

BLACK SLUICE INTERNAL DRAINAGE BOARD

DRAFT - M I N U T E S

of the proceedings of a Meeting of the
Environment Committee

held at the Offices of the Board on Wednesday 14th May 2014 at 2pm

Members

Chairman - * Mr J R Wray

Mr R Leggott	* Mr R Welberry
Mr M J Scott	* Mr P Robinson
* Cllr D R Dickinson	* Mr P Holmes
* Mr J F Atkinson	* Mr V A Barker
* Mr K C Casswell	Mr C A Fretwell

(* Member Present)

In attendance: Mr I Warsap (Chief Executive)
Mr P Nicholson (Operations Manager)
Louisa Hoyes (Environmental Intern Witham 3rd IDB)
Alan Ball (Wildlife Conservation Partnership)
Helen Scarborough (Scarborough Nixon Assoc)
Ian Nixon (Scarborough Nixon Assoc)
Claire Schofield (Scarborough Nixon Assoc)
Amy Bouic (Greater Lincolnshire Nature Partnership)
Leslie Hebdon (Risegate Environmentalist)

The Chairman introduced and welcomed the representatives above and thanked them for their attendance.

534 APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Mr M J Scott, Mr R Leggott and Mr C Fretwell.

535 MINUTES OF LAST ENVIRONMENT MEETING

The Minutes of the last Meeting of the Environment Committee held on 15th May 2013, copies of which had been circulated, were considered and it was agreed that the Minutes should be signed as a true record.

536 MATTERS ARISING

(a) Fish Refuge Shelters - Minute No 379(b)

The Chief Executive responded to a question regarding the number of fish kills since the introduction of a phased start of the pumps at Black Hole Drove

536 (a) Cont.....

Pumping Station. The pumps are generally run at night and no fish kills have been observed or reported.

Mr Welberry informed the Committee that more than 336,000 eels had died in an incident at the hydro electric power station in Ballyshannon over the Easter weekend it was understood that no one was checking the two traps at Cathleen's Fall due to staff holidays and over the weekend a major run of eels up the River Erne resulted in the traps becoming full and the eels having nowhere to go and were starved of oxygen.

537 REPORT ON ENVIRONMENTAL WORKS COMPLETED 2013/14 - Agenda Item 4

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

(a) Owl Boxes

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

(b) Tom Tom Data Recording of Environmental Sightings

The Chief Executive presented a slide of the data inputting received from the Tom Toms devices in all eight of the Boards machines.

Amy Bouic thanked the Board for the data being received by Lincolnshire Environmental Records Centre (LERC). A map detailing the water vole cluster in our area was circulated and a link will be supplied for the website.

(c) Risegate Eau Bank Works

The Chief Executive presented a slide picturing the hydro seed sprayed onto the banks. The Chairman reported that he had gone to the bank this morning and that the seed had germinated. The Committee discussed how this bank was to be managed, the Operations Manager stated that guidelines had been followed in preparing the area and that it should be self managed.

The arisings cut in late summer will become a seed gathering and will be put on the other bank.

With reference to the Derwent Cottage Scheme the Chief Executive stated that to complete the works some fencing and hedging is to be put back and with any budget left a hydro mixture will be put on the banks near Derwent Cottage.

(d) North Forty Foot Fishing Platforms

The Chief Executive presented a slide showing the disabled ramps to the fishing platforms. Mr Robinson enquired about the mass of rape on the opposite side bank, the Chief Executive stated that the Energreen will be cutting this down.

(e) Kingfisher Nesting Sites

The Chief Executive presented a slide of the completed site at Chain Bridge pumping station now that it has reeded up. Alan Ball commented that there have been reports of an increase in numbers of Kingfishers due to the mild winter.

(f) Grass Snake Breeding Sites

The Chief Executive presented a slide showing a large grass snake in the South Forty Foot Drain. The weed dump sites are to remain undisturbed.

(g) Boston Clean Up

The Chief Executive presented a slide of the Boards' Workmen cleaning out a dyke during the Boston Clean Up and this was featured in the Boston Daily on the 24th April 2014.

(h) Invasive Species

The Chief Executive informed the Committee that GNLP have produced detailed documents identifying a range of invasive species. The Workmen have been given laminated A5 copies, he offered copies for the members to take away.

(i) Bombus Ruderatus Bee

The Chief Executive presented a slide picturing the development of a site near Allen's Bridge. He then introduced Leslie Hebdon to the Committee who has helped to encourage the bees by planting several species of flower to promote and protect the bee's habitat.

The Board has completed a scheme there to open the area up which has released the water system. The *Bombus ruderatus* bee which has been identified on site is a rare bee to Lincolnshire.

