

THE RIVER STOUR (KENT) INTERNAL DRAINAGE BOARD

Minutes of the Online Meeting of the Board held at 14:00 on Thursday 6 August 2020

PRESENT

Mr M J G Tapp (Chairman), Mr G R Steed (Vice Chairman), Mr A D Linfoot OBE (Deputy Vice Chairman), Mr D M Botting, Cllr M J Burgess, Cllr M D Conolly, Cllr D Crow-Brown, Ms N H Dyas, Mr P S Dunn, Mr D J Fuller, Mr P N Howard, Cllr P D Jull, Cllr G B Sparks, Mr M P Wilkinson and Mrs G Wyant.

IN ATTENDANCE

Mr P Dowling (Clerk & Engineer), Ms A Eastwood (Finance & Rating Officer) and Mr S Revell (Water Level Controller).

WELCOME

The Chairman welcomed to the meeting Mr M Thomas (KSCP), Mr I Nunn (FCRM Operations Manager for KSL, EA), Dr D Price (EA Technical Advisor), Ms G Mitri Renner (EA Asset Performance Team Leader) and Ms D Thompson (EA Stour Field Team Leader).

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr D Ledger, Cllr N Ovenden, Cllr D O Smith, Mr L Wooltorton and Mr P Williams. Apologies were also received from Mr D Godden (Rhino Plant Hire), and Mr J Dilnot (Engineering Assistant).

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chairman called for any declarations of interest and declared an interest in all three structures on the Northern Sea Wall and the Mile Cut Feed (EA assets) due to farming land on the Chislet Marshes. There were no other declarations of interest.

PRESENTATION

BAP – Buxford Dyke Enhancement (IDB 25)

The Chairman thanked Mr M Thomas for the informative document on the channel enhancements on the Buxford Dyke and invited him to run through it.

Mr Thomas stated that the reason for prioritising this location is due to: it being one of the few locations where the presence of White-Clawed Crayfish (WCC) has historically been reported; the channel retaining some natural character; and sympathetic landowners along most of its length offering greater enhancement opportunities. Some of the work has already been done – reducing shading by coppicing along the edge of Willow Bed was carried out and funded by Godinton Estate with the help of KSCP volunteers – other work was incorporated into the standard management program to be carried out by the Board's contractors – hand weed cutting to enhance sinuosity and flailing of hedges and tree works also to reduce shading. The two standalone projects below are programmed for late Summer/early Autumn:

- Installing cattle drinks in Godinton Estate by the Chart Bypass

Excessive poaching by cattle has resulted in a substantially widened channel and the silt entering the channel is deposited downstream, preventing fish from spawning, and reducing viability of habitat for recolonization by WCC. Erosion of soil releases nutrients into the ecosystem, causing eutrophication. Where the cattle drinks will be constructed the eroding cliffs will be regraded for ease of access by cattle and aggregate laid to prevent further erosion. Fencing will be constructed to prevent cattle from walking along the watercourse and logs will be installed at the bank toe to prevent aggregate creeping downhill into the channel. The timber will be supplied by the estate, from last winter's tree-felling.

Mr Thomas stated that it is doubtful that WCC are still in the channel as their presence was last recorded in 2010 and there has been a general decline across the region. This project is mostly directed towards improving habitat conditions for WCC should its population start to re-establish. The Chairman asked if there are plans to reintroduce WCC to the channel once the enhancements are complete rather than just waiting for its population to re-establish. Mr Thomas reported that there is some funding to carry out some work and approaches are being explored by KSCP in collaboration with other organisations such as the EA.

The Clerk & Engineer asked if Mr Thomas knew the timescale of this study, because there is concern that there are only a couple of sites with healthy WCC populations. Mr Thomas replied that he is not aware of it but suggested that Mr J Shelton at KSCP may be able to provide further information.

- Installing large woody debris on ABC owned land (Buxford Meadows Nature Reserve).

This straight section of channel is an ideal location for using river restoration techniques to create a more sinuous channel, with greater flow and depth variation. Reduced channel width during low flows will increase silt scouring while maintaining channel capacity during high flows. The result will be enhancement of aquatic habitat for WCC, fish and invertebrates and creation of additional wetland habitat. Tree trunks, or Large Woody Debris (LWD), can be harvested from the adjoining wet woodland and positioned in the channel to accrete silt, forming berms which will direct the current towards the opposite bank. LWD will be secured in place with wood posts and bank excavation opposite each LWD feature will compensate for lost capacity. Features are positioned to coincide with the natural geomorphology of the channel.

