

WITHAM FIRST DISTRICT INTERNAL DRAINAGE BOARD

Minutes of the one hundred and twenty sixth meeting of Witham First District Internal Drainage Board held on Wednesday, 22nd November 2023 in Branston Booths Village Hall at 2pm.

Present:

Mr E Applewhite
Mr D C Armstrong Chairman
Mr S Cobb
Cllr K Fernandes
Mr P Gilbert
Cllr A Hagues
Cllr M Head
Cllr G Hewson
Mr A Hodgson
Mr D Leggate
Dr B Maplethorpe
Mr A Means
Cllr L Sanders
Mr C R Oxby
Dr V Stanton
Cllr P J Vaughan

In attendance:

Mr Ian Coupland Director of Operations
Miss Jayne Flower Executive Assistant
Mrs Jane Froggatt Chief Executive
Mr Steve Larter Director of Finance & Governance
Mr Martin Shilling Director of Engineering & Technical Services

2650 Apologies for absence.

Apologies for absence were received from Mr D Busby, Cllr I Carrington, Mr P Carrot (Vice Chairman), Cllr M Clarke, Mr W Grantham, Mr M Harrison, Mr R Hickling, Mr S Leggate, Mr I Mair and Mr S Maplethorpe.

2651 Declarations of Interest.

Declarations of interest were received from members appointed by City of Lincoln Council and North Kesteven District Council, in matters relating to their respective Councils.

2652 Election of Chairman.

Mr David Armstrong was nominated, seconded and there being no further nominations duly elected as Chairman for the following year.

2653 Chairman's Announcements.

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the November Annual Public Meeting and thanked Members for electing him once again as Chairman.

There was much to get through today and therefore it was a slightly revised agenda to accommodate discussion of Storm Babet which hit Lincolnshire on 20.10.23, whilst undertaking the necessary Annual Public Meeting duties of election of Chairman, Vice-Chairman and members of the Executive Committee.

The Chairman extended a welcome to the new members nominated by the Special Levy paying councils:

- **Cllr Leigh Sanders** has filled the vacancy for a NKDC nominated member.
- Cllr Peter Lundgren is replaced as a NKDC nominated member by **Cllr Mike Clarke**.
- Cllr Susan Waring is succeeded as a NKDC nominated member by **Cllr Andrew Hagues**.
- **Cllr Mervyn Head** rejoins the Board, having previously served as a member nominated by NKDC in 2021.

Members recorded thanks to outgoing Councillors for their contribution to the Board's work.

An additional change for Witham First was the nomination of elected member **Cllr Ken Fernandes**, representing the electoral ward of Sleaford on behalf of Sleaford Town Council [who qualify as landowners and drainage rate payers by virtue of the Sleaford allotments].

Members were advised by the Chairman that they would complete the Governance requirements and confirm previous minutes. Then, following the Chief Executive's report they would move on to discuss Storm Babet and the significant impact this has had in the drainage district and more widely across Lincolnshire.

He reminded Members that, if they had not already done so, to please confirm with Jayne Flower attendance at the Members' Training Day on Tuesday, 05th December 2023.

2654 Election of Vice Chairman.

Although not present at the meeting today, Members were informed that Mr Paul Carrot was willing to stand as Vice Chairman. He was proposed, seconded and there being no further nominations, duly elected as Vice Chairman.

2655 Election of Executive Committee Members.

All 8 current members, namely the Chairman, Vice Chairman, Mr Ed Applewhite, Mr Steven Cobb, Mr Peter Gilbert, Mr Ron Oxby, Mr Mark Harrison and Mr Simon Maplethorpe were elected to the Executive Committee en-bloc.

2656 Election of Joint Services Committee Members.

The 3 current members, namely the Chairman, Vice Chairman and Mr Peter Gilbert and the current deputies, Mr Steve Cobb and Mr Mark Harrison, were re-elected en-bloc to the JSC.

2657 Calendar of Meetings 2024

Members AGREED the following dates for 2024:

Witham First District Board Meetings (Branston Booths Village Hall at 2pm):

- Tuesday, 30th January.
- Tuesday, 21st May
- Tuesday, 26th November (+APM).

Witham First Executive Committee Meetings (W1st Depot, Woodhall Spa at 2pm):

- Tuesday, 16th January.
- Tuesday, 07th May.
- Tuesday, 12th November

Joint Services Committee Meetings (at 10am, Witham House, Meadow Lane):

- Monday, 13th May.
- Monday, 15th July.
- Monday, 09th December.

Annual Inspection 2024

- Thursday, 26th September.

2658 Register of Members' Interests.

In accordance with the Members Code of Conduct, members were asked to complete the annual update to the Register of Members' Interests form for the Register and to submit this form to Jayne Flower at the end of the meeting, or direct to Witham House.

2659 Minutes of the previous Board meeting, 23.05.23.

The Minutes of the Board's previous meeting held on 23rd May 2023 were proposed, seconded and APPROVED as an accurate record.

MATTERS ARISING:

There were no matters arising, all being covered by the agenda.

