

THE RIVER STOUR (KENT) INTERNAL DRAINAGE BOARD

Minutes of the Meeting of the Board
held on Thursday 28 May 2015
at 2.00 pm in the Board's Offices at
34 Gordon Road, Canterbury

PRESENT

Mr M J G Tapp Esq (Chairman), Mr A D Linfoot, O.B.E. (Vice Chairman), Mr D M Botting, Councillor M D Conolly, Mr G F Ellis, Councillor Mrs A K Hicks, Councillor Mrs M Martin, Councillor D O Smith, Mr J F E Smith, Mr S W Twyman and Mr P Williams.

IN ATTENDANCE

Mr P Dowling (Engineer to the Board), Mrs A I Eastwood (Finance and Rating Officer), Mr S F Revell (Water Level Controller) and Mr D Lewis (Clerk of the Board).

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor P J F Sims, Mr P N Howard, Mr I G Steed and Mr M P Wilkinson.

The Clerk stated that in addition to the apologies received he had been made aware that ex-Councillor Tony Austin had not sought re-election and had moved away to Cheshire; ex-Councillor C J (Kit) Smith had not sought re-election and had moved away to Shropshire and ex-Councillor Dr J Cohen had lost his seat in the council election and was no longer a councillor or Board Member.

The Engineer stated that Ms Debbie McNamara (Operations Team Leader – Stour, Environment Agency) intended to come to the meeting but at the last minute was summoned elsewhere to sort out a problem and therefore had to tender her apologies.

WELCOMING

The Chairman welcomed Mr John Bennett, Chief Executive of the Kent Wildlife Trust to the meeting and stated that Mr Bennett had kindly offered to give the members a short presentation on the Kent Wildlife Trust's activities which includes the Ham Fen Reserve Beaver Project in the Board's Drainage District.

PRESENTATION

Mr John Bennett, Chief Executive of the Kent Wildlife Trust thanked the Chairman for the invitation and the opportunity to talk to the members. Mr Bennett stated that the Trust managed over 60 sites in Kent as Kent Wildlife Trust Nature Reserves. Mr Bennett stated that land in the

60 sites extend to more than 3,300 hectares. Mr Bennett stated that the Trust also manages a number of sites in partnership with local authorities which include: Hothfield Common (with Ashford Borough Council) – A site rich in flora and fauna, this important reserve contains Kent's last four Valley Bogs and one of its few remaining fragments of open heath. The Site is noted for dragonflies such as the Keeled Skimmer and it is a good site for lizards and grass snakes; Conningbrook Lakes Country Park (with Ashford Borough Council) – Conningbrook Lakes Country Park (with Ashford Borough Council) – Ashford Borough Council, Ashford Leisure Trust and the Kent Wildlife Trust are working in partnership to establish and manage a new country park on the banks of the River Stour on the outskirts of Ashford. Kent Wildlife Trust is responsible for developing and maintaining the wildlife interest of the park; lakes fringed with wet woodland, river bank, meadows and hedges. All of which adds up to the prospect of kingfishers, herons, egrets, waterfowl and the occasional barn owl; Blean Woods (with Canterbury City Council) – One of UK's rarest woodland butterflies, the intricately patterned Heath Fritillary, relies on open and semi-shaded areas of the Blean Woods around Canterbury. Open rides, glades and recently coppiced areas are vital to maintain its primary larval food plant, Cow-Wheat. Each winter, areas of woodland, mainly Sweet Chestnut, are cut to maintain the Heath Fritillary and its food plant and Council) and Ham Fen Nature Reserve and Beaver Project (with Dover District Council) – The Beaver Project is now in its fifteenth year at Ham Fen. Over this period the Beavers have transformed much of the old fen back to open, wet, fen. Mr Bennett stated that Ham Fen was Kent's last remaining fenland and contained 23% of Kent's mire habitat and is the most important fen in South East England. Mr Bennett stated that the site was formerly part of a larger 700 hectare fen which was drained in the late 18th and 19th century. In 1991, when the Trust acquired the site, only about half a hectare of open fen habitat remained, the surrounding land having developed into secondary woodland or been drained, fertilized and converted into pasture. Mr Bennett stated that part of the restoration and management of the site included: conservation grazing with cattle, Konic ponies, Soay sheep and feral goats. Mr Bennett stated that Beaver were first introduced, as a 'keystone' management tool in 2001, and the Beaver first bred in 2009. Mr D M Botting asked how many Beavers are at Ham Fen Reserve. Mr Bennett stated there were about 10. Mr Bennett stated that the Beaver were contained on the reserve by electric fencing and metal grills on bridges and structures but some of the Beavers have escaped and been re-captured. Mr Bennett stated that Trust has now identified the weakness in the fencing and repaired this and hopefully the Beavers will now be contained on the site. Mr D M Botting asked if the Beavers were tagged. Mr Bennett stated that the Trust have tried to tag the Beavers but the tags, because of the Beavers habitat and way of life, become damaged or broken fairly easy. Mr Botting asked if microchips could be used. Mr Bennett stated that the Beavers become extremely stressed if they are captured and they have been known to die. Mr Bennett stated that the Trust, in consultation with Defra, is investigating other methods of radio-tagging. Mr Bennett stated that the Trust is not advocating the release of Beavers into the wider countryside. The Chairman thanked Mr Bennett for a most interesting presentation.