Cllr M Burgess stated that the work that has already been done on this project is very good and it has already turned a muddy area into a pleasant and useable area and he is very interested to see the further developments. Regarding WCC, Cllr Burgess stated that he thought attempts were made to repopulate them in an area near Rolvenden a few years ago. Mr Thomas said that Rolvenden is outside of his area, but he will investigate. There being no further questions the Chairman thanked Mr Thomas for his presentation.

HEALTH & SAFETY

Ref: A3-6 Health & Safety – COVID-19

The Clerk & Engineer reported that staff continue to follow current government guidance, a risk assessment has been carried out, cleaning procedures are in place and minimal contact between staff continues but the office is being manned every day. PPE has also been acquired in case the need arises.

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE BOARD HELD ON THURSDAY 28 MAY 2020

The minutes of the Board held on Thursday 28 May 2020 were received. It was proposed by the Vice Chairman, seconded by the Deputy Vice Chairman 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

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Chairman asked Mr P Howard if his complaint about the constant use of the byway through his farm had been addressed. Mr Howard replied that some barriers have been put up at each end of the track which act as a deterrent, but it still occurs, and the EA is assessing the river pollution. Ms G Mitri Renner stated that she has not heard back from the team that review incidents as they are not currently able to visit the site. She reminded Mr Howard to continue to call the incident line every time an incident happens so there is a good record which will inform the action to be taken.

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE FINANCE, GENERAL PURPOSES & WORKS COMMITTEE HELD ON MONDAY 20 JULY 2020

It was proposed by Cllr P D Jull, seconded by the Vice Chairman and resolved that the minutes of the meeting of the Finance, General Purposes and Works Committee held on Monday 20 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 2020

Ref: A2-3.1 Members Training – Health & Safety

It was reported that taking forward their commitment to enhance health and safety within the sector, ADA will be drawing together resources during 2020 to host a series of regional/virtual workshops in early 2021. These workshops aimed at IDB Board members will cover health, safety and environmental training.

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

Water Level Control

The Clerk & Engineer reported that all water levels are at or close to normal summer level. Despite the recent hot, dry period the situation is currently good but reducing groundwater levels/base flows and heavy weed-growth are likely to make feeding and levels more difficult to sustain.

The Board's Water Level Controller has suggested to the EA that they consider temporarily increasing the volumes on the Mile's abstraction licence to enable him to continue to maintain the levels required. The Clerk & Engineer stated that there has been a problem with the gravity feed for several years and we are therefore more reliant on the pumps than is necessary. The leaking outfalls on the Northern Sea Wall have also contributed to the problem of Low Dissolved Oxygen (DO) levels downstream of the Thanet Way. The EA's Fisheries Team has requested an increased feed to provide a flush through, but this also increases the use of licensed volume.

The EA's Resources Team's initial response to this suggestion was that it will take time to review the abstraction licence as a formal amendment process is needed. The Clerk & Engineer stated that Mr I Murrell (EA) is exploring if this can be done under an environmental statement as it needs to be addressed before the licence capacity runs out. Dr D Price reported that the only update he has is from Mr C DiMarco (EA Water Resources Team Leader) that it is planned to fully refurbish the gravity feed structure in October 2020, moving on to some work at Gosshall Feed during next financial year and then taking another look at the Mile pumps and screens.

The Chairman asked the Water Level Controller to report on the daily problems he is facing at the Mile site and how much a refurbished/new penstock and flap will improve the situation. The Water Level Controller explained that he must minimise the use of the pumps, due to quantity limitations on the abstraction licence, so alternates between pumping and gravity feeds as tide levels allow. He further explained that the gravity feed structure has been failing for the last 4 to 5 years; so he has to put approx. ten 9-inch stop-boards in to limit the amount of water leaking back from the Mile into the Stour. To operate the gravity feed boards are removed, with assistance, which allows for some (but a limited) gravity feed. Ideally all the boards should be removed but he would not be able to put them back in safely without a larger team. Due to the recent hot weather and the amount of irrigation, 600,000 cubic metres have been used, with 200,000 cubic metres remaining. This should be enough to manage water levels, but the low DO levels are causing problems for fish – with some fish mortalities occurring. The refurbishment of this gravity feed is therefore a high priority.

