

Minutes of the Whittlesey & District IDB Meeting held on Tuesday, 1 June 2021 at 2.30 pm via Zoom

Present:

R Brown (RB) Chairman	P Tingey (PT)
R Fletcher (FR) Vice Chairman	Cllr D Laws (DL)
P Bradshaw (PB)	A Price (AP)
A Cade (AC)	R Price (RP) CEO
M Fisher (MF)	

WD01/21. Apologies for absence: K Mayor, C Saunders, M Sweet.

a. Declaration of Pecuniary Interest: Cllr D Laws on planning matters, drainage, and irrigation; R Price, A Price as directors of PDSM.

WD02/21. Matters Arising

a) A605 Kings Dyke Scheme

After hours of meetings, a cheque has been received from Cambs County Council for £23,397.65 for the removal of surface water from the new flyover. The agreement for discharge was reasonable with the price locked. It only remains for the RF to sign to formalise the agreement.

b) Wisbech Garden Town

This is on the backburner for the foreseeable future.

c) Unpaid Drainage Rates – Debtors

There are a few small unpaid bills and three large amounts: C Ablitt – £2312.28, H Burgess & Sons - £837, Old Chapel Farming Company £689.40. Five final demands were issued by Recorded Delivery requesting payment by 31 March 2021 advising matters would be taken further if payment not received. No-one has been in touch to arrange a payment plan to date. RB stated that this was unfair on all the other members who had paid. The Finance Committee will try and bring a plan forward to deter this from happening again in the form of adding interest for unpaid bills.

It was possible that the non-payment from H Burgess & Sons was due to excess water on 6 acres of land. The Board were unaware of the situation as this issue had not been reported. Morfoots surveyed the whole area 18 months ago in that vicinity to ascertain whether the drains were adequate to cope. The findings were that if the drains are kept clean, they are sufficiently deep to take the water away; evidence was provided. The landowner or tenant is responsible for enabling the water to reach the drain to take the water away.

d) Upcoming Election for the W&DIDB sitting board members

Notices are on the website and the process has been simplified. People currently on the Board will be reinvited. There is interest from new people. RP will send individual emails to establish people's preference and send the appropriate paperwork to whoever is invited to join the Board.

WD03/21. Operating Engineer

a) The Operation Engineer's 2021 drain works programme

This year's drain works plan consists of basket cutting and flail mowing, although RB indicated that prices may have to rise due to the movement from red to white diesel, which has not been budgeted for.

Other than some breakdowns with pumps, control of the water has been managed. There are quite a few bank slips, with some big ones to address. The Environmental Officer, Peter Beckenham from Middle Level will walk the drains on behalf of the Board. The Water Vole reports will be ready for

Natural England. There are some banks have slips on both sides totalling 2.2 kilometres but only one side can be repaired at a time. Nearly all the slips are in silt hills and one where a land drain has been buried. The vast majority are in the Ramsey Mereside/Glassmoor Bank area, and these will be fixed as and when possible. The banks will be tidied up until they can be done properly.

Through the strain of the winter months terrific help has been given from the board members. Water levels have been so high that a lot of pumps were struggling, and the syphons would not close automatically. New Plantation had water coming back through the pumping station and the drain collapsed outside. The loss adjusters confirmed that the Board are covered. The pumping station shut down completely even though Alwyn was checking and raking out the weed screen. Over next few hours more water came through. The pump chamber is to be high vacuumed to remove the silt and debris. This had a knock-on effect on Ramsey Mereside which could only run one of the two pumps. The weight of the water put too much pressure on the outlet flap valves. The mobile pumps had to go to Lords. Ian Stanley helped to run pumps for 2.5 months solid and after that due to the wet weather. The water was kept off the land. All assets have been put through extreme pressure but, the Board has managed in a very tough year.

DL asked whether after receiving £23,397.65 for A605 King Dyke Project is the Board satisfied with the drainage system. RP reported that the pumping stations at Manor Farm and Underwoods have sufficient capacity to cope with the additional water.

DL asked whether the Board had been approached by the investors of Churchill Farm, consisting of 21 acres. There is a query on the surface water drainage from west to east near to the A605 bridge. RP confirmed that this land is in the highlands, unless the water came into Cambs County Council run through the syphon. DL advised this was covered over by Jones Bros the contractors and negotiations are going to have to start as it is prohibitive.

DL asked if there had been any involvement with emergency meeting with Steve Berkley; there had been 500 flood events since Xmas, most affected March where people had to evacuate homes. Middle Level were to report back to the Board. It was suggested Middle Level be approached to see their response. The W&D IDB work was fully appreciated as without it there could have been serious flooding. It was suggested that the Board contact David Thomas for an update; the meeting was held on Friday, 22 January; the only authority that did not respond was the EA.

RB expressed sincere thanks to everyone who had assisted on Christmas Eve

Pumping station works that need to be carried out this year – refer to spreadsheet.

b) The Operation Engineer to report upon other matters

i) Overview of Asset repairs required.

Ramsey Mereside PS- Well Chamber to have cracks sealed and repointed.

