Opinions and questions were invited. This will be further introduced at agenda item 11.

(d) Control of Mink

Opinions and questions were invited. This will be further introduced at agenda item 10.

(e) Environmental surveys of larger hedge rows in our bushing programme

Opinions and questions were invited.

(f) South Forty Foot Drain Environmental Works associated with the de-silting works

The Chief Executive explained that works have been completed up to the A52 and the order for the recommencement of de-bushing works for the following 3km north of the A52 has been received. This work should commence approximately October 2019.

(g) RSPB Water Abstraction for Frampton Marsh

Opinions and questions were invited.

(h) Big Boston Clean Up

The Chief Executive noted that the workforce is involved with this.

(i) Operation Fly Swat

It was noted that the Board is a partner within the Operation Fly Swat Team.

The Chief Executive further noted that the Lincolnshire Police Crime Commissioner has acknowledged this and has suggested that law could state that fly tipping offenders should receive penalty points on the associated driving licence.

(j) Invasive Species

The Chief Executive re-introduced the topic of 'yellow flower' and displayed photos of it taken only the day prior to the meeting, showing that there is no correlation as to where it grows.

He explained that Mr J Atkinson has asked for the following to be introduced, Mr J Atkinson has been doing his own trials around the eradication of yellow flower for the past three years. He has flailed annually during May whilst it is in flower and it has completely eradicated the problem whilst also allowing the natural vegetation to grow.

The Chief Executive noted that the growth of natural vegetation on the banks is of importance to the Board because once the yellow flower has died off, it leaves no other vegetation, reducing the banks stability and increasing the chance of bank slips.

Mr J Atkinson, through the Chief Executive, also wanted to report that he has trialled some more areas where he has only cut once during the previous May, which has removed 95% of the yellow flower.

The Operations Manager explained that he has been in contact with the Environment Agency and has received a reluctant response for the Board to do any work towards the control of the flower on their South Forty Foot Banks. He noted that once an agreement is in place, the South Forty Foot can be used as a trial area, however, it will not be in place in time for trials this year.

Three control sites have already been identified, one of those being Dunsby Fen. The control is looking to be completed next week. The control will involve one cut annually in May for three years and monitoring what benefits or affects this has. Dependent on the results of the trial areas will depend on the method taken going forward.

Mr P Robinson noted that it seems to have been successful near the cricket ground on the North Forty Foot. He felt that the emphasis needs to be around cutting at the correct time of year before it seeds.

The Chairman acknowledged that previously he had dismissed this problem as being an issue in areas where rape was being grown. However, he now recognises that it is a catchment wide problem that needs addressing.

Mr R Leggott questioned if a corresponding survey of damage to wildlife due to the cut had been completed? It was noted that it is not a natural nesting site for birds anyway, with Mr I Nixon clarifying that the earlier the cut is completed the better. It was clarified that a walkover survey by the machine operator will be completed before any flailing is completed.

Mr K Casswell raised his concern that if the trials are successful, then the Board will have many km of bank to cut at that time of year, questioning if that will be the only cut the bank will have? It was discussed that the drains would be prioritised.

Mr I Nixon questioned whether any other drainage boards in the area were addressing the issue of yellow flower? The Operations Manager made reference to a report completed by Lindsey Marsh in 2016 following an eight-year trial. Mechanical cutting and spraying were investigated, with variable results and no additional work being carried out.

(k) Bat Boxes and Surveys

Opinions and questions were invited.

(l) Environmental Scheme - Eel Passability at Boards 'Category A' Pumping Stations

Opinions and questions were invited.

(m) Environmental Scheme - Bird Survey

Opinions and questions were invited. This will be further introduced at agenda item 12.

(n) Grass Snake Nesting Sites

Photos of grass snake nesting boxes, erected in winter 2018 were displayed on screen. Reference was made to the photo on the front cover of the agenda, it being noted that that snake was just outside the catchment.

(o) Wild Flower Meadow

The Chief Executive made reference to the piece of land owned by the Board alongside the North Forty Foot at Cooks Lock, which is a wildflower meadow during the summer, displaying photos on screen.

Ms T Smalley suggested the consideration of having it surveyed to see if it meets local wildlife site status.