Ms D Thompson stated that she does not have any information on the structural repairs of the sluice but reported that her team has managed to successfully use weed boats to carry out a weed cut to improve flows. The Water Level Controller agreed and commented that a good job has been done, with all the weed and debris from the railway culvert being cleared and this is appreciated.

Dr D Price stated that he does not have any further information and reported that the project manager has left the EA and is being replaced by Ms R Swift in a few weeks. He added that he will get an update on the Mile and Gosshall Feed refurbishments.

The Chairman stated that this a very disappointing situation and needs to be prioritised, as water is being unnecessarily wasted, the environment is being put at risk and the Water Level Controller's workload has increased. Ms G Mitri Renner agreed that discussions on this matter must continue between the EA, the IDB and the Fisheries Team to ascertain what can be done. The Clerk & Engineer reported that he has discussed this with Ms D Thompson recently and she has agreed for two of her team to attend site regularly to install and remove the boards if and when needed.

Ref: W4-2

Water Trading Pilot

The Chairman asked if there were any updates on this pilot. The Clerk & Engineer replied that this project is being led by KCC's Water Resources Manager (Mr Alan Turner) and although the EA and Defra are keen at a national level the local EA Resources Team is more cautious due to possible

increases in workload as a result. A meeting between the interested parties is to be arranged for this to be discussed further.

Ref: A4-3 Biodiversity

The Clerk & Engineer reported that Watercourse Summary Sheets have been updated as a result of last year's BAP surveys and this year's surveys are focussing on the transferred Main Rivers.

The Board's BAP Committee started its 5-year review of the BAP document and it has been agreed that the main BAP document will be revised and re-structured but not completely re-written. Another 5-year review document will be produced, similar to the last (in 2015), and these will be retained as appendices as a record of progress and planned actions. There will be greater emphasis on partnership working and promoting IDB activities. A draft document will be produced as soon as possible, and it is hoped that the final updated BAP will be presented to the Board for discussion and adoption at its meeting in February 2021.

Meanwhile ADA has announced plans to provide updated guidance and templates for IDB Biodiversity Action Plans reflecting recent Government policy changes and will create new nationally reportable metrics that will help to report on the delivery of enhancement to the natural environment. This guidance is not due until the end of the summer, but we will endeavour to incorporate it into the Board's current BAP review if possible.

Ref: A2-3.1 Members Training – Environmental Governance

The Clerk & Engineer reported that ADA has agreed a project proposal with Defra for developing guidance to supporting the environment specifically relating to the work of IDBs. The guide and subsequent training will be targeted at the Board Members of IDBs and build on the ADA Good Governance Guide for IDB Members (2018). Publication is targeted at the ADA Conference 2020 which will be conducted online on 11 November.

Ref: W7-1 Natural England Assent

The Clerk & Engineer expressed his thanks to Mr P Williams (Natural England) for arranging the updated Site Management Statement which has now been agreed with Natural England, for the Board's routine maintenance activities in or affecting SSSIs, giving assent for the next 5 years.

Ref: A10-21 East Kent Beaver Advisory Group (EKBAG)

The Clerk & Engineer reported that the EA is still to provide information on a Beaver Project in Devon and KWT agreed to produce a detailed map showing recorded beaver sightings/activities and dates. Some guidance for landowners is still to be produced to help them manage the risk in future.

A complaint was received from a landowner regarding high water levels and repeated flooding of land upstream of Hay Lane at Ham. A joint site meeting took place, between the landowner, IDB and EA, and it was found flows in the North Stream through Ham Fen are substantially restricted by numerous fallen trees and heavy weed growth. The routine maintenance of this section of Main River has been transferred to the Kent Wildlife Trust, as part of the Beaver Project, but the EA has agreed to carry out the works to bring this watercourse up to an acceptable standard.