2660 Joint Services Committee 17.07.23.

The minutes of the Joint Services Committee held on 17th July 2023 had been circulated with the agenda and were received and NOTED by members.

MATTERS ARISING:

There were no matters arising.

2661 Minutes of the Executive Committee meeting, 07.11.23.

The minutes of the Board's Executive Committee meeting held on Tuesday, 07th November 2023 had been circulated with the agenda and were proposed by Mr Ron Oxby, seconded by Mr Ed Applewhite and APPROVED as an accurate record.

MATTERS ARISING:

Mr Steve Cobb asked why there was no mention of the EA's Car Dyke. He was reassured that it would be covered in detail during the meeting today.

2662 Chief Executive's Report.

The Chief Executive's report had been circulated with the agenda, and issues highlighted included:

2662.1 Storm Babet 20.10.23

Storm Babet was a significant event, with over 100mm of rain falling in some parts of Lincolnshire in the 24 hours to 21:00 on Friday 20.10.23. Some of the issues raised included seven known breaches in EA maintained main rivers in Lincolnshire and many sites of main river bank overtopping and significant bank seepage.

Although all 4 drainage districts were affected, with localised flooding in many locations (e.g., Westborough in UW, Brant Broughton in UW, Digby in W1st, Brant Road in Lincoln [UW], Horncastle in W3rd) the 2 Boards' systems and assets were particularly hit hard in Witham Third DIDB and Witham First DIDB districts.

2662.1.2 The following list summarised the impact in Witham First DIDB's district:

- Overtopping on EA South Delph: sending water into Canwick Fen and on to inundate the Board's Sandhill pumping station. Careful partial opening/closing of Ferry Lane penstock to balance water between Sandhill PS [with the objective of not losing its ability to pump] and Heighington Fen and pumping station. This has been an ongoing issue for weeks and landowners on both sides of the issue have been affected. There will be reinstatement/recovery costs once the impact at both Sandhill PS and Heighington PS can be assessed. Mobile pumps been deployed at both Sandhill PS to lift water into South Delph and at Heighington PS. Levels in Canwick Fen coming down c100mm per day and overtopping has ceased.

- Sandhill Beck overflow: the 2006 legal agreement between the Board and the EA was intended as providing a managed spillway at the tide lock at the height of a flood event, not as 10/12 days of overflow at full bore with operation of the penstocks to move water through to Heighington Fen and operate as one catchment. This has been raised as an issue for review with the EA. Also noted, vermin holes adjacent to the overflow site.
- Heighington Fen PS had been pumping constantly, due to 1; overflow weir from EA Sandhill Beck and 2; EA's Heighington Beck overflowing.
- Branston PS: Branston Fen overflow weir has now been closed. A big issue here is the syphon driver is set too low [below the bank full level of the River Witham]. Potential future scheme to install penstocks.
- Washingborough road closure. Board is assisting with reducing levels, but apparently water not emanating from the Board's watercourses. Potentially a blocked/collapsed road culvert. Levels circa 800mm down since Saturday 04.11.23. A lot of local concerns about the temporary road closure, which was in place until Friday 10.11.23.
- Electrical fire at Farroway PS: MCC panel serving the Ruskington catchment pump is down [£9k estimated repair cost], which has put a lot of pressure on the Anwick Fen pump. Anwick STW was inundated, and Moy Park had to temporarily close. Water from EA's Dorrington Dyke.
- Ringmoor PS is inaccessible.
- Timberland PS, electrical phase failed at the start of the flood event and Western Power repaired asap. But Billingham PS operated for 17 hours.
- Digby: both pumps came out for refurbishment in early 2023 and have run well through the event. PS was inundated, but pumps still ran. Source was EA Dorrington Dyke overtopping & being full of reed mass. One of the oldest MCC panels though. Flooding in Digby village, although not as extensive as would have been the case without the Digby FAS channel bypass scheme. Extensive flooding on Digby Fen [visual inspection 07.11.23 & the water had receded considerably].
- 3x EA Carr Dyke sites of significant bank overtopping, impacting on Metheringham Fen PS and requiring additional pumping hours/costs.
- Blankney PS: Taking water from EA's Timberland Delph overflow and River Witham general seepage. Failure of 2 electrical motors- Rundles promptly repaired both and reinstated.
- Chapel Hill PS, North Kyme PS and Nocton PS: no issues reported at these locations to date.
- Sleaford & North Hykeham MP Dr Caroline Johnson met with representatives of Witham First DIDB at Digby Pumping Station on 09.11.23 including the Chairman, Mr

Peter Gilbert, Cllr Ian Carrington, Jane Froggatt, Martin Shilling and Ian Coupland.

2662.1.3 Members were advised that we have now received the electricity bills for October, and it was confirmed that for this Board it was £103k.

2662.1.4 The Lincolnshire LRF convened 20.10.23 and the SCG, TCG and supporting Pump Cell met daily, sometimes more frequently, for a couple of weeks. No emergency was declared, but a major incident was declared in relation to the River Witham bank slump at Fiskerton [to which W3rd responded with its 3 pumping stations at Short Ferry, Fiskerton Diesels and Greetwell - evacuating water at 6,600 litres per second for 24/7 over the last couple of weeks to reduce the flood cell water level where 81 residential properties were at risk of flooding]. There was good cooperation with IDB and EA staff operationally, and the Lincolnshire LRF across agencies during Storm Babet.