(p) Bug Hotel

Photos of the two bug hotels constructed at the site of the office were displayed on screen.

(q) Badger Setts

The Chief Executive noted that the workforce continually obtains the relevant licenses within Natural England. He further noted a situation last year in which the police attended a site where the Board were working alongside badger setts and everything was in accordance with how it should be. The Board use straw filled bags pushed down the sett holes, carry out the operational work, and then remove the bags.

Ms T Smalley noted that the Environment Agency are trialling piling around the setts.

(r) Pollution Incidents

The Chief Executive displayed photos on screen of an incident whereby a lorry, full of chemicals, had run off the road into a dyke within the Board's catchment. The pollution was reported to the Environment Agency and the Board's machinery and personnel assisted at the site.

(s) Eel Passage Research

Opinions and questions were invited.

(t) Greater Lincolnshire Nature Partnership (GLNP)

This will be further introduced at agenda item 10.

Proposed Works and Environmental Involvement in 2019/20

(u) Bourne North Fen (Tongue End) Ponds

It was noted that there are no costs associated with this for this year.

(v) Water Vole Surveys

Opinions and questions were invited. This will be further introduced at agenda item 11.

(w) Winter Bushing and Cleansing

There is a small budget required for this for the likes of damming and the removal of fish.

(x) Summer Cutting and Vegetation Clearance

It was noted that where birds' nests are found, five metres either side of the nest will be left un-cut to reduce disturbance.

(y) Owl Boxes

Opinions and questions were invited.

(z) Recording by Machine Drivers

Opinions and questions were invited.

(aa) High Profile Watercourse Assets

Opinions and questions were invited.

(bb) Water Levels

The main river water levels are not controlled by the Board.

(cc) Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS)

This is a small budget for the implementation of identification training for employees.

(dd) Fens for the Future / South Lincolnshire Fenlands Partnership

Ms T Smalley explained that Fens for the Future covers the whole natural area of the fens which is a knowledge sharing partnership between those wanting to create natural habitat, compared to the South Lincolnshire Fenlands Partnership which focuses on a smaller area around Willow Tree Fen and Baston Fen to secure corridors for wildlife, working with the minerals industry and local community projects.

(ee) Operation Fly Swat Partner

It was noted that the cost of this has increased, however, it would cost the Board far more in fly tipping removal if we were not a partner.

It was established that this is with Boston Borough Council. Mr V Barker questioned the area that is covered by this scheme, he will make enquiries to find out.

(ff) Big Boston Clean up

Opinions and questions were invited.

(gg) Sand Martin Nesting Site

This work unfortunately did not get completed last year, so it is proposed to complete this year. Photos of example sand martin nesting sites were displayed on screen.

(hh) Grass Snake Nesting Sites

This budget is for two more grass snake nesting sites, made up from natural materials.

(ii) Wildflower Meadow

This budget is for the maintenance of the wildflower meadow.

(jj) Water Framework Directive (WFD)

It is of great importance to keep in line with WFD constraints and compliance.

(kk) The Wash and North Norfolk Marine Partnership (WNNMP)

The project manager will be leaving, but the programme will continue. The Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust also co-fund this.

(ll) Gulf Wedged Clam (Rangia)

The area around Swineshead Bridge is the only identified place in the UK that has this particular clam. The Board's concern is that if the pumps weren't running, then the clams could get inside the pump valves and cease them up.

(mm) Operation Galileo

Involvement with this will continue.

(nn) Greater Lincolnshire Nature Partnership (GLNP)

This will be further introduced at agenda item 10. The Lincolnshire Wildlife Fund also fund this.

(oo) Pollinators

Two of the Board's workforce attended training on pollinator's this year.

(pp) Changes to Eel Passage Regs Process (ChERP)

With having 34 pumping stations, this has quite a large impact on the Board.

(qq) Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP)

This is due for review this year, and Helen Scarborough will be employed to help with this.

The committee AGREED the budgetary figures included within the agenda report.

1440 TO RECEIVE A REPORT ON BARN OWL NESTING BOXES FOR 2018/19 - Agenda Item 7

The Chairman introduced this agenda item, noting that he has spoken to Mr A Ball prior to the meeting in order to get an up to date review. He explained that Lincolnshire has not had a very good year regarding the breeding of barn owls due to the lack of voles. It was clarified that barn owls eat short tail voles rather than water voles.

