

BLACK SLUICE INTERNAL DRAINAGE BOARD

MINUTES

of the proceedings of a meeting of the Environment Committee

held at the offices of the Board on
7th March 2023 at 2pm

Members

Chairperson - * Mr P Holmes

* Mr W Ash	* Mr J Atkinson
* Mr V Barker	* Mr K C Casswell
Mr M Rollinson	* Mr P Robinson
* Mr R Welberry	Mr R Needham
* Cllr P Skinner	

* Member Present

In attendance: Mr I Warsap (Chief Executive)
Mr P Nicholson (Operations Manager)
Ms T Smalley (Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust)
Mr S Harrison (Works Manager)
Mr D Withnall (Finance Manager)

2100 Recording the meeting - Agenda Item 1

Board Members were informed that the meeting would be recorded.

2101 Apologies for absence - Agenda Item 2

Apologies were received from Mr R Needham and Mr M Rollinson.

The Chairperson welcomed and introduced Tammy Smalley (guest from Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust).

2102 Declarations of interest - Agenda Item 3

There were no declarations of interest.

2103 To review the Environment Committee Terms of Reference - Agenda Item 4

The Committee RESOLVED to recommend that the Environment Committee Terms of Reference be approved at the next Board meeting.

2104 Minutes of the last meeting - Agenda Item 5

The Minutes of the last meeting of the Environment Committee held on the 1st March 2022, copies of which had been circulated, were considered. It was AGREED that they should be signed as a true record.

2105 Matters arising - Agenda Item 6

There were no matters arising.

2106 To review the Biodiversity Action Plan (Policy No. 11) - Agenda Item 7

The Chairperson introduced the Biodiversity Action Plan, noting that it is a dynamic document and there are no proposed changes.

The Chief Executive added that this isn't just a document produced because the Board are obliged to do so, it includes aims and objectives that the Board strive to achieve.

Mr R Welberry referenced Mackay's Pit, Swineshead, and whether the Board would be willing to help a community pond as part of the Biodiversity Action Plan, noting the costs associated with the algae (£780), currently paid by the Parish Council. The Chairperson responded that the Board contributed when it was dredged out a few years ago and also installed fishing platforms for a reasonable price. Mr R Welberry acknowledged this. Both the Chairperson and Chief Executive added that there has got to be a balance, and where would the line be drawn if the Board started to help such community assets.

Mr R Welberry further noted another potential project in Swineshead (Sand Holes, Coles Lane), noting that they would like to keep more water in it during the summer for environmental purposes. There is a drain that runs along the rear of the site, with Mr R Welberry wondering whether it would be possible to sluice it in dry times in order to hold more water there, so that it floods back in, rather than drain away. The Operations Manager suggested that perhaps the committee may consider that the Board's contribution could be to provide advice.

The Chairperson referred back to the Biodiversity Action Plan, noting that there has been an increase in the number of members of public quoting and referring to the plan when contacting the Board. There are a lot more people that are aware of their surroundings.

The Committee RESOLVED to recommend that the Biodiversity Action Plan (Policy No. 11) be approved at the next Board meeting.

2107 To receive a report on environmental work completed in 2022/23 and recommendations for proposed works for 2023/24 - Agenda Item 8

The Works Manager presented this agenda item, highlighting particular points as follows.

Completed Works 2022/23

Owl Boxes

There have been three new boxes erected at Dunsby, Haconby and Damford. It was noted that Jackdaws were present in thirteen (60%) of the twenty-two boxes checked in 2022, questioning if Ms T Smalley was aware of any ways to reduce this?

Mr R Welberry noted that they are not a protected species and could therefore be shot under a gun licence.

It was also confirmed that a barn owl wouldn't 'see off' a Jackdaw, with the Chairperson adding that he has known of an instance where a Jackdaw built a nest on top of a sitting Barn Owl that consequently died.