Beggars Bridge PS- Weedscreen Cleaner to be refurbished.

Lords Farm PS- Panels and Supply to be upgraded.

Plantation Farm PS- Investigations into bank and PS failure.

ii) Long-term strategy for security of Assets

Long term strategy for security of the assets. Deficits in past years has meant a big reduction in reserves, and an Action Plan is required to bring these reserves back to where they should be. Engineering inflation of costs. The hourly rate has increased dramatically over the past few years and, there are less contractors available and willing to carry out the work.

WD04/21. General Matters

a) Risk Management & Health & Safety

Assessments have been carried out by the NFU for the last two years. It was discussed at the Finance and General Purposes Meeting on 18 May that RP should routinely contact a third party nearby when lone working in remote areas, for example, attending water inlets. RP, Philip Green and other contractors are to put a plan in place, as a matter of urgency to make procedures safer. PT has a plan as to how best to design the water controls instead of piling. A further Finance & General Purposes Meeting is required to discuss and finalise water control procedures going forward.

b) ADA – Continue to address issues affecting land Drainage Authorities
ADA is assisting in pushing back against new DEFRA rules and regulations regarding conservation strips for drainage boards. It does make it more difficult for drainage, but we will have to wait to see what happens.

WD05/21. Payments - consider payments made by the Board 2020/21:
The payment vouchers were considered by the Board and accepted.

WD06/21. Annual Accounts year ending 31st March 2021 (*Accounts to be presented, but signed off by F&GP committee upon audit completion*)

a) To consider and approve the Annual Governance Statement for the year ended 31st March 2021. As the end of year accounts were not back from the Internal Auditor, the general committee agreed that the accounts were to be approved at Finance & General Purposes meeting later in the month.

b) Annual Accounting Statement for the year ending 31st March 2021.
RP confirmed that the accounts are currently with the Internal Auditor. The meeting agreed that the accounts could be approved at the next Finance & General Purposes Meeting later in the month. RB thanked A Price and L Price for the work carried out to present the accounts. It was agreed that the AGAR report would be sent out to all the general committee members for their approval prior to the Finance Meeting.

d) RP reported that the Notice of public Rights and Publication of unaudited Annual Return will run from 7th July to 31st July 2021 and the appropriate notices will be displayed. Once the AGAR form is complete and signed off with the end of year accounts by the external auditor, the return will be posted on the website to view, to enable and concerns to be raised as part of the Good Governance guide. A copy of the AGAR form and end of year accounts will be sent to all general committee members for their approval.

e) The Board consider and approve Internal Audit arrangements for 2021/22.
It was proposed that Ivan Cooper continues as the Board's internal auditor. Proposed by RB and seconded by RF.

WD07/21. Income & Expenditure

Report upon income and expenditure for 2020/2021

The only item that stood out from a spending point of view is the pump hire from SLD which was required to deal with the emergency. The most expensive cost is electricity.

It was proposed by RB and seconded by RF that the Income and Expenditure and Budget sheets be accepted.

WD08/21. Rates and Levy Requirement

Under Section 37 of the Land Drainage Act 1991, the appropriate proportions in which the net expenditure of the Board must be met for 2020/2021 is: -

a)	Agricultural Sector	57.55%
b)	Special Levy issued to Fenland District Council	36.34%
c)	Special Levy issued to Huntingdonshire D C	6.11%

The Board made a deficit of £54,369.00 in 2020/2021
The Whittlesey Board have raised a 12p rate since 2008/2009

RB asked the RF to put forward a proposal regarding the rate in the £1 for 2021/22, as discussed at the Finance Meeting of 14.75p. PT commented that the infrastructure is getting older and felt the rise was justified, but the amount should perhaps be nudged up by 3p to 15p. AC referred to the New

Plantation substantial costs of between £10,000 or £50,000. An explanation should be given to ratepayers of the increased costs. Reserves should be available should a worst-case scenario occur, as it nearly did last year. Top priority is the New Plantation, along with Lords. Following discussion RF proposed 15p in the £1. DL seconded this, commenting that if rate did not increase then there would be huge deficit. Ratepayers should be advised that the Board are placed in a position to increase the rate due to the increased cost of pumps, electricity, and repairs. She proposed that a further rate review be put on next year's agenda and not leave it for 2 years; RB seconded this.

RP confirmed he will include a note explaining and justifying as much as possible the rate increase. RB confirmed that the rate will be sealed at the next Finance and General Purposes meeting.

WD09/21. Date of next meeting

The next meeting will take place on Tuesday, 2 November 2021 – (Potentially) Town Hall, Market Street, Whittlesey at 2.30pm or Peel House Council Offices.

WD10/21. Any Other Business

a) Next Finance and General Purposes Meeting - RP's previous pension before joining the Cambridgeshire County Council pension has not been formalised to date. There is also a formal arrangement of contract with PDSM to finalise for the protection of both PDSM and the Board, and a new contract of employment for RP. Proposed by RB, seconded by TM.

b) RB hopes a day trip in the summer can be organised, including refreshments, and to invite Russell Wright to thank him for his past work.