In summary, the event has caused more damaging impacts to two of the Boards' assets than the series of rainfall events in 2019/20. The Boards are still dealing with the impact and the full recovery costs and additional pumping costs are not yet known. These costs will be collated, as known to form the Statement of Claim to be submitted to the RFCC Chairman and EA's Area Director.

The 4 Witham & Humber Drainage Boards' Chairmen had collectively written to Mr Eddy Poll, Chairman of the Anglian [Northern] RFCC to advise of the severe impact of Storm Babet, to highlight that there is no national or local funding mechanism for the IDBs to use for necessary recovery works and to meet third-party excess water pumping electricity costs. A similar approach was being taken by other IDBs, including W4th.

2662.2 Pay Award 2023/24.

On Thursday 21st September Lance Pennell and Jane Froggatt attended the Lincolnshire ADA Branch's Pay & Conditions Committee meeting. Employers and staff side representatives Unison reached agreement on a proposed pay settlement for 2024/25 from 01st April 2024.

This is a consolidation of £1,130 [of the 2023/24 unconsolidated hardship sum of £1,800] as stage 1 and then, as stage 2, 6.45% applied to the new baseline. This 6.45% is in keeping with the pay formula used previously [of 12 months rolling average change in public sector Average Weekly Earnings July 2022-July 2023, as published in September].

Both parties sought ratification of the proposed pay settlement proposal for 2024/25. Unison Lincolnshire IDB Branch put the proposal to their members, those employed only by the 7 relevant IDBs, and undertook to respond to

Employers with a yes/no result before 19.10.23. Employers put it for ratification to the ADA Lincolnshire Branch meeting on 19th October 2023.

The pay claim presented initially by Unison was for 11% [being 9% RPI related, and 2% catch-up inflation claim]. Employers rejected the pay claim and counter-offered a deal of consolidation of £1,000 + 6.45%, this offer was rejected by Unison.

Unison then submitted a counterclaim for £1,130 + 6.45% [an impact which increases the LDO role salary on SP15 by 11.06%, increasing the salary from £26,376 in 2023/24 to £29,292 in 2024/25 from 01.04.24]. This was accepted as a fair and reasonable compromise which meets a key pay objective of narrowing pay differentials within IDBs and gives a larger proportionate pay increase to those staff on lower pay scales within the IDBs.

The £1,800 paid as an unconsolidated hardship sum in 2023/24 is in our W&HDB baseline revenue budgets. This is therefore already in our baseline to offset the cost impact of the £1,130 consolidated sum element as is part of the 6.45%. So, for employers presentation-wise we have a deal which is fair to staff, narrows internal IDB pay differentials in line with a key pay objective and which in our budget setting for 24/25 will hopefully be palatable to Drainage Rate payers and Special Levy Paying Councils.

On Tuesday 17th October we received notification of a clear Unison ballot result of YES for the proposed 2024/25 pay settlement from 01st April 2024. The proposed settlement with staff-side endorsement went to the ADA Lincolnshire Branch where it was endorsed and adopted as the recommended pay settlement for 2024/25 on 19.10.23. It now comes to the November Board meetings for each Board to formally adopt the settlement.

Members APPROVED the recommended ADA Lincolnshire Branch pay settlement for 2024/25, from 01st April 2024, as set out.

The Chief Executive placed on record her thanks to Cllr Lance Pennell, UW member, who serves on the ADA Lincolnshire Branch's Pay & Conditions Committee as the 4 Boards' representative. Lance has indicated his willingness to serve on the Committee for a further year, but should another member be interested in taking the role from November 2024 then he or the Chief Executive would welcome expressions of interest.

2662.3 Staffing

2662.3.1 **Guy Hird, Head of Engineering & Technical Services**, retired on Friday 03rd November after over 34 years with the IDBs and 4 years' prior service with Lincolnshire County Council Highways. A small gathering was held in the office on Thursday 02nd November to wish him well. Members placed on record their thanks to Guy for his long service and wish him well. After a short break, Guy returns to work for the Boards in January 2024 as the part-time Consents & Planning Officer [working 2 days per week and 3 days per week, alternate weeks].

2662.3.2 **Kevin Rossington, LDO for Witham First DIB**, retired on 17th November after almost 30 years' service. His colleagues joined him for a farewell lunch at Abbey Lodge and presentation of his retirement gift.

The Chief Executive's report and update were received, discussed and NOTED.

2663 Storm Babet.

The Director of Engineering and technical Services introduced a presentation on the effects of Storm Babet.

The presentation provided a detailed summary of the events over the initial 7-10 days from when the storm landed on Friday 20th October 2023, noting that there had already been some significant rainfall to many areas in the days leading up to this heavy rainfall event.