(j) North Forty Foot Drain

The Chief Executive presented a slide picturing the temporary works dam erected on the North Forty Foot Drain. Large quantities of eels and fish were carefully removed prior to the water levels being reduced in order to aid the desilting works.

538 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROPOSED ENVIRONMENTAL SURVEY AND DRAIN WORKS TO BE CARRIED OUT 2014/15

(a) Water Vole Surveys

The Chief Executive proposed that the water vole surveys continue to be carried out by Scarborough Nixon prior to desilting and following the works where water voles had been identified. The Committee AGREED.

(b) Bats

The Chief Executive explained that during the Board's works it was realised that we had roosting bats noticeably around pumping stations, believed to be roosting in the gravity/suction bays. Helen Scarborough added that bats are legally protected and once surveyed you can plan ahead to do works at times of the year according to the species. She concluded there is a possibility that the bats are Daubenton's.

The Committee AGREED to recommend to the Board that a survey 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.

(d) Owl Boxes

The Chief Executive requested approval for three pole mounted barn owl boxes. The Committee discussed whether a programme for repair and replacement was needed.

Alan Ball responded that he and Bob Sheppard who check the boxes do ongoing maintenance and repair therefore there is no need to replace any. The Committee AGREED to recommend to the Board a contribution to erect three pole mounted owl boxes.

(e) Eel and Fish Passes

The Chief Executive had gone into great detail in the Agenda papers outlining the agreement and procurement of surveys for the ten pumping stations within the Black Sluice IDB on the High Priority list.

(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) The 2014 Lincolnshire Show Schools Challenge

The Chief Executive stated that during the Tour of Italy an idea was to offer a Schools Challenge which would be themed towards local education to create models and investigations in the format of a topical challenge supported by ADA. Students were invited to look into water level management. The Black Sluice has 43 schools in and around our district, the Chief Executive wrote to these schools offering assistance but unfortunately we did not get a single response.

Mr K Casswell responded that the school schedule is set out a year in advance and the approach should be made through the Head of Geography at Secondary Schools and Chairman of Governors at Primary Schools. The Committee felt this format should be encouraged and taken into next year.

(h) Fens Waterway Link

The Chief Executive stated that information relating to the sale of Horseshoe House, Bourne Road, Guthrum Gowt gave an indication to the preferred route.

(i) Fens for the Future

The Chief Executive stated that an introduction to this initiative is detailed in the agenda papers.

(j) Water Framework Directive

The Chief Executive and Operations Manager have attended a meeting with the EA Officers and outlined a number of questions to be looked into.

(k) Badgers

The Chief Executive stated that the Board only has licences to work adjacent to Badgers. The Committee discussed the damage badgers have on the ecology with them having no predator they are digging out bees, and grubs. Killing pheasants and hedgehogs, a badger will kill anything. Alan Ball added that any ground nesting bird will be falling prey to badgers. There are no surveys of numbers of badgers and nothing to control them.

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

The Chief Executive stated that we are one of the authorities which have a statutory duty under the UK Habitats Regulations to report on progress against these management actions on an annual basis.

It was RESOLVED that the Report on Environmental Works should be received and adopted.

539 BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN (BAP) - Agenda Item 5

The Chief Executive stated that due to the size of the document the BAP would be presented on screen and introduced Clare Schofield who had worked on production of this document to go through the changes.

Clare Schofield from Scarborough Nixon then highlighted the updates, some tables were made easier to read, with realistic and achievable targets.

Alan Ball commented that some of the birds were not Lincolnshire birds. The Chief Executive will email Alan to confirm and amend the section containing marsh warbler and cirl bunting.

The Committee AGREED to recommend approval by the Board at the next meeting.

540 REVIEW OF THE BOURNE NORTH FEN BORROW PITS - Agenda Item 6

The Chief Executive stated to the Committee that the Board owns three environmental sites "borrow pit sites" which have been identified as significant sites with high environmental potential. Scarborough Nixon were approached to survey these sites with the view to presenting a 5 to 10 year management plan.

Clare Schofield presented a powerpoint management plan:

Borrow Pit 1 at Wherry's Farm, Twenty

This triangular Pit measuring approximately 1.37 hectares, is close to the River Glen and a railway line that was dismantled in the 1950s. A drainage ditch runs parallel with the eastern boundary of the site.

The site is surrounded, on its other two sides, by arable land. The Pit can be divided into two distinct parts, excavated into two levels.

One level is open in character but has been planted with hazel and alder at some point in its recent history. Common reed is abundant in this area, supported by sedge and rush species associated with a wetland habitat, and suggests at least seasonal retention of water. The more enclosed area could be described as wet woodland and comprises mostly of a mixed age stand, including standing and lying dead wood, of species of willow.