Ms T Smalley wondered whether there is anything connected to the entrance that may help but will ask the question.

Mr V Barker added he wondered whether it could be connected to how the bird enters the box, i.e., Barn Owls from underneath and Jackdaws straight in.

The Chief Executive noted the boxes are purchased from the Wildlife Conservation Partnership and so it would be assumed they would know what is best for the Barn Owls.

Mr V Barker added that he has seen an increase in the number of Barn Owls in his area.

Early Flailing Works

This early flailing work continues along with the early health and safety bank cuts on the main river highland carriers for the Environment Agency through the Public Sector Co-operation Agreement (PSCA).

Control of Mink

The Board has caught fifteen Mink in the four traps set, with a big population on the North Forty Foot Drain between Boston and Langrick Road. Five of the Mink have gone for DNA testing; however, no DNA results are back yet. Although it has been identified that there were two adult males, one adult female and two juvenile females. It is believed that there is a high population of mink in the Board's catchment, with specific hotspots. Also noting the high population of water vole at risk.

It was confirmed that the Board currently operates four of the Remoti traps, there being no limit to the number of traps that can be used with the app. There is also two years free monitoring with the Remoti. Officers at the Greater Lincolnshire Nature Partnership (GLNP) monitor all of the IDBs traps and put together a map of the concentrations of mink.

It was noted that Tony Martin (Waterlife Recovery East Project) has four hundred traps. Ms T Smalley added that there are now areas where they have no mink, therefore indicating the success of the project. Ms T Smalley further added that the first trial of this within Lincolnshire was conducted on the Becks that flow off the Wolds through the coastal grazing marshes, which was funded by Viking Link as part of their planning condition as part of water vole mitigation. This is coming up to the end of three years of trapping and a report is currently being written up, which Ms T Smalley will share. This trial has suggested that wherever there are large scale planning developments, where water vole mitigation is required, mink control should be included in this planning condition, alongside ensuring that the water vole habitat is provided. Ms T Smalley further added that funding has been achieved from Keadby 3 Power Station (North Lincolnshire) from the developers as part of the planning conditions.

It was further confirmed that in the areas where the mink has been eradicated, an increase in the water vole population has been seen.

Mr R Welberry noted that in order to be successful, the other IDBs also need to have mink traps. It was confirmed that the neighbouring IDBs are all trapping and catching mink also. The Works Manager also added that there is a live report of all the mink caught on the Waterlife Recovery East Project website.

The Works Manager also added that the Board require help from landowners and public to identify where they are, from sightings or roadkill. The Board are looking to develop a system on the Board's website whereby the public can report mink sightings.

Tony Martin (Waterlife Recovery East Project) has recommended that eight traps would be sufficient for the Board.

Environmental Surveys of Larger Hedge Rows in our Bushing Programme

The Board have appointed a new ecology consultant, Archer Ecology Ltd, as Inspired Ecology Ltd has ceased trading. Archer Ecology is an ex-employee of Inspired Ecology.

Big Boston Clean Up

The 2022 clean up was cancelled due to Covid and there has been no correspondence about a 2023 clean up yet.

Cllr P Skinner noted that he will find out, noting that it would be a shame for it not to go ahead, but that it is election year and so it may not.

Operation Fly Swat

The Works Manager noted that he has been trying to arrange a meeting with the head of this operation, noting that usually by now the Board are aware of their financial contribution for the following year, but have not been notified of it this year.

Cllr P Skinner noted that the Council finances have only just gone through, adding that it has been tough this year, noting that they are still waiting for some form of help from the Secretary of State regarding drainage rates, reminding the committee the Council are capped at a 3% increase and 52% of what is retained by the council is the drainage rate. Cllr P Skinner noted that if the Works Manager sends him an email, he will chase the matter up.

The Works Manager added that there have been some issues with Fly Swat, in that some of the collections in smaller "drains" aren't being collected by the Fly Swat team, there being some confusion over the shared responsibility of the Board and the Fly Swat Team.