Numerous alerts had been issued by the EA in the 24 hours leading up to the storm and it had been widely reported and predicted by weather and news agencies. 14 flood alerts which recommend "be prepared" and 17 flood warnings which advise the public to "Act Now" had been issued.

One months' worth of rain fell in 24 hours on 20th October.

Amounts greater than 100mm were recorded upstream of Woodhall Spa and Horncastle in the 24 hours up to 9pm on Friday 20th October.

No location was spared.

This event gave the highest ever recorded rainfall in most gauges – this is since their installation during 1950's and 1960's. Seepage was a real issue particularly for Heighington, Branston, Sandhill and throughout the lower Witham area. Banks are now fully saturated and damaged in places. This will be a potential issue for this coming winter.

Members were advised that the assets dealing with the storm are over 50 years old, and it was reiterated that there is no point rebuilding to previous defence levels. Assets need to be built back better, to a higher standard of flood defence. There is no point spending money to be in the same position when the next heavy rainfall event occurs. Most of the district pumping stations are not designed to work under water, they are not electric submersible pumps but surface mounted pumps that operated for significant periods whilst inundated, with resulting damage to bearings etc.

On a positive note, it was agreed that the pump cells meetings across Lincolnshire agencies were useful, and Officers requested and received more pumps capacity. This worked well, much better than in previous events, such as 2019.

Val Stanton stated that there were 3 mobile pumps operated in Heighington with 1 provided by the EA. Ian Coupland, Director of Operations, stated that the new modern engines for the EA mobile pumps were used for the first time during this event and they failed after a short period of use. All the modern pumps that had been loaned to the Board had suffered with numerous issues.

The Board's own ex-EA second hand pumps worked well, without issue.

An example of the enormous extra workload placed upon pumping stations was provided, with the hours pumped in the month to 23.09.23 and to 23.10.23:

Pumped Hours		
PS	23-Sep	23-Oct
Sandhill	30	278
Heighington	32	560
Branston	27	451
Blankney	0	340
Billingham	0	33
Digby	3	537

Members were informed that the Billingham pump had not been in operation for almost 15 years but managed 33 hours during October.

The Chairman went round the room, to invite comments from members.

Steve Cobb gave comments to the meeting from a pre-prepared statement which he handed over. He expressed concerns regarding the handling of the water from Storm Babet.

"He firmly believed that mistakes were made by the board's officials in the Canwick, Washingborough and Heighington fen areas.

The first mistake he felt had been made, was that Officers did not contact the Board members representing the area, as they have knowledge of the area, in some cases going back a long time, such as floods from 1960's and 1970's when bank failures in Washingborough and Canwick fens caused problems. The 1960's failure was a breach behind the area of the proposed Sainsbury store in Washingborough fen was sealed very quickly (48hrs) and little flooding took place, certainly not on the scale of recent floods.

The 1970 flood of Canwick fen caused a lot more problems, water from Canwick fen found its way to Heighington fen and filled the drains to the top, there was no sluice in ferry lane and the culvert was eventually blocked with large amounts of stone after trying with large straw bales which were forced through the culvert like being shot out of a gun and the wooden sluice under Sandhill closed these actions prevented major flooding in Washingborough and Heighington fen".

Mr Cobb detailed his specific observations, reproduced as follows:

- "Friday 20.10.23 was a wet day and he recorded 84 mm of rain. River levels south delph 3 /4 full.
- Saturday 21.10.23 the south delph was full, Carr dyke over topping at Branston Booths approx. 100 meters of water crossing road max depth 150mm (6inches) this water entering Heighington fen. Sand hill beck spillway working 6 inches + overflow into Washingborough fen. Social Media reports of breach in Canwick fen. Heighington beck over topping at fosters bridge water reached north dales drain.
- Sunday 22.10.23 Canwick fen full, he assumed that the Board had closed the sluice gate to contain the water and protect Washingborough and the fen as Canwick fen filled in just over 24 hrs, Heighington beck over topping at fosters bridge (approx.

24mtrs wide max depth 6 inches (this was still over topping on 27.10.23) this water goes to Heighington pump, spillway still working, Branston Booths still over topping. Branston booths delph now full so leaking badly from both sides. Water from Sewage works discharging to Heighington fen.

Mr Cobb sent pictures to Martin by email who responded that it was good to get information from the ground. Mr Cobb queried then, why no officer had contacted the Board's representatives for the area, they have more knowledge of the areas than the officers, daily and historical and if contacted would have helped in making correct decisions, something that did not happen.

- Monday 24.10.23 concerned that the sluice in ferry lane that he had assumed was closed was in fact open, and that because of the danger to Sandhill pump the sluice under the beck was to be opened. Mr Cobb contacted the Chief Executive at this point with concerns about liability of a board action flooding land. This duly happened. Land previously clear of flood water became flooded as a direct result of this uncontrolled action, enter mobile pumps, which holds levels at the pump station, levels away are raising, too much was being let through. The damage to land and growing crops is still to be assessed, a claim will be forwarded.
- Tuesday 25.10.23 Ferry lane sluice opened to prevent water overflowing ferry lane, ok to flood property and land but ferry lane can't have water flowing over it.
- Wednesday 26.10.23 level at ferry lane sluice down sluice open too much.
- Thursday 27.10.23 an email from Martin Shilling states that the sluice in ferry lane has now been closed, which in Mr Cobb's opinion was 5 days too late. He reported billions of gallons of water had been allowed to enter Washingborough fen and put property and the pump at risk. A higher level of water in Canwick fen would have lowered the amount entering from the river.