Management objectives for the site are:

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

Borrow Pit 2 at Bourne North Fen, Twenty

The site comprises two standing water bodies, a large lake and a smaller pit to the north separated by a grassy tree lined bund. There are wide fringes of common reed and the banks are tree lined with a variety of species. The site supports fish and abundant waterfowl, it comprises of a mosaic of wetland, woodland and grassland habitats.

Management objectives for the site are:

- Manage the wet woodland habitat appropriately
- Maintain and enhance the reedbed 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

This rectangular Pit, measuring approximately 3.26 hectares, is close to Bourne Eau. A drainage ditch runs parallel with the southern boundary of the site. The site is surrounded, on its other three sides, by arable land.

The Pit can be divided almost equally into two distinct parts, plantation woodland and willow carr.

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 Committee discussed that any environment budget surplus could be used, the Chief Executive was requested to assess costings for some of the works required.

541 HECKINGTON FEN WIND PARK GRID CONNECTION - Agenda Item 7

The Chief Executive stated that the Secretary of State, Planning Inspectorate has written to the Board requesting information in an environmental statement relating to the project. The deadline for receipt of our report is 29th May 2014.

The Chief Executive proposed a request to use experts to help the Officers produce a statement to the government regarding the sites at Heckington and Bicker for sub stations and the proposed two routes. The Committee AGREED to recommend that funding be provided for Scarborough Nixon to assist.

542 REPORTS – Agenda Item 8

(a) Amy Bouic - Greater Lincolnshire Nature Partnership (GLNP)

This is the second full reporting year and the latest Lincolnshire BAP 2013/14 is now complete. The Annual Review will be published shortly and copies will be sent to the Black Sluice IDB. The Black Sluice has contributed data from the Tom Tom to LERC which has enabled a BAP map with location, species data which has been requested by other organisations, many thanks to Black Sluice for submitting your records.

The GLNP are issuing a Position on Agriculture statement once endorsed these statements will give everyone in the Partnership a clear idea of what we stand for and why.

Amy.bouic@glnp.org.uk www.glnp.org.uk

(b) Louisa Hoyes - Lincs ADA Environment Committee Review

The draft ADA Lincs Environment Committee minutes were enclosed in the agenda for information. Louisa Hoyes highlighted a few points to the Committee;

- (i) Anglian eel and fish prioritisation – All pumping stations designated category A or B must have a solution in place for eel screening by 31st December 2014, or they will be in breach of EU Law.

(c) Alan Ball - Wildlife Conservation Partnership

Only three pairs of Barn Owls bred in the Black Sluice Board's boxes in 2013 raising broods of just 3, 1 and 2. It was also a very poor year for Kestrels but one pair raised a brood of 6, the largest successful brood recorded in 2013.

Barn Owl experts across the UK have regarded 2013 as the worst breeding year in living memory, caused mainly by high mortality of adults in the exceptionally cold March at the end of a very severe winter and a resultant lack of mice/voles as prey. However Lincolnshire seems to have fared much better than other areas in the UK, thanks to high levels of prey and a later breeding season followed by a mild 2013/14 winter. The prospects for 2014 are looking very good indeed. If pairs double brood in 2014 it is likely to be the best year on record in Lincolnshire.

Thanks to the efforts of landowners, the EA and all of the Drainage Boards in Lincolnshire (remembering that Black Sluice was the first Drainage Board in 1987 to erect owl boxes), Lincolnshire now has more Barn Owls than any other county in the UK. It is important to maintain this stronghold as Barn Owls reared in Lincolnshire can move into neighbouring areas and help maintain the British population, especially following poor years such as 2013.

542 (c) Cont.....

Three new pole boxes were installed in early 2014 bring a total of 33 boxes. The boxes have started to be checked for 2014 so far the new box at Kirton Meeres on land owned by [REDACTED] has been taken up by Barn Owls and already have five owlets. Whilst inspecting locations for new sites Little Owls were sighted so a little owl box was installed in a nearby building. All boxes will be checked by the end of June 2014 and we are expecting much better results.

Bob Sheppard and Alan Ball on behalf of the Wildlife Conservation Partnership would like to thank the Black Sluice Board for their unwavering support and enthusiasm for maintaining the Barn Owl nest box scheme.

(d) Helen Scarborough - Scarborough Nixon Associates

Helen felt that all matters had been discussed during the meeting; she stated that if any members had any questions or queries then please let her know.

543 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

(a) Vice Chairman

The Chairman recommended to the Members of the Committee to nominate Paul Homes as Vice Chairman of this Committee. Seconded by Cllr D Dickinson and all AGREED.

(b) Environmental Committee Meetings

A question was raised regarding the number of meetings each year. The Chief Executive stated that if there were pressing issues which needed to be reviewed then an additional meeting would be called.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 5pm.