Cllr P Skinner noted that there ought to be a meeting to discuss this, again, noting that he can chase this up.

The Chairperson noted that the council have always collected any fly tipping encountered on his farm promptly.

Mr V Barker questioned if the Operation Fly Swat covers just the Black Sluice area? It was confirmed that it is just Boston Borough Council area.

The Works Manager noted that there are particular locations where it frequently occurs. Cllr P Skinner also noted that there is a team of enforcement officers that have cameras and can be deployed.

Invasive Species

Wild Yellow Flowering Brassica Rapa – continuous flailing trials over a three-year period have been completed, the trials indicating that May is the optimal time for cutting the yellow flower prior to seeding, however, the Board can only complete this flailing where finances allow.

The Chairperson thanked Mr J Atkinson for his diligence and input on this matter. Also, encouraging landowners to do their own flailing if they so wished.

Mr P Robinson noted that it has been successful on the North Forty Foot Drain and that the grass is now established.

Bat Boxes and Surveys

There are no signs of occupancy in any of the Board's bat boxes. The Chief Executive noted the disappointment that there is no occupancy. The Chairperson noted that bats are not easily accepting of them, it could take 3-4 years for them to use them, if ever. It was noted that there are bats present, they just aren't using the boxes.

Environmental Schemes

Eel Passability at the Boards 'Category A' Pumping Stations - The Board has eleven pumping stations categorised as this. The Board currently receives Eel Exemption Notices, which have been extended until November 2024. The Chief Executive also noted the large sums of money required to implement Eel passage mitigation at these pumping stations; ranging from £300,000 (Donington Wykes Pumping Station) to £3.4million (Black Hole Drove Pumping Station).

Mr K Casswell noted that he doesn't understand why they don't disregard the regulations until funding is made available to complete the works.

The Chairperson added that, with appropriate conditions, an eel will travel across land anyway.

Grass Snake Nesting Sites

The nesting / hibernation sites have been redressed, there is a healthy population at Black Hole.

Wildflower Meadow

The Wildflower Meadow at Cooks Lock Pumping Station is being maintained, it being noted that there are a few bald areas and so more seed may be required. Ms T Smalley noted that she could arrange a Land Advisor to offer some advice on this. The Works Manager and Chief Executive thought this would be beneficial.

Badger Setts

The Board continue to follow Natural England guidelines when working adjacent to Badger setts.

Pollution

If there are pollution incidents, the Board contacts the Environment Agency (EA) and assist them if required, seeking to recover any costs.

Ms T Smalley questioned how many incidents there are a year? The Works Manager responded that there have been two reported to the EA this year, with the Chief Executive adding that there is no trend year on year.

Ms T Smalley added that if that incident results in a fine for the polluter, the Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust and other charitable environmental bodies are approached to accept the fine with a plan of works relevant to the area to deliver environmental improvement.

Greater Lincolnshire Nature Partnership

The Board continues with its Service Level Agreement with the GLNP, this includes the Lincolnshire Environment Records Centre data, which holds over 15 million sightings.

Horbling Fen SSSI; Water Level Management Plan with Natural England

The Chief Executive explained that he realised it had been quite a while since the plan had been reviewed and so it was reviewed in 2022 and submitted to Natural England for approval. Natural England have not yet approved it, but have asked if they can provide any financial assistance for a new weir or for any new structures at Horbling. The Chief Executive has responded with new pumps etc. and is awaiting a response back.

South Lincs Pollinator Project

The Board has two pollinator sites – Kirton Marsh and Gosberton Risegate. Ms T Smalley added that the lady who was leading this retired and her successor is now in post. There are now two Land Manager Advisors at the Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust who will cover this project.

The Works Manager noted that this advice would be helpful, adding that he has been in contact with Boston Seeds also.

