

THE RIVER STOUR (KENT) INTERNAL DRAINAGE BOARD

Minutes of the Meeting of the Board held at 14:00 on Thursday 1 August 2019 at
Ashford Borough Council, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford, TN23 1PL

PRESENT

Mr M J G Tapp (Chairman), Mr A D Linfoot OBE (Vice Chairman), Mr G Steed (Deputy Vice Chairman), Mr D M Botting, Ms N H Dyas, Mr P N Howard, Cllr P D Jull, Cllr N Ovenden, Cllr D Smith, Mr M P Wilkinson and Mr P Williams.

IN ATTENDANCE

Mr P Dowling (Clerk & Engineer to the Board) and Ms A Eastwood (Finance & Rating Officer).

WELCOME

The Chairman welcomed to the meeting Ms D Thompson (EA Incident Response Team Leader – Upper & Lower Stour Area), Ms A Thurgarland (KSCP Partnership Officer) and Mr Darren Godden (Rhino Plant Hire, IDB Contracts Manager). The Chairman also welcomed Cllr P D Jull to his first meeting of the Board.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr M J Burgess, Cllr M D Connolly, Mr P S Dunn, Mr D J Fuller, Cllr D Ledger, Mr L Woollorton and Mrs G Wyant. Apologies were also received from Mr J Dilnot (Engineering Assistant).

PRESENTATION: NATURAL FLOOD MANAGEMENT – SLOWING THE FLOW by Annie Thurgarland (KSCP)

Ms Thurgarland stated that she is currently working with KCC's Flood Management Team and is tasked with slowing the flow using Natural Flood Management methods. The increased frequency and intensity of extreme weather events along with long periods of drought is increasingly causing problems across the country. This presentation is mainly aimed at farmers and others that manage land because without their goodwill most of these techniques cannot be achieved.

Natural Flood Management aims to reduce the downstream maximum water height of a flood or to delay the arrival of the flood peak downstream, increasing the time available to prepare for floods. This is achieved by restricting the progress of water through a catchment using a range of techniques which work with the natural features of the catchment to slow down or store flood waters. The techniques used are:

- Blocking drainage grips slowing the water at the top;
- Building woody debris dams slowing water as it flows down spreading it either side of the dams away from the watercourse and onto preferably wide vegetated margins;
- Targeted new native woodland planting;
- Riverside woodland planting;

- Flood water storage through swales and offline ponds which will hold water at high water and lose it at low water;
- Riverbank buffer strips;
- Interception of runoff pathways such as rough grass strips and bunds;
- Soil management.

Increasing Soil Infiltration: is a very effective way of reducing surface water runoff, a free-draining soil will make saturation less likely. There is a big overlap with catchment sensitive farming. Ms Thurgarland stated that she currently has a compaction test which she is using to advise farmers if there are any measures that can be taken to improve infiltration and advice is also given on other things such as ploughing direction.

Evaporation from vegetation and soil can also make space for water.

Slowing Water: by increasing resistance to its flow – for example, by planting floodplain or riverside woods or blocking grips on moorland. Vegetated margins need to be encouraged as they are very beneficial, and a lot have been lost due to the changes to the Entry Level Stewardship.

Storing water by using and maintaining the capacity of ponds, ditches, channels or land, water which will be released slowly.

Reducing water flow connectivity by interrupting surface flows of water through creating small earth bunds in the flowpath and by planting buffer strips of grass or trees.

Cllr Smith asked how far from the river is it adequate to plant trees. Ms Thurgarland stated that it depends on various factors such as space available and whether there is erosion. Mr Botting stated that one of the problems with planting lots of trees is that the shaded area will be scarce on vegetation. Ms Thurgarland agreed and stated that woodlands do help with infiltration but there is also a need for ground vegetation so that it acts as a blocker, therefore woodlands need to be managed properly to ensure that they maintain some ground vegetation.

Ms Thurgarland reported that as a result of research into these methods Defra published “Working with Natural Processes – Evidence Directory” and “Mapping the potential for Working with Natural Processes – user guide” which are available online which are worth using as a guide to suggest what can be done.