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE BOARD HELD ON THURSDAY 5 FEBRUARY 2015

The minutes of the meeting of the Board held on Thursday 5 February 2015 were received. It was proposed by Mr A D Linfoot, seconded by Councillor Mrs Marion Martin and resolved that minutes be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a true record of the proceedings at that meeting.

MATTERS ARISING FROM MINUTES

Attendance

Mr J F E Smith stated that he was in attendance at the Board Meeting on Thursday 5 February 2015 but the minutes did not reflect this. The Clerk apologised to Mr Smith for this omission and stated that he would amend the minutes to reflect his attendance.

Seaton Weir

Councillor M D Conolly (Dover District Council) stated that he regularly walks his dog down by Seaton Weir and, following the construction of the new weir, the surrounding grass and footpaths by the Little Stour looks like a lunar landscape. Councillor Conolly asked if the Environment Agency intended to re-profile and re-seed the area by the riverside. The Chairman asked the Engineer to bring this to the attention of the Environment Agency.

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE FINANCE, GENERAL PURPOSES AND WORKS COMMITTEE HELD ON MONDAY 11 MAY 2015

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Finance, General Purposes and Works Committee held on Monday 11 May 2015 were received. It was proposed by Councillor Mrs Marion Martin, seconded by Mr A D Linfoot and resolved that the minutes be received.

MATTERS ARISING FROM MINUTES

Engineer's Report for the period 1 October 2014 to 31 December 2014

Biodiversity

The Engineer stated that on completion of the last batch of watercourse surveys, he will ask the Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership (KSCP) to undertake a review of all the biodiversity watercourse surveys and submit their recommendations for further work to the Board. Councillor M D Conolly (Dover District Council) considered that it was extremely important that on completion of the last batch of biodiversity watercourse surveys, that the Board issues a report in order to publicize its good work. Councillor Mrs Marion Martin (Ashford Borough Council) agreed with Councillor Conolly and considered it was vital to publicize it widely as possible in order to bring the Board's very good biodiversity work to a wide audience. The Vice Chairman stated that the Board should more actively publicize as widely as possible the Board's work and consider issuing an annual report to the Special Levy councils and other important parties and organisations.

Engineer's Report for the period 1 January 2015 to 31 March 2015

Weedcutting

The Engineer stated that discussions have continued with local EA staff in respect of weedcutting on Main River, to be carried out under the PSCA. Watercourses currently under consideration include sections of the Great Stour at Hothfield and Wye, the Whitewater Dyke, the Ruckinge

Dyke, the Richborough Stream and the Minster Stream. The Engineer stated that it is intended that details of this work be agreed well in advance of the weedcutting season, so that resources and costs can be properly planned and agreed. Mr J F E Smith stated that the section of the Great Stour between Chartham and Chilham was in dire need of weedcutting. The Engineer stated that he would bring this to the attention of the local EA staff.

De-silting

The Engineer stated that the section of the Sarre Penn at Nethergong was added to the PSCA de-silting programme at the last moment in order to try and improve the channel but this did nothing to correct the bank slippage in the area. The Engineer stated that there were a number of bank collapses that were in need of attention and that he brought this to the attention of the local EA staff. The Engineer stated that the EA are struggling to justify any additional expenditure on flood defence grounds for the Sarre Penn. The Engineer stated that he had contacted Mr Jon Shelton, Partnership Manager, Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership (KSCP) to see if he could arrange for any work to be carried out on the Sarre Penn on conservation and biodiversity grounds and Mr Shelton advised that he could only justify expenditure on ordinary watercourses but the KSCP may be able to offer advice to landowners.