Mr Cobb concluded that in his opinion something needs to be done as this problem will only get worse. He believed that several times since the spillway on Sandhill beck was started he had said that the pumps capacity required upgrading as he believed it had never coped with the water that overflows. He felt that an extra pump should be installed immediately, one that operates from a higher level.

He continued that the EA never got permission to flood land from the owners, a matter that needs redressing. At the time it was said that the spillway will only operate for up to 24 hrs when the river was tidal locked, allowing the boards pump to clear the overflow with little or no flooding.

Mr Cobb argued that the Board's agreement to pump water was never discussed at executive or Board level, suggesting that it was presented by the Board's clerk at the time as a done deal, and a bad one for the rate payers.

The sluice at ferry lane requires a flood wall behind at the level of the river bank top, this would keep ferry lane dry. Water from Heighington beck the overflow point at fosters bridge requires the bank building up to prevent over flow. There's not a lot that can be done to prevent water from the Carr dyke entering Heighington fen or the seeping from Branston delph an upgrade for Heighington pump is now required as the lack of capacity has now

been shown, the amount of water entering from the concrete areas outside the Board's control means we cannot sit back we must get on and improve now, or we shall be letting the rate payers down.

Mr Cobb would like the Board to have a proper action plan for every fen to help prevent mistakes happening and this should be done immediately with full consultation of the Board's area members.

He felt that one thing was crystal clear: the Board should not have to deal with the EA's short comings.

He queried why are river levels kept high, when a flood completely ruins any good work done for the environment by the rate payers and land owners in the Board's area, rather than wait for the EA to do something we should get ahead do what is necessary to protect this area.

Continuing, Steve Cobb argued that the opinion that to let water under Sandhill beck was only doing it like in the days of the diesel pumps was wrong. He believed that the sluice was only open in the summer months so that the pump at Sandhill was not used, in the winter it was closed, and pump operated as required by drain maintenance former staff member Chick Mitchell. The installation of the electric pump and channel changes made the operation of the sluice redundant.

The detailed report from Mr Cobb covered only matters up to 27th October 2023. His priority was that the damage to growing crops in Washingborough fen was over £100k, caused by the spillway and the failure to close Canwick fen sluice. In Heighington fen damage to growing crops is over £150k all caused by what he saw as the IDB's uncontrolled transfer of water from Washingborough fen”.

He was thanked for his observations, the meeting moved on without response.

At the beginning of the meeting a letter had been handed to the Officers on behalf of Washingborough Parish Council. It raised numerous [29] questions and requests for general information. Officers would be attending the Washingborough Parish Council meeting the following week on Tuesday 28th November with a view to answering as many of the issues as possible. Ed Applewhite referred to this letter and asked if the Board was able to recharge the electricity charges to the EA.

[Post meeting note: the letter from Washingborough Parish Council and the response from the Board had been circulated to members, by email, after the Board meeting].

Ed Applewhite suggested that the IDB had made this area of land a flood area. The meeting moved on, with on this occasion no opportunity for Officers to respond.

ADA does have some traction with the EA and Ian Hodge, the EA's Chief Engineer, will visit the W1st and W3rd Districts on Wednesday, 03rd January 2024. Officers will be lobbying him to discuss the need for forward planning and resilience measures as we cannot prevent these floods happening unless we upgrade our defence levels.

Peter Gilbert commented that for his area the pumps coped well, he was very fortunate and there were no record highs at Kirkstead. He did ask the EA to lower the Witham prior to the

storm but this was not actioned. It was noted that local EA staff feel constrained by regulations for winter levels for navigation of rivers.

Bridget Maplethorpe noted that there had been overtopping in her area – the likes not seen in 60 or 70 years at Digby Fen. All her farmland at Digby was flooded, the land stayed flooded for a full week despite having not flooded before.

Finally, members of the Board recorded their thanks to all Operatives, particularly Adrian Skelton, Pumping Stations Foreman, for their efforts.

2664 Operations Report, including Health & Safety.

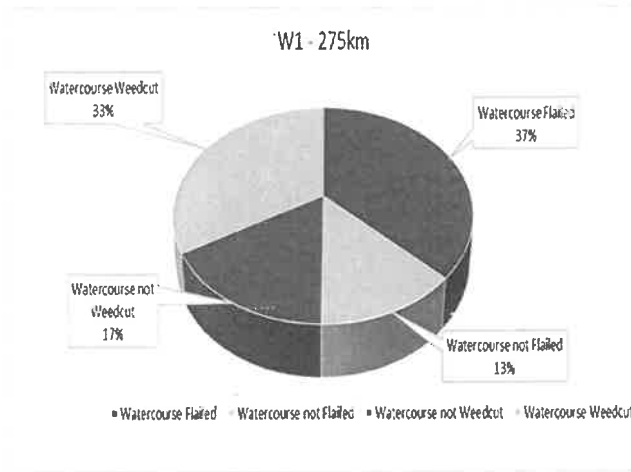
The Operations report had been circulated with the agenda and was presented by the Director of Operations.