Ms Thurgarland talked through some slides on local programmes she is currently involved with which depicted some of the above techniques.

The Chairman asked what the EA’s Resources Department view on the infiltration storage is. Ms Thurgarland stated that this has not been discussed because nowhere suitable has been found for this method yet.

Mr Howard expressed concern at raising water levels in dykes with check-dams because this will raise the levels in the water table either side of the dyke, therefore the land will not be able to absorb as much water in times of heavy rainfall making flooding quicker. Ms Thurgarland replied that check-dams are a good way of slowing flows but, as with all of these techniques, must be selected carefully and with the agreement of affected landowners. Ms Dyas stated that she has enquired before about reducing water levels in drainage ditches prior to winter so that there will be increased capacity for winter rainfall. The Clerk & Engineer stated that Ms Dyas is referring to the lowland marshes, but

these measures are being considered on higher gradient upland watercourses at the top end of the catchment.

Ms Thurgarland stated that the main contributing factors to be addressed are intensive farming, loss of trees, hedgerows and vegetated margins and house building/infrastructure. She added that if we could improve engagement and implementation of some of these techniques multiple benefits would be seen:

- Improved growth if reduction in soil compaction;
- Reduction in soil loss with reduction in runoff;
- Bunds catch silt which can be returned to the fields;
- Margins increase the presence of pollinators and natural pest control;
- New hedging and clumps of trees provide shading for livestock/nesting/foraging habitat for wildlife, carbon storage;
- Reduction in silt into streams and rivers helps habitat for aquatic life;
- Hopefully some replenishing of aquifers through the Prowater Project

Ms Thurgarland stated that the issues affecting this project are the concerns over loss of earning potential and the negative impacts on the land. The fact that these methods have limited benefits and will not necessarily work in extreme circumstances, funding is limited to implementation but not for ongoing maintenance, so it is highly reliant on landowners' goodwill and cooperation.

The Clerk & Engineer asked if there are target areas and if there is good landowner engagement in those areas. Ms Thurgarland replied that the target areas are anywhere where flooding is occurring and affecting housing. She added that all the landowners she has contacted to date have been very helpful.

The Chairman thanked Ms Thurgarland for her presentation, and she encouraged members to contact her with any ideas, queries or problem areas.

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE BOARD HELD ON THURSDAY 30 MAY 2019

The minutes of the Board held on Thursday 30 May were received. It was proposed by the Vice Chairman, seconded by Cllr D Smith and resolved that the minutes be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a true record of the proceedings at that meeting.

MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

Ref: F1-2a Final Internal Audit Inspection of the
2018-2019 Accounts and Accounting Records

Cllr Jull expressed surprise at the cost for the Bankline service from Natwest because he is aware that Lloyds Bank provide this service free of charge. The Finance & Rating Officer stated that she will find out more information, though this service is usually only provided for current accounts, therefore the Board would need to move its everyday banking to Lloyds Bank to benefit.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Chairman asked if there is been any reply about the increasing amount of alder trees dying. The Clerk & Engineer stated that he enquired with Mr Thomas (KSCP) who was not aware of the problem but would make further enquiries.

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE FINANCE, GENERAL PURPOSES & WORKS COMMITTEE HELD ON MONDAY 15 JULY 2019

It was proposed by the Deputy Vice Chairman, seconded by Mr M P Wilkinson and resolved that the minutes of the meeting of the Finance, General Purposes and Works Committee held on Monday 15 July be received.

MATTERS ARISING FROM THESE MINUTES

**Joint Report of the Clerk & Engineer and Finance & Rating Officer
for the period 1 April to 30 June 2019**

Ref: W1-39 Main River Rationalisation Project

The Clerk & Engineer reported that the 10 rivers which were proposed for transfer are now IDB watercourses and the commuted sum for the assets was received on 26 July. The Chairman asked how many of the original 10 IDBs have completed their transfers. The Clerk & Engineer replied that only 5 pilots were taken forward and three of these have resulted in river transfers. The Chairman expressed his thanks to everyone involved for all the work and time put into this interesting project.