Water Level Control

The Chairman introduced Mr Shaun Revell, the Board's Water Level Controller, to the members. The Chairman asked Mr Revell if he was happy undertaking Water Level Management for both the Board and the Environment Agency. Mr Revell stated that he was busy but very happy. The Chairman asked the Engineer if he was happy with the water level control arrangement. The Engineer stated that he was very happy and by doing both water level control functions, it was cutting down a lot of duplication.

Environment Agency Works

Coldharbour Sluice

The Chairman asked if the Coldharbour Sluice was still leaking-in sea water. The Engineer stated that the leaking flap seal had blown again and was still leaking-in sea water. Mr Revell stated that the EA had now removed the flap and taken it away for repair.

Report of the Clerk for the period 1 January 2015 to 31 March 2015

Ref: W.1-33 Future of the EA Administered Internal Drainage Districts in the South East

The Clerk reported that there are currently 8 Internal Drainage Districts managed by the Environment Agency (EA) in Kent and Sussex. These are being dissolved and the land drainage activities in the areas they cover are being transferred to local management. In some of the areas, the land drainage activities will be taken over by the riparian owners with supervision from local authorities. There is however a plan to create a new IDB in East of Gravesend (Kent). In the East of Gravesend, the local authorities have agreed that a new IDB will be established. A draft scheme for abolishing the EA operated IDD and creating a new IDB is currently with Defra's legal department for comment. As soon as the scheme is agreed, the EA will advertise the scheme locally for public consultation, before it can be made into an Order to bring that into effect. It is hoped that this will come into effect by the end of this year. In East Sussex, there are

3 IDDBs to be abolished (River Cuckmere, Lewes and Laughton and Pevensy Levels). The local authorities favour establishing a new IDB which would take on the competent authority role of managing the land drainage activities in order to meet the requirements of the Pevensy Levels SSSI. The new IDB is likely to cover the River Cuckmere and Pevensy Levels Internal Drainage Districts in East Sussex. A Steering Group has been set up to progress the setting up of the IDB. As yet, no scheme has yet been drafted. The aim is to submit a draft scheme in June 2015 and bring this into effect by the end of March 2016. In West Sussex, it is most likely that the land drainage activities will be taken over by the riparian owners with supervision from local authorities.

The Engineer stated that he will be attending an East of Gravesend Steering Group Meeting in June where decisions in respect of the East of Gravesend IDB will be made.

Ref: W.7-2 Public Sector Co-operation Agreements (PSCAs)

The Clerk reported that exploratory discussions with Canterbury City Council and Ashford Borough Council have taken place and both councils have expressed an interest in entering into a PSCA with the Board. Councillor Mr D O Smith (Ashford Borough Council) stated that the last regular maintenance Ashford Borough Council's Engineering Department carried out on the dykes/watercourse the council is responsible for took place back in 2002. Councillor Smith stated that there was still a lot of local flooding and drainage problems in the Ashford Borough Council area and he was sincerely hopeful that Ashford Borough Council would enter into a Public Sector Co-operation Agreement with the Board and therefore be able to call upon, and use, the expertise of the Board and its contractors.

Administration

Ref: A.3-2 Election of Members (Members Representing Agricultural Ratepayers)

The Clerk reported that every three years, the Board is required to hold an election of its Members (Members representing Agricultural Ratepayers). 2015 is an election year and it is necessary for the Board to fix the date of the election (Thursday 29 October 2015 is the suggested date) and instruct the Clerk of the Board to prepare the Register of Electors.

The Clerk stated that the Board is required to:

- a) Fix the date of the Election - Thursday 29 October 2015, and
- b) Instruct the Clerk of the Board to prepare the Register of Electors.

It was proposed by Mr A D Linfoot, seconded by Councillor Mrs Marion Martin and resolved that Thursday 29 October 2015 be fixed as the date of the Election of Members and that the Clerk of the Board be instructed to prepare the Register of Electors.

Finance

Ref: F.1-2 2014/2015 Final Internal Audit Report

The Clerk reported that Mr David Griffiths, the Board's Internal Auditor, carried out his 2014/2015 year end internal audit inspection of the Board's 2014/2015 accounts and accounting records on Tuesday 5 May 2015 and that the Internal Auditor had now submitted his report for the Board's consideration and approval. The Chairman considered Mr Griffiths' report to be extremely good which complemented the Board's Staff on their very good standard of record keeping. It was proposed by the Chairman, seconded by Councillor Mrs Marion Martin and resolved that the 2014/2015 Final Internal Audit Report be received and approved.