The Chairman also noted that he has expressed his concern for the number of jack-daws resident in the barn owl boxes, however, Mr A Ball explained to him that a healthy barn owl would remove them.

He further added that Mr A Ball wanted to pass on his thanks for the work the Board do for the barn owls.

1441 TO RECEIVE A REPORT ON THE 2018 BUTTERFLY RECORDS FROM WINDMILL LODGE BUTTERFLY CONSERVATION AND WILDLIFE AREA, AMBER HILL - Agenda Item 8

Opinions and questions were invited.

The Chairman noted that there is another butterfly conservation area within the catchment that he may approach for another report.

1442 TO RECEIVE A VERBAL PRESENTATION BY THE LINCOLNSHIRE WILDLIFE TRUST (LWT) - Agenda Item 9

Ms T Smalley, head of conservation at Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust (LWT) gave an informative presentation, explaining that the trust hosts the partnership and hold the funds. Through these partnerships, the trust has built up a relationship with Black Sluice IDB and the trust is also involved in the ADA Environment Committee.

The trust is also one of the key partners in the South Lincolnshire Water Partnership. As part of the partnership, it is hoped to influence Water Resource East (WRE), focusing on the water resource challenges in the east of England - by 2030, this area will not have enough water storage to meet public demand. It is therefore being investigated if South Lincolnshire can be one of the areas that delivers towards water storage.

Ms T Smalley referred to the 25-year environment plan issued by the government which, for the first time, has recognised that society is having a negative impact on the environment to the extent that it no longer refers to 'conserving and protecting' the environment, but instead refers to 'recovering' nature. She added that she feels it is not industries to blame, but it is society that has to make the choice to help the environment.

She commended drainage boards for all they are now doing to help the environment, with the Chief Executive noting that he feels they are moving in the right direction.

Mr R Leggott raised the point that he has served on the Board for many years and cannot remember there always being an environment committee or budget, demonstrating how approaches have changed over time.

1443 TO RECEIVE A VERBAL PRESENTATION BY THE GREATER LINCOLNSHIRE NATURE PARTNERSHIP (GLNP) - Agenda Item 10

Ms S Baker, Senior Policy Officer for the GLNP, explained that it is a partnership of 49 organisations who are interested in achieving more for nature. She gave an informative presentation based on three main factors; the pollinator project, local wildlife sites and water vole conservations.

Pollinator Project

A few years ago, GLNP received some funding from DEFRA to support wild pollinators on farmland. Over the last few years, the GLNP have been working with farms around this. This is now looking to be expanded further to other farms, with Ms S Baker noting that if any of the committee knows of anybody that would be interested in the catchment to let her know. It was clarified that there is no desired geographical location, with factors such as game cover enhancement and enhancement of existing features. The Chief Executive noted the Board's area in Bourne which is predominately reed and wet woodland could be of interest.

Local Wildlife Sites

There is already a strong established network in the catchment, however there are a lot of opportunities within the catchment. The Chief Executive noted that he was surprised at how many riparian and board-maintained watercourses were designated, that he was unaware of. Ms T Smalley added that a prioritised list of drains to be surveyed for local wildlife status will be produced.

Water Vole Conservations

Over the last couple of years, some of the IDBs had reported that they were recording fewer water voles and concerned about the number of mink. It is felt that a national strategy needs to be formed for the control of mink, however, Lincolnshire have been working on mink control for around 15 years.

Newer technology has been introduced to the monitoring of these species such as remote monitoring of traps, which potentially makes it more workable for individuals. The Operations Manager noted that this was a restriction that the Board encountered, regarding the cost and time involved in the workforce checking traps daily. Mr P Robinson noted that physical monitoring of mink traps can indeed disturb the animals and so remote monitoring may overcome this.

Ms S Baker added that if Lincolnshire trial this remote technology and strategically monitor these species then more accurate data and correlations can be identified. The areas for these pilot studies have yet to be identified, if anybody would like to suggest a particular area.

The Chief Executive noted an area in the northern part of the catchment where mink have been observed.