Between the 4 Boards, there had been 7 reported incidents, with minor injuries reported, 2 in the W1 Board:

- (UW) Staff Member leaving Witham House Car Park, when vehicle on carriageway was overtaking a cycle, the Staff Member stopped – Near Miss Road Traffic Collision.
- (W1) Operative tripped up step (no defect to the step), landed awkwardly and hurt rib. Reported to RIDDOR as an over 7-day incident.
- (W3) Operative caught door track with teleporter pallet tine.
- (W3) Operative ‘tripped’ over capping stone when they were walking backwards.
- (W3) RTC.
- (W3) Operative trapped thumb when setting down ladder.
- (W1) Operative caught stay line of over-head power lines. Rectified with power company, no loss of power, rapid response. Internal investigation completed.

July saw the start of annual flailing and weed cutting maintenance programme. This has proven to be a very challenging season, with the late and sporadic harvest and the weather that has worked against us, followed by Storm Babet. Across the group other challenges this year include unfilled vacancies, long term illness absence, Operatives having to take time to care for seriously ill family members. Even with all these issues and pressures, three of the four Boards would have finished the vegetation maintenance by Christmas 2023 and the fourth Board, Witham First DIDB, by late January 2024, until Storm Babet impacted.

The following charts have been introduced to put some metrics to what maintenance works are described each time in the Operations report- to give members a feel for what has been done and what works remain. As a reminder for new members, we flail first and then the excavator drivers follow-on with weed cutting. The charts map out the Board's November position regarding vegetation maintenance, as of 31.10.23:



As part of our annual programme de-silting, reforming and bushing notices have been sent out ready for this work to begin in the new year. Following the heavy rainfall, we have seen numerous new bank slips and issues arise. We will deal with all problems as promptly as possible. We may see some of our planned winter works maintenance postponed, to accommodate urgent bank slip repairs.

Kevin Rossington, the Board's Pump attendant and flail Operator retired on 17.11.23 after 29 years and 8 months working for Witham First. Kevin's pump knowledge and attention to detail will be sorely missed. It has been agreed that the role of pump attendant and flail operator will be separated, and each role filled separately. We have had some internal applications for the pump role, and we have interviewed externally but have yet to decide [TBC 14.11.23].

It was previously reported that the first pump at Digby had been lifted and was away for refurbishment, with the second pump to follow. These have now both been reinstated and are working hard. Pump NO.1 cost £19,882.00 and No.2 cost £16,950.00 to remove, refurbish and reinstate.

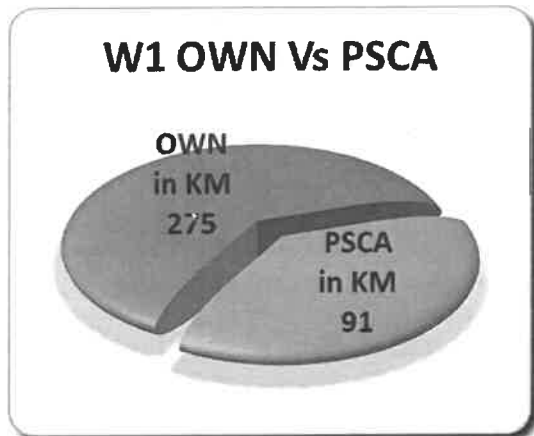
Ruskington fen pump electrical panel had a fire within, this was on 16th October. It is hoped to have the repairs quote imminently. The delay has been getting companies to attend quickly. This will be an insurance claim to replace the damaged panel.

Due to the excessive pumping at Sandhill PS during Storm Babet and the top of the pump being submerged, the top bearings had failed. The grease was constantly being washed out, causing the bearings to run dry. The pump suffered some vibration damage and will be lifted and repaired ASAP.

At Blankney Pumping Station both motors had slip ring failures during the excessive pumping of Storm Babet, these were taken off by the pump team and taken to Rundles at New Bolingbroke who turned them round in a day and we were back up and running. Ian Coupland sent a thank you note to Rundles, as normally repairs could take a week.

Quotes submitted to the EA for PSCA works were as follow: NEL £169,670.89, UW £200,944.02, W1 £124,071.49 and W3 £306,668.35 [the actual/recovery costs of completed works may differ].

These amounts of work/income will not be reached this year due to the extreme weather and not being able to access the banks. We have already quoted for some Winter bushing maintenance across the W&HDBs group and have a meeting booked to discuss the possibility of more work.



Witham First have undertaken some vegetation removal on Holdingham Beck near Sleaford for a joint venture.

If it is confirmed that these additional works have been commissioned, it will be possible to plan the delivery of the works in terms of Operatives and plant.

The priority remains to complete the 4 Boards' own work on adopted & scheduled watercourses, as funded by drainage rate payers and Special Levy paying Councils.