Ref: F.1-2 Internal Control and Internal Audit Review Team's Report for 2014/2015

The Clerk reported that the Board's Internal Control and Internal Audit Review Team, consisting of the Councillor Mrs A K Hicks and Mr M P Wilkinson carried out their inspection of the Board's accounts and accounting records for 2014/2015 on Tuesday 5 May 2015. The Clerk further reported that during the course of the Audit Team's inspection, the Audit Team took the opportunity to meet with the Internal Auditor and discuss with the Internal Auditor details contained in his report to the Board. The Clerk further reported that the Audit Team has now submitted their report for the Board's consideration and approval.

The Chairman thanked the Audit Team for all their hard work and their report. The Chairman considered the Audit Team's report to be very good and recommended that the report be received and approved by the Board. It was therefore proposed by the Chairman, seconded by Councillor Mrs Marion Martin and resolved that the Internal Control and Internal Audit Review Team's Report dated 15 May 2015 be received and approved.

Ref: F.1-5 Accounts for the Year Ending 31 March 2015

The Chairman reported that the accounts for the year ending 31 March 2015 have been completed and balanced and that the Income and Expenditure Account showed the final out-run for the year to be a **surplus of £5,330.45**. The Chairman stated that the Clerk had managed to achieve a very low amount of outstanding drainage rates for the year. The Chairman stated that the Finance, General Purposes and Works Committee have recommended that the Board should approve the accounts and invited the Members to raise any issues they may have in respect of the accounts. It was proposed by the Vice Chairman, seconded by Councillor MD Conolly and resolved that the Accounts for the Year Ending 31 March 2015 be received and approved.

Ref: F.1-5 Audit Commission Annual Return for the Year Ended 31 March 2015

The Chairman reported that the Audit Commission requires the Board to approve Section 1 (Accounting Statements) and Section 2 (Annual Governance Statement) of the Annual Return for the year ended 31 March 2015. It was proposed by Mr A D Linfoot, seconded by Mr D M Botting and resolved that the Annual Return (Sections 1 & 2) for the Year Ending 31 March 2015 be approved.

Ref: F.1-6 Financial Risk Assessment for the Year Ended 31 March 2015

The Clerk reported that the Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2011, requires the Board to complete and approve a Financial Risk Assessment for the year ended 31 March 2015. The Clerk further reported that the Financial Risk Assessment for the year ended 31 March 2015 has been considered by the Finance, General Purposes and Works Committee and they have recommended that the Financial Risk Assessment for the year ended 31 March 2015 be received and approved by the Board.

It was proposed by Councillor Mrs Marion Martin, seconded by the Vice Chairman and resolved that the Financial Risk Assessment for the year ended 31 March 2015 be received and approved.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Future Staff Levels

The Chairman advised the Board that the Clerk will be retiring in early March next year. The Chairman also stated that it has also been suggested that as the Board is now taking on the EA's water level control tasks, the Board's Water Level Controller (Shaun Revell) may now need a part-time or full-time apprentice/assistant. The Chairman stated that in view of these changes in staffing, he would like to suggest that a small Sub-Committee should be formed in order to consider what level of Board's staff that will be required in the future. The Chairman suggested that the Sub-Committee should include himself, the Vice Chairman and two of the members of the Board's Audit Control Team, Councillor Mrs Aline Hicks and Mr M P Wilkinson.

It was proposed by Councillor Mrs Marion Martin, seconded by Councillor M D Conolly and resolved that a small Sub-Committee, consisting of the Chairman, Vice Chairman, Councillor Mrs Aline Hicks and Mr M P Wilkinson be formed to consider the level of the Board's staff for the future.

Postage

Mr D M Botting asked why the members' papers for meetings were always sent out by First Class mail. Mr Botting considered that Second Class mail would be sufficient and save the Board on postage costs. The Clerk stated that Second Class mail did not have the same guaranteed delivery and was treated by Royal Mail very differently. The Vice Chairman considered it would be worthwhile conducting a trial for one or two meetings to see if Second Class mail was appropriate. The Vice Chairman stated that the Board should record date sent and the members should record date of receipt. The Clerk stated that he would arrange for Second Class mail to be used for the next few meeting papers.

MEETING CLOSED

There being no further business, the Chairman declared the meeting closed and thanked the members for their attendance.