Ref: W7G Environment Agency Works

Mr I Nunn reported that the EA continues to work under Covid-19 restrictions and are mostly working from home, a few offices are now being opened for limited access. Plucks Gutter should formally open within the next 6 weeks, but the depot is already fully functioning. There is a large programme this year which is not easy to deliver because some of the support services are limited. He reported that the weed cutting programme is running according to plan and the emergency works at Sandwich (Highway Marine) are complete.

Ms Thompson reported that they expect delivery of a new weed boat but until this arrives a truck-saw has been hired to weed cut the South Stream, the Delf Stream (Pinnock Wall), the Great Stour at Conningbrook and the Sarre Penn/River Wantsum (by the Sarre tilting weir).

Mrs Wyant asked what works have been taking place at Littlebourne Bridge. Ms Thompson replied that Southern Water is carrying out habitat enhancements consisting of some woody debris, a few scrapes and some narrowing to help with the flow, she stated that the EA have approved this project.

The Clerk & Engineer asked Ms Thompson if the full maintenance programme is going ahead this year. Ms Thompson confirmed this to be the case, similar to last year's. The main problems currently encountered are breakdowns and the inability to vehicle share. She further stated that she is proud of her team who are working hard to deliver the full programme under the existing constraints.

Cllr Conolly asked what the project in Wingham entails. Ms Thompson replied that the same weed cut is to be done as in previous years and the IDB will cut the section downstream of the village.

Dr Price reported that he has been working hard on obtaining funding and there are lots of project works underway. Delivery of some of these has been delayed, such as Northmouth Penstock seal replacement – date still not set – however works are to start at Coldharbour Outfall on 21 September. Dr Price further reported that he has also applied for funding under the recovery program for works primarily at the pumping stations (Ash Level, Stourmouth, Hacklinge) and expects some of the work to be completed this year. He further reported that the desilting of the Delf is likely to take place early 2021; the replacement of the stop-board structure at Butterfly PS is to be done shortly; the replacement of the tidal flaps at Richborough Outfall is due to be completed in October; the extra culvert at Black Sluice is not likely to take place until spring/summer 2021.

Mr Wilkinson asked Dr Price if there is any news on work on the Sarre Penn. Dr Price replied that this is to be jointly inspected by the EA & IDB to identify what work needs to be done, which will then be carried out by the IDB under the PSCA. The Clerk & Engineer reported that it has been agreed to use some of the precept each year to bring this up to a better standard.

The Water Level Controller asked if there are any plans for works at Cooper Street where the pumping station is completely out of action. Dr Price replied that funding has been awarded but the project is being dealt by a different team due to the complexity of the work, but he believes that this work should be delivered by the end of March. Meanwhile a temporary pump can be brought in as and when required which the field team will operate. The Water Level Controller stated that an 8" temporary pump is adequate for the summer, but a larger pump will be needed through the winter. Mr I Nunn confirmed that a larger pump will be installed when needed.

The Vice Chairman asked for an update on Brewery Sluice refurbishment. Dr Price reported that the new design proposed is to have a smaller flap within a penstock, which will be higher and therefore

less likely to become obstructed by silt. A new trash screen is also to be installed and works should be completed before the end of March.

The Clerk & Engineer asked if the feedback from last year's eel study at Minster Pumping Station has been received and is there likely to be any changes this year. Dr Price replied that he is still waiting for feedback from the university, the field team and the Water Level Controller (in terms of the logistics). The study is to continue this winter to ascertain the final details, such as the exact placement of the pump.

Ref: W5 Planning Applications

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

Dover District Council

19/01462 – Erection of 76 dwellings on land north of Orchard View and West of Saunders Lane, Ash.

Cllr Conolly reported that this application is going to planning committee next week with an officer recommendation for approval with a number of conditions.

Cllr Jull asked if it would be possible to have a higher resolution map on the Board's website to make it easier to identify what planning applications are within the Board's drainage district. The Clerk & Engineer stated that there are plans (when time allows) to review the website to include more information, improve mapping and improve access to the biodiversity information.

The Deputy Vice Chairman stated that the government has recently announced changes to relax the planning application process and various organisations have lodged their concern over the likely lack of control over a variety of things. He asked if ADA will be commenting and ensuring that there will not be an abandonment of appropriate drainage requirements. The Clerk & Engineer replied that he is not aware of any such representation, but he will enquire.