Members received and NOTED the Operations Report and update.

2665 Engineering Report.

A report had been circulated with the agenda and was presented by the Director of Engineering & Technical Services.

Metheringham Fen Pumping Station (FD-1143-2014-PRO)

This scheme was substantially completed in July. Subsequently, a potential issue has been identified which is subject to further investigation. Water can be heard entering the discharge pipeline when the pumps are turned off and continues for some time afterwards, suggesting a leak in either the flap-valve or the connection to the flap-valve, or the flap-valve takes a little time to seal completely. A CCTV survey is being organised to understand the source of the leaking.

Timberland & Billingham Pumping Station Refurbishment (FD-3072-2016-PRO)

The engineering team has developed a long list of options for the Timberland and Billingham pumping stations, estimates of cost have been developed.

The benefits for this project have been calculated by the Lower Witham Flood Resilience project which is being led by the EA. There have been delays in getting this information as the do-nothing scenario was set inappropriately within the various flood compartments, feedback from the Board's officers has been used to determine the most appropriate do-

nothing scenario. We are still waiting for the outputs of this work, so have not been able to progress the development of the OBC as quickly as we would have liked.

An OBC will be developed, led by Georgina Nichos as Capital Planning Manager for 7 IDBs, and the scheme progressed as soon as the benefits data is available. The indicative programme will be updated accordingly.

This package of current work is valued at £83,000 and will see the production of an outline business case that will support an application for Grant in Aid.

The River Slea Flood Resilience Project (FD-6209-2022-GEN)

The EA has started a potential project to manage flood risk on the River Slea between Sleaford and Haverholme.

Further information is available on this webpage on Citizen Space:

<https://consult.environment-agency.gov.uk/lincolnshire-and-northamptonshire/river-slea-flood-resilience-project/>

Lower River Witham Resilience Review & Billingham Catchment System Review (FD-5336-2020-PRO)

Work to complete the hydraulic modelling of the lower Witham system continues and was due for completion in March/April 2023. The Board has not been updated as to the progress of this element of the work. In the meantime, the Board's officers are meeting with the EA and its consultants, to discuss maximising benefits that may be available to claim as part of any future FDGiA bids.

The Board's officers continue to raise issues of concern relating to the system's condition and ability to convey water with the EA and its consultants. During the recent high rainfall event and the resulting flood levels, instances of where the embankments were overtopped or breached were made known to the Environment Agency as they were found by the Boards' workforces or reported to them by members of the public. Where these were because of a breach or defence failure then this defect was added to the Agency's list of work to be included within the recovery programme.

The EA had publicised dates of 'drop in' events where the public may view the proposals and discuss them with the Agency's officers and their consultants. However, these were postponed until the autumn as the new project manager thought there was insufficient information and detail of any proposals to make members of the public aware of with any certainty.

The EA has a web page for the Lower Witham Flood Resilience Project:

<https://consult.environment-agency.gov.uk/lincolnshire-and-northamptonshire/lower-witham-flood-resilience-project/>

Members received and NOTED the Engineering report and update.

2666 Consents and Enforcements.

A report had been circulated with the agenda. There was nothing to highlight to members on this occasion.

Members received and noted the report on Consents and Enforcements.

2667 Planning and Consultations Report.

The Planning and Consultations Report had been circulated with the agenda and was presented by the Director of Engineering & Technical Services.

Issues highlighted to members were as follows:

**23/1005/HOUS
FD-6585-2023-
PLN** **Erection of single storey extension and associated works. The Chestnuts Metheringham Fen Metheringham Lincoln Lincolnshire LN4 3AH**

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the above application. The site is within the Witham First District Internal Drainage Board area.

The Board **objects** to the proposed development.

Reason: the location is in Flood Plain, Zone 3 on the Environment Agency Flood Maps and at flood risk. It is a single-story dwelling with bedrooms on the ground floor which is inappropriate.

No development should be commenced until the Local Planning Authority, in consultation with the Lead Local Flood Authority has approved a scheme for the provision, implementation and future maintenance of a surface water drainage system.

- If soakaways are proposed the suitability of new soakaways, as a means of surface water disposal, should be to an appropriate standard and to the satisfaction of the Approving Authority in conjunction with the Local Planning Authority. If the suitability is not proven the Applicant should be requested to re-submit amended proposals showing how the Site is to be drained. Should this be necessary this Board would wish to be reconsulted.
- Where Surface Water is to be directed into a Mains Sewer System the relevant bodies must be contacted to ensure the system has sufficient capacity to accept any additional Surface Water.
- Any discharge into a water course will require a consent from the Board under the Land Drainage Act.

Members received and NOTED the Planning and Consultations report.

2668 External Auditors' Notice of Closure – AGAR 2022/23.

A report had been circulated with the agenda and was presented by the Director of Finance and Governance.

The Annual Return 2022/23 was agreed at the Board meeting on 23rd May 2023, subsequently published on the Board's website for public inspection and despatched to the Board's appointed External Auditor PKF Littlejohn LLP on 09th June 2023. The public inspection period was from 12th June 2023 until 21st July 2023. The Board had until 30th June 2023 to approve and submit its Annual Return 2022/23.