The Chairman questioned if the dry summer has effected the population of water voles? He noted a riparian drain on his farm, which always has water voles in it, it was dry for an extended period last year and there were no water voles seen. Mr I Nixon noted that water voles don't actually need to be within water, they will nest above ground. It was also clarified that the presence of otters tends to drive mink away.

1444 TO RECEIVE A VERBAL PRESENTATION BY INSPIRED ECOLOGY - Agenda Item 11

Mr I Nixon explained that the business 'Scarborough Nixon Associates' is no longer as Mr I Nixon's previous business partner, Ms H Scarborough, is no longer a part of it, hence the change to Inspired Ecology which consists of Mr I Nixon and Mr A Scurrah-Price.

Mr A Scurrah-Price gave an informative presentation on the general ecology, characteristics and statistical evidence of water voles. He also noted that just because trends show that numbers of water voles have decreased, that may not necessarily be the case, in light of false absences for instance. There are various indicators to suggest that there are water voles in the area. Mr A Scurrah-Price next explained to the committee the general ecology, characteristics and statistical evidence around otters. The Chief Executive noted that the Board have constructed an otter holt. He further referred to two otters that have recently been knocked down on the road at Holland Fen.

Mr V Barker left the meeting.

Mr I Nixon continued that he proposes completing some water vole surveys on the South Forty Foot Drain, concentrating on either side of the de-silting works. This will also give an idea of what effect the de-silting work is having on the water voles. Further work at Holland Fen was also proposed in addition to the continuation of water vole monitoring at Great Hale. Bat boxes could also be checked alongside the work.

The Chairman noted that Inspired Ecology are welcome to take a look at the watercourse he referred to earlier in reference to water voles.

1445 TO RECEIVE THE TONGUE END & WYBERTON MARSH 2019 BIRD SURVEY REPORTS - Agenda Item 12

Mr I Nixon gave a report on the bird surveys carried out at Tongue End and Wyberton Marsh.

Tongue End

He reported that nesting marsh harriers were found and that they raised at least one chick, two chicks is the 'normal' number of chicks for these birds. There were also other good sightings including a cuckoo and common terns. The common terns were feeding regularly, they will be nesting somewhere else, but not sure where. It was also clarified that they would nest on shingle rafts.

Wyberton Marsh

Mr I Nixon noted that Wyberton Marsh is a well varied habitat, however, there was nothing too startling found at the site.

The Chairman referred to the written report within the agenda, noting the frequent reference to agricultural practices on the decline in nesting birds, further noting that there is no reference to other influencing factors such as predators.

It was noted that Frampton Marsh is not that far from the site, with birds possibly being there that would previously have been found at Frampton Marsh.

Reference was made to a nesting kestrel, with Mr I Nixon explaining that if the surveyor doesn't physically see the kestrel then he can't say that there is one there.

The Chairman thanked Inspired Ecology for the work they carry out for the Board.

1446 TO RECEIVE AN UPDATE ON THE POSSIBLE INTRODUCTION OF CONSERVATION COVENANTS IN THE FORTHCOMING ENVIRONMENTAL BILL - Agenda Item 13

The Chief Executive presented this agenda item, explaining there will likely be somebody from Lincolnshire ADA Environment Committee attending.

1447 TO RECEIVE THE MINUTES FROM THE ADA LINCOLNSHIRE BRANCH ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE: - Agenda Item 14

The Chief Executive noted that one of the Board's appointed members, Cllr P Skinner, has been elected the Lincolnshire ADA Environment Committee Chairman. He further noted whether he should therefore be involved in this committee? Further noting that a vacant position has become available due to the previous councillor not re-standing for election.

1448 ANY OTHER BUSINESS - Agenda Item 15

(a) BOSTON BELLE - 30 MAY 2019 - ANTONS GOWT PLANT COLLECTION

Ms T Smalley invited the committee on the Boston Belle on the 30th May 2019, free of charge. The trip is going upstream of Boston to carry out a plant collection at Antons Gowt as part of the lottery funded project with the Natural History museum. Please email Ms T Smalley should anybody wish to attend.

The Chairman thanked the guests for their attendance and contributions at the meeting.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 16:24.