Artificial House Martin Nests

The House Martin has been identified as an endangered species, with them not being able to build their nests on new buildings. The Board have therefore erected five artificial nests at Helpringham Pumping Station and five at Quadring Pumping Station. It was noted that they have only just been erected and so haven't been used yet.

Ms T Smalley noted that with Swift boxes, using a 'caller' is helpful, it is a device that mimics the sound of the bird, to encourage the bird to use the nest, it thinking there are already others around.

The Wash and North Norfolk Marine Partnership

The Operations Manager attends these meetings, contributing as and when required.

The Environmental Good Governance Guide for Internal Drainage Boards

These guides were circulated at the last Board meeting, copies of which are available. The Chief Executive added that it is an interesting document.

Proposed works 2023/2024

Water Vole Surveys

As previously mentioned, the Board used a new ecology consultant last year, Archer Ecology, an example of work produced by them is included within the agenda (Water Vole Surveys), this report cost £6,000 and the Board's Officer's don't feel it is good value for money. The Board's Officer's feel that the level of information within this report could be produced in house by the Board's own employees and so are going to look at completing such work inhouse going forward. The Operations Manager added that such surveys and reports used to be completed by the hand roding gang. Budget £2,000.

Winter Bushing and Cleansing

The Board has a separate bushing budget, outside of the Environment Budget, fish relocation whilst cleansing is budgeted at £2,500.

Owl Boxes

The repair and replacement of three existing owl boxes during 2023/24 is budgeted at £2,000.

Recording by Machine Drivers

Tom-Tom repairs and updates are budgeted at £1,500.

High Profile Watercourse Banks

Environmental flailing is budgeted at £4,000.

Water Levels

The Chief Executive noted that the Board has implemented a new pumping regime (only pumping whilst cheaper night rates are in operation and lifting the start and cut off levels), with a view to reduce pumping costs, increase aquatic diversity and assist with soil moisture in the catchment. This was implemented in January and is still in place now, because of the lack of rainfall, noting that, officially, the area is still in a drought.

Mr V Barker felt that this new pumping regime has been a success. Mr V Barker added that we are approaching the time of year when the Environment Agency (EA) raise the levels in the South Forty Foot Drain which will affect the Board's pumping regime. It was noted that it is lifted because of the EA's navigation obligation and for aquatic biodiversity.

The Chairperson noted the Board's rainfall record and that there is only one month in the last twelve months where the rainfall has been significantly more than the average.

Ms T Smalley referred to Ken Hill Estates, Snettisham, Norfolk, noting that, as of January 2023, they had recorded no rain on their farm since April 2022.

The Works Manager added that there have been a number of reports of 'pollution' recently, when actually it is just stagnant water that has been sat in drains. Mr V Barker questioned if it is connected to septic tanks and foul water? It was noted that it could be.

Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS)

The purchase of additional Remoti mink traps is budgeted at £2,000.

Operation Flyswat Partner

As previously noted, a meeting needs to be held to establish the responsibilities of each partner. The contribution is estimated at £3,600.

Grass Snake Nesting Sites

Redressing of the Grass Snake nesting sites are budgeted at £250.

Wildflower Meadow

The maintenance of the wildflower meadow at Cooks Lock Pumping Station is budgeted at £600.

Pollinator Project

The development of the Board's pollinator project site is budgeted at £750.

The Wash and North Norfolk Marine Partnership

There is a £400 contribution for the Wash and North Norfolk Marine Partnership.

Greater Lincolnshire Nature Partnership

There is a £300 contribution for the Greater Lincolnshire Nature Partnership.