The External Auditor has a statutory deadline of 30th September to complete their external audit and publish the formal Completion of Audit Certificate (Section 3 of Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR)). This was issued and received on 8th September 2023.

Part 2 of section 3 of the AGAR has been completed as follows; 'On the basis of our review of Sections 1 and 2 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR), in our opinion the information in Sections 1 and 2 of the AGAR is in accordance with Proper Practices and no other matters have come to our attention giving cause for concern that relevant legislation and regulatory requirements have not been met'.

Under the section 'Other matters not affecting our opinion which we draw to the attention of the authority' they have reported 'None'.

This therefore completes the External Audit for 2022/23 and this Board, along with the other 3 Boards in the Witham & Humber Drainage Boards group, have all received the same Audit opinion, so there are no issues to report to the Board.

The Notice of Conclusion of Audit was issued on 20th September 2023 and has been displayed at the Board's depot, on the Board's website and at Witham House office.

Members received and noted the External Audit Notice of Closure on the IDB Annual Governance & Accountability Return 2022/23, and the clean audit opinion.

2669 Governance & Corporate Risk Report.

A report produced by the Director of Finance & Governance and Risk Manager had been circulated with the agenda and was presented by the Director of Finance & Governance.

Members noted the updates.

2670 2023/24 Financial Report to 31.10.23.

The Director of Finance & Governance introduced the report that had been circulated with the agenda.

The financial position as at 31.10.23 was a (£43k) positive variance to profiled budget.

Members were reminded that no Storm Babet costs were included (these will impact adversely on the 30th November P8 position onwards in 2023/24).

The Board was currently showing a positive position against the profiled budget. However, this does not show the financial impact of the 20th October 2023 Storm Babet event. Some of the 'high risk' spend areas can recur (especially electricity) and inflationary increases continue to be seen across many budget heads which will impact on the remainder of this financial year. Electricity price increases have been implemented from 01st October 2023 which will have a further impact on the Board's financial position over the remainder of this financial year, especially if we have more heavy rainfall events.

Overall Position

Profiled Budget P7 £	Actual (Surplus)/Deficit £	Variance £
(627,293)	(670,422)	(43,129)

Income includes:

- Special Levies tranche 2 from Councils received on or before 01st November 2023.
- Highland Water contributions (balance of 2022/23 actual costs and 80% of 2023/24).
- PSCA income invoiced to 31st August 2023 (September & October to be invoiced).
- Commutation payment to the Board for Digby FAS £72,385 (transferred to Reserves).
- Bank interest received to date.

Expenditure includes:

- Electricity to 30th September 2023. New rates/standing charges due from 01st October which will be in future reports. October costs will be high.
- JSC recharges between the 4 W&HDBs to Q2, 30th September 2023.
- Invoices paid as per schedules of expenditures.

Bank/Nationwide Balances were £1.154m as at 31th October 2023. 1 year investment of £250k made on 20th October 2023 with Chorley & District Building Society (totalling £1m across 4 Boards) @6% = £15,000 interest per Board. Nationwide currently paying 3.80% on 95 Day Notice and 2.25% on instant access accounts. Maintain liquidity for Storm Babet costs.

PWLB loan balance £97,787 (next payment 17th December 2023).

Schedules of expenditure showing transactions over £500. Those under £500 had been consolidated into a summary table on the last page of the finance report.

Drainage Rates Write-offs were requested for consideration and approval, a matter that is reserved solely for the Board Members.

Members were requested to review the write off of drainage rates proposed in the report that comprised "Under £2.50's" accounts where it is not economical to send out an invoice and unregistered land where no owner/occupier has been identified.

Following discussion Members APPROVED the Write-Off of drainage rates as follows:

Under £2.50	£0.00
0889	£5,979.40
0293	£79.40
0892	£85.70
0730	£528.47
0792	£74.64
TOTAL	£6,747.61

Members reviewed the Schedules of Expenditure incurred to 31.10.2023 and NOTED the 2023/24 financial performance for the period 01st April 2023 to 31st October 2023.

2671 Environmental Annual Report 2023.

A report had been circulated with the agenda and was presented by the Director of Engineering & Technical Services.

As a public body, under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (2006), Internal Drainage Boards must have regard to the purposes of conserving biodiversity in a manner that is consistent with the exercise of normal functions such as policy and decision-making. 'Conserving biodiversity' may include enhancing, restoring, or protecting a population or habitat. An IDB has a legal duty to protect and enhance the environment, set out in a wide range of legislation.

The Annual Report set out the agreements and achievements of the Board's environmental activities from December 2022 to November 2023.

Members received and noted the report.

2672 Any Other Business.

There were no further items of business, and the meeting closed at 16:45.

2673 Date, Time and Place of the Board's Next Meeting.

The Board's next meeting was confirmed for **Tuesday, 30th January 2024** at 2pm in Branston Booths Village Hall.

.......... Chairman 30.1.24..... Date
W1st BM 22.11.23.