Ref: W4/Rev Review of Water Abstraction Licensing System

The Clerk & Engineer reported that the Board is to apply for 4 transfer licences and the cost of these will be shared with the EA. He further reported that the Association of Drainage Authorities has managed to negotiate a reduction to the original fee of £1,500 but there is a list of conditions which need to be worked through to ascertain if it applies. He added that applications will not be submitted until all details and costs have been confirmed.

Mr Botting asked if the gauge-boards planned to be installed will be set at the same level, because they have different levels on the Stour (from Grove Ferry to Stonar Cut). The Clerk & Engineer replied that all boards will be set to Ordnance Datum Newlyn (ODN) as are all the boards on the Main River. He added that the EA's river level telemetry system has been installed to a local datum and the EA is reluctant to change this because people have gotten used to them, although there is a table on their website where you can convert the local readings to Ordnance Datum.

Ref: W7 IDB Programme of Works (Including works carried out under PSCA)

Weed Cutting

The Clerk & Engineer reported that this year's IDB weed cutting programme totals approximately 205km, taking an additional 36.6km of Main River transfers and 14.1km of IDB adjustments into account. He further stated that the condition of the latter will be monitored, and some maintenance will be carried out if needed and if budgets allow. There is also approx. 45km of Main Rivers to be cut under the PSCA.

Water Level Control

The Chairman asked what the situation is with the Northmouth Sluice and Coldharbour Sluice which were both leaking seawater back onto the Chislet Marshes. Ms Thompson replied that Mr Jemmett is dealing with this but is unfortunately on sick leave, but she will find out more information and report back. The Clerk & Engineer stated that as previously discussed it was felt that this should be considered emergency works, but it did not qualify under the EA's new guidelines, but Mr Nunn had

subsequently confirmed that repairs are in the pipeline. Mr Wilkinson stated that he still cannot understand why this relatively simple repair was not treated as an emergency because there were fish dying and salt coming into a freshwater marsh which is used for irrigation.

Ref: A3-6 Health & Safety – Near Miss Incident

The Clerk & Engineer stated that this site has been made safe and the EA was asked to check and make safe other pumping stations with similar set up. Ms Thompson stated that she will check on progress and report back.

The Vice Chairman stated that there is a potential insurance liability issue if an accident were to happen, but as it is an EA structure the liability should rest with the EA.

Ref: A4-3 Biodiversity

The Clerk & Engineer reported that some of the watercourses previously listed to be re-surveyed may drop off as a result of the transfers and the transferred watercourses be added to the programme.

Ref: W7G Environment Agency Works

Ms Thompson commented on the following EA activities:

- The trees thought to be overhanging the Vigo Sluice are contained within a residential garden therefore no work will be carried out;
- Weedcutting on the river Dour and on the Betteshanger and Finglesham side of the Hacklinge has been completed;
- Weedcutting at Sarre in the Chislet system has been finished and currently working at Wantsum;
- Divers were out at the Mile End, assisted by the Board's Water Level Controller, and some problems and a leak were found, and a business case needs to be completed to apply for funding;
- Brewery Sluice project will start in October;
- All the work in the Little Stour Flood Relief channel has been finished apart from one structure which by mutual agreement will be completed next year;
- Stonar lights are now fully operational.

Cllr Smith asked if there is any known reason why the Aylesford Stream is at its lowest level ever. Ms Thompson stated that she is not aware of any problems but will investigate and report back.

Ref: W5 Planning Applications

The Chairman invited comments on the Planning Applications listed in the F & G P Committee meeting minutes.

Ashford Borough Council

14/00409 & 19/00579 – Major development proposal to provide an employment led mixed-use scheme, to include site clearance, the alteration of highways, engineering works and construction of new buildings and structures and other associated development including utilities and transport infrastructure, car parking and landscaping on land on the north side of Highfield Lane, Sevington,

Ashford. Outline planning permission was granted in September 2017 for this proposed development (Stour Park).