Environment Budget 2023/24

The committee AGREED the budget as below:

Water Vole Surveys	£2,000.00
Winter Bushing & Cleansing	£2,500.00
Barn Owl Box Replacements	£2,000.00
Tom Tom Repairs/Updates	£1,500.00
High Profile Watercourse Banks	£4,000.00
Mink Control	£2,000.00
Operation Fly swat partner	£3,600.00
Grass Snake Sites	£250.00
Wild Meadow Maintenance	£600.00
Pollinator Project	£750.00
WNNMP	£400.00
GLNP	£300.00

Total **£19,900.00**
(2023/24 Environmental Budget being £21,000)

2108 To receive a report on Barn Owl Nesting Boxes for 2022 - Agenda Item 9

The Chairperson presented the Barn Owl report for 2022, noting that Alan Ball (Wildlife Conservation Partnership) was not able to complete as much checking in 2022 as previous years due to not being able to for a few months.

It was noted that succession planning for this role is not required yet and that this service is provided through the Wildlife Conservation Partnership.

2109 To receive a report on the 2022 butterfly records from Windmill Lodge Butterfly Conservation and Wildlife area, Amber Hill - Agenda Item 10

The Chairperson presented the 2022 butterfly records from Windmill Lodge Butterfly conservation and wildlife area at Amber Hill.

The Chief Executive noted that Phil and Ros Bowler would welcome any comments or questions through this committee.

2110 To receive a report from Tammy Smalley (Head of Conservation at Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust (LWT)) - Agenda Item 11

Ms T Smalley gave the following update.

Natural England Catchment Sensitive Farming Advisor

Colette Tate is in the post above, Ms T Smalley noted she will share contact details.

Greater Lincolnshire Nature Partnership

The Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust continues to host the GLNP on behalf of all partners. The GLNP are in the process of being appointed by Lincolnshire County Council as the lead for communication on the Greater Lincolnshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy. Defra has awarded Lincolnshire County Council as the responsible body for the whole of Greater Lincolnshire and the Council are going to contract the GLNP to do all of the engagement and mapping work for it. Guidance is being awaited from Defra, originally anticipated in April 2023, but is going to be delayed.

Green Investment in Greater Lincolnshire

This is the Natural Environment Readiness Fund that was overseen and delivered by the Environment Agency. From November 2023, developers will have to deliver biodiversity net gain and so will be looking for biodiversity credits. Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust have been working on setting up a Greater Lincolnshire process for the market of sellers (landowners) who could sell their biodiversity, water nutrient credits or carbon credits to a buyer. 150-200 landowners have engaged and will be contacted next week about submitting an expression of interest to go on a registry to start developing what credits they could sell.

The Chief Executive questioned what is the minimum area of land needed to provide a credit to sell? Ms T Smalley responded that there is no minimum. The Chief Executive continued that the Board own 34 pumping stations, sat on c0.25 acres each, some banks and a couple of fields rented out, questioning if it is worth the Board looking into this? Ms T Smalley felt it is worth looking in to, adding that the market will not be based on whether you are a big landowner or a little landowner. It is not a case of selling specific credits to a specific development.

The Chairperson questioned if the marketplace had dictated the price yet? Ms T Smalley noted that the marketplace will dictate the price, however it is not up and running yet. Further adding as an example, carbon credits under the Woodland Carbon Code are selling for £30 per carbon credit. The Chairperson felt that the associated administration costs and involvement would outweigh anything gained. Ms T Smalley noted that the administration would be with the facilitator.

Ms T Smalley gave some further pricing examples:

- *Biodiversity net gain credits* (a normal hectare of land could produce around four biodiversity net gain credits). The higher / rarer the habitat delivered, the more the seller will be paid. In relation to average habitats (e.g., flower rich meadow), at present, the market is at between £20,000 per unit (lowest), £45,000 (average), up to £95,000 in London (highest). A biodiversity unit is a mathematical equation that can be calculated using the biodiversity metric, qualified ecologists must undertake the surveys and it will be monitored over 30 years.
- *Nutrient neutrality* – Currently Lincolnshire doesn't have nutrient neutrality requirements. In the areas where it is enforced, if you want to build a house, you must offset the nutrients being created by the development. It is estimated that each house will cost £3,000 - £5,000 for the credits. Real example - 1 hectare wetland project could mitigate between 100 – 300 houses.