Ref: W5/DC Developer Contributions

The Clerk & Engineer reported that ADA is working on a project to develop reliable and consistent guidance to IDBs when considering how a development might impact on the efficient flow of water through their systems. It also looks at financial contributions from developers that may be required to accommodate increased flows and mitigate any adverse impacts. Draft guidance is nearly complete, containing annexes providing best practice examples from several risk management authorities.

The Clerk & Engineer reported that he intends to look into this further and he has on first instance spoken to the Water Management Alliance who already apply a general contribution charge. Previous concerns were that the contribution was perceived as a commuted sum and it may leave the Board with liabilities and duties to maintain but the guidance will define it as a general contribution to the Board for general maintenance activities.

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 which have all been approved in consultation with local members. There were no further comments.

FINANCE

Ref: F2 IDB Annual Reports to DEFRA

It was reported that the IDB Annual Report (IDB1 form) for year ended 31 March 2020 has been received and completed. This report is to be submitted to Defra, Environment Agency, County and District Councils by 30 September. In accordance with the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 and the transparency code for smaller authorities the completed IDB1 form will also need to be published on the Board's website and outside Noticeboard.

It was proposed by the Chairman, seconded by Cllr D Crow-Brown and resolved that the IDB1 form be received and approved.

Ref: F6-1 Environment Agency Precept Reports

It was reported that the final Precept reports for 2018-19 and 2019-20 have been agreed and finalised. It was proposed by the Chairman, seconded by the Deputy Vice Chairman and resolved that the IDB Annual Precept Reports for 2018/19 and 2019/20 be received and approved.

Ms G Mitri Renner thanked the Board for their patience awaiting this information and she stated that more regular discussions are now taking place so that reports are produced in a more timely fashion.

The Clerk & Engineer thanked Ms Mitri Renner and stated that the 2019/20 report has the previously planned allocations for 2020/21 which have slightly changed since. The EA have received funding for the Richborough refurbishment therefore £27,000 can be allocated to other works and we are currently looking at maintenance of the Sarre Penn and the Upper reaches of the Stour.

ADMINISTRATION

Ref: A3-3 IDB Byelaws

The Clerk & Engineer reported that an ADA working group has been investigating possible revisions to the existing model set of IDB Byelaws. Some changes are being sought and the Board will be advised accordingly once finalised.

Ref: A7-1 Employment of Staff

It was reported that in recognition of retirements in recent years, of the Board's Clerk and Administrative Assistant, and steadily increasing workloads it is suggested that the Board considers appointing a Technical Assistant, to improve technical support and cross-cover (between all staff) and improve general resilience. More time could be devoted to planning liaison, consenting, enforcement, policy review/audit, consultations, and wider professional engagement.

The Chairman reported that this matter has previously been raised by the Internal Audit Team and Internal Auditor, but funding is the main obstacle. It was proposed by the F&GP Committee that a sub-committee be appointed to investigate this matter, including possible impacts on existing budgets, and delegated the full authority to appoint a Technical Assistant/Officer if considered appropriate and affordable. It was proposed by the Chairman, seconded by Cllr G Sparks, and resolved that an Employment Sub-Committee consisting of the Chairman, Vice Chairman, Deputy Vice Chairman and Cllr M Burgess be appointed to discuss/progress the appointment of a Technical Assistant.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Governance & Accountability – Board Members & Meetings

The Chairman asked Members who have not yet watched the refresher speech by Mr Iain Smith on Board Members' duties and responsibilities to do so – link provided by the Clerk & Engineer. He further asked if there were any comments or questions for those who have watched it. Cllr M Burgess stated that he had watched it, it was a good refresher, and he was pleased to report that he feels confident that the Board is complying with everything stated.

The Clerk & Engineer stated that there are a few of these training videos that he will continue to send out prior to Board meetings for the Members to access, which can then be discussed at meetings if needed.

Note of thanks

Mr P S Dunn stated that he is very pleased with the weed cutting carried out by Rhino Plant Hire and he also thanked Mr I Nunn for sorting out the Richborough Sluice, which has been a concern to the Board for many years. Mr I Nunn replied that all at the EA appreciate the recognition.

MEETING CLOSED

There being no other business the Chairman thanked all for their attendance and declared the meeting closed.