The Clerk & Engineer reported that points 1-3 had now been addressed, but point 4 (the details of the site eventually drains) had not. However, KCC has commented that the development proposals are policy compliant and they therefore cannot object.

Dover District Council

17/01530 – Outline application for 63 dwellings with associated infrastructure on land to the rear of Matthews Close & Southwall Road, Deal.

The Clerk & Engineer highlighted the fact that a Verification Report was requested by KCC to ensure that SuDS is implemented and maintained as agreed.

Ref: W15 Applications for Consent and Enforcement Actions

The Chairman referred to the Applications for Consent listed in the F & G P Committee meeting minutes and invited comments from the Members.

Ref: 18-ST-05

Location: Land west of Sarre, on Chislet Marsh.

Proposed: Installation of power cable beneath an ordinary watercourse.

The Clerk & Engineer reported that this application has been **approved** but the works have not yet started.

Mr Botting asked if the Board's consent is needed for the building works at Hersden. The Clerk & Engineer stated that it is outside of the Board's district, but he is aware that details of on-site SuDS have been agreed with KCC and CCC, with runoff restricted in accordance with Canterbury City Council's policy.

FINANCE

Ref: F1-2.1 Appointment of Internal Auditor

The Chairman reported that enquiries to find a suitable candidate to replace Mr D Griffiths as the Board's Internal Auditor were fruitless and following advice from ADA it was proposed by the F&GP Committee that the Board re-appoint Mr D Griffiths for another three year term at the Annual General Meeting in November.

It was proposed by the Chairman, seconded by the Mr M P Wilkinson and resolved that Mr D Griffiths be reappointed for three years starting on 7 November, this was agreed by all present.

Ref: F1-5 (c) Annual Governance and Accountability Return 2018-19 (AGAR) – SECTION 2 (Accounting Statements 2018-19)

The Chairman reported that the External Auditor, PKF Littlejohn advised the Board that Section 2 Box 9 of the AGAR was completed incorrectly – Box 9 relates to the value of fixed assets (i.e. the property, 34 & 34A Gordon Road) and as on revaluation the property value increased from £275,000 to £395,000 the External Auditor advised that the previous year's figure must be re-stated for consistency and

comparability, This amendment was made and signed by the Chairman, the Clerk & Engineer and the Responsible Finance Officer and emailed to the External Auditor, who stated that as the amended Section 2 was provided he will be able to remove the 'except for' matter and raise an 'other' matter regarding amendments.

ADMINISTRATION

Ref: A1-1 Board Members Appointments

The Chairman reported that Ashford Borough Council re-appointed Cllr Mick Burgess, Cllr Noel Ovenden and Cllr David Smith, and further appointed Cllr David Ledger who represents Weald South Ward (Hamstreet, Shadoxhurst, Warehorne and Woodchurch). The Council's Full Council rejected its Selection Committee's proposal to reappoint Ms Aline Hicks as its representative on the Board due to her no longer being a Councillor and that it will make its fifth and final appointment at the next meeting in October. The Chairman stated that Ms Hicks has been a very enthusiastic and supportive member, so was disappointed with this decision.

There were no changes to Canterbury City Council's appointments, although the Council is still reviewing its policy for appointing to outside bodies (details to follow in the coming months) and Dover District Council confirmed the re-appointment of Cllr Mike Conolly and the appointment of Cllr Peter Jull (North Deal Ward) to the Board.

Thanet District Council confirmed that Hunter Stummer-Schmertzing is no longer a Councillor and no longer its representative on the Board, and that a new appointment will be made in September.

A New Members Briefing was attended by the Chairmen, the Clerk & Engineer and the two newly appointed members, Cllr Jull and Cllr Ledger. Another briefing will be arranged for the new Members when appointed.