The Chief Executive questioned if things such as bat boxes, owl boxes etc. could be sold as credits? Ms T Smalley noted that it will only attract philanthropy, it is habitat being sought.

Mr K Casswell noted that from a farmers perspective, if he had an acre of woodland set 20 years ago, would that be viable? Ms T Smalley confirmed that the carbon credits would be able to be sold. The market is currently at around £30 per carbon credit and typically a lowland woodland generates 300-350 carbon units per hectare.

Ms T Smalley referred to the Orsted Offshore Windfarm (global developer) who want to be net positive as a business across their whole remit. They asked 25 people to bid to be their biodiversity enhancement project. Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust and the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust secured this. For the first five year pilot phase, £3 million has been secured to complete restoration pilot work on the River Humber. If this is successful, more funding will become available.

The Chief Executive suggested that the Board compiles a schedule of what the Board owns and believes to be environmental benefits for Ms T Smalley to review. Ms T Smalley confirmed that this is the expression of interest, which she will be circulating with all of the IDBs. This can then also be shared with Board members and put on the Board's website. Once an expression of interest is submitted, the Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust team will assess whether they think any have any potential for delivering credits and if they do, and the landowner wishes to continue, they will then look to develop a more detailed plan around what could be delivered.

Ms T Smalley also noted that government guidance was released last week around what can be stacked and bundled. Carbon credits can not be stacked with anything, but you could get woodland creation money to create the woodland and then go on to sell the carbon credits created from that. Biodiversity net gain, water and some forms of agri-environment can be stacked and bundled.

The Chairperson referred to the Board's pit at Bourne North Fen, questioning if there would be any management rules that the Board would have to follow if its credits were sold? Ms T Smalley noted that Bourne North Fen is going to be Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust's exemplar site for selling ecosystem services.

Further noting that when selling credits, you will be signing up for at least 30 years and it has to be managed to deliver those outcomes. It will be monitored, and enforcement taken if the agreement is blatantly breached.

Peat Assessment

The Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust have been assessing the condition of peat in Lincolnshire and there are options around peatland restoration and peatland code payments. This cannot be stacked against anything else.

Mr K Casswell noted that he believed Defra were going to provide £3million funding for peat surveys and that ADA may manage some of that. Ms T Smalley noted that they are already providing this funding and that Fens East have secured almost £900,000 and have been doing the condition assessment of peat across Lincolnshire, Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire peats. The same is also being done in the Humber Head Levels, with Yorkshire Wildlife Trust and Nottingham Wildlife Trust, £500,000 was secured. Any sites that meet the criteria for peat restoration will submit an application during June and July.

National Seedbank Network

Local provenance native wildflower seed will be available for some schemes such as natural flood management. There is a plant propagation site on the coast planned and discussions are happening regarding another large-scale plant propagation site in Lincolnshire.

Wash Barrage

The Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust are against the development of a Wash Barrage due to technical and nature conservation reasons.

Grants

The Chief Executive noted the number of grants secured. Ms T Smalley noted that in 2021, she applied for 12/13 grants and achieved all of them.

Mr V Barker noted the value of Ms T Smalley's update. The Chairperson thanked Ms T Smalley for her time.

2111 To receive the minutes from the ADA Lincolnshire Branch Environment Committee: - Agenda Item 12

The Chairperson presented the minutes from the ADA Lincolnshire Branch Environment Committee Meeting held on 6th October 2022.

2112 Any other business - Agenda Item 13

(a) Bird Flu (Avian Influenza)

The Works Manager noted that the Board has reported five dead swans to Defra under the Avian Influenza guidelines and another sick swan has been noted on the Old Hammond Beck. It was confirmed that nothing is received back to let the Board know if the birds had got Avian Influenza.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 15:41.