Ref: A1-2 Members of the Board – Finance, General Purposes & Works Committee

The Chairman reported that three of the Board Members who were not reappointed, due to various reasons, were on the F&GP Committee (Cllr A Hicks, Cllr M Ovenden and Cllr H Stummer-Schmertzing), which leaves six remaining F&GP Committee Members (2 Appointed and 4 Elected). This Committee is comprised of 9 Members and it would be desirable to maintain an Appointed Member majority balance (5 Appointed and 4 Elected). Although the full Finance, General Purposes & Works Committee must be re-elected at the AGM on 7 November, it was proposed by the F&GP Committee that 3 new Members be added/appointed to this Committee at this Board Meeting.

The Chairman asked for volunteers, Cllr Jull volunteered, and it was proposed by the Chairman, seconded by the Deputy Vice Chairman that Cllr Jull be appointed to the F & G P Committee. In the interest of keeping a balanced committee between Appointed and Elected Members it was decided to wait for the further new appointments by Ashford Borough Council and Thanet District Council before appointing another two Members to this Committee

Ref: A7-1 Employment of Staff – through Office Angels Agency

It was reported that after contacting a few Agencies, Mr Nick Kosh was appointed via Office Angels and started work at the Board on 18 June 2019 as a temporary administration assistant.

Ref: A7-2 Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS)

It was reported that both LGPS Consultations – regarding Fair Deal, strengthening pension protection and changes to the local valuation cycle and management of employer risk– have ended. The results of these consultations are being evaluated and outcomes will be reported when known.

The ruling on the McCloud case and the subsequent Supreme Court’s decision to rule against the Government’s Appeal will result in a requirement to compensate certain members for any discrimination suffered due to transitional protections – this may have implications for pension schemes which have implemented transitional arrangements for benefit changes. Guidance on how and if this will affect the Board’s contributions will not be known for a while but estimated impact to employers, ranges from 1% to 3.2% of pensionable pay but differs largely amongst employers as it will depend on the age profile of their membership and the earning assumption.

Ref: A9-1.2 Office Premises – 34 & 34A Gordon Road

It was reported that a decision is still awaited on the planning application to renew the windows and doors at the property. The Energy Performance Assessment carried out of the flat provided a Band E rating, which is the lowest allowable rating (for the flat to be rented out). It should be noted that there is long-term aim for as many properties as possible to be upgraded to EPC Band C by 2030 ‘where practical, cost-effective and affordable’. Some improvements were recommended in addition to the already planned improvements to which the Board must give some consideration to:

- Internal or external wall insulation – this would have to be internal due to the property being within a conservation area.
- Heating controls (room thermostat), replace boiler with new condensing boiler and flue gas heat recovery device in conjunction with boiler – plan to action this in the future.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

1. Cllr P Jull reported that some hedge trimmings have been put into the ditches either side of Marsh Lane leading down to Southwall Dyke – to be investigated.
2. Mr Williams reported that a farmer at Worth complained about the lack of maintenance on the North Stream which has caused it to narrow over the years. Ms Thompson replied that an 80% weed cut is carried out yearly on the North Stream but no desilting program is in currently in place, but she will investigate.
3. Mr Howard asked if the EA has planned any maintenance on the Upper Stour. The Clerk & Engineer replied that the IDB will carry out the usual weed cutting at Hothfield, under the PSCA, and will be assessing maintenance needs on the transferred section (from Burnt Mill to Little Chart).
4. Ms Dyas stated that there are a lot of trees and blockages in the Sarre Penn affecting the flow and causing unnecessary flooding. The Clerk & Engineer stated that the IDB had cleared the main obstructions from this watercourse a couple of years ago on behalf of the EA. Ms Thompson replied that she will investigate.
5. The Finance & Rating Officer reported that the ADA Conference and Annual General Meeting will take place on 13 November 2019 at One Great George Street, Westminster. The opening Speaker has been confirmed as Neil Parish MP for Tiverton & Honiton, and Chair of the House of Commons Environment, Food & Rural Affairs Committee and Keynote Presentations

addressing the need to build positive collaborations across water management will be made by Stuart Roberts, Vice President of the NFU, and Julie Foley, Director of Flood Risk Strategy & National Adaptation at the Environment Agency. Any Members wishing to attend should contact the Finance & Rating Officer so that places can be booked.