

# East Suffolk

## Internal Drainage Board

### Minutes of the Meeting held on the 20<sup>th</sup> June 2008

Held at Kirton Lodge  
starting at 2:00pm.

#### Attendance:

**Present:** - Sir Edward Greenwell (Chairman), A. R. Hall, C. A. Loyd,  
P. J. Mann, G. A. J. Paton, M. A. Paul, R. J. Pipe & A. J. Rowlands.

**Apologies:** D. E. Biddle, P. N. R. Cooke, R. W. Mann.

**In Attendance:** - P. J. Camamile (Chief Executive) & I. W. Hart (Engineer).

#### Action:

#### 1. Minutes of the Meeting of the 29<sup>th</sup> April 2008:

##### 1.1 Acceptance:

Having been circulated beforehand, the Minutes were taken as read, agreed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record of the proceedings.

##### 1.2 Matters Arising:

#### 2.0 Policy, Rules and Associated Public Statements:

The Engineer reported on the development of these documents:

#### Policy Statement on Flood Protection, and Water Level Management:

This document still awaited the inclusion of statistics for the new Board, which was the subject of the ongoing digital mapping exercise, reported elsewhere but the other amendments have been incorporated into the draft document.

#### Rules, Statutory Provisions, Code of Conduct, Financial Regulations, Anti-Fraud and Corruption Policy, Whistle Blowing Confidential Reporting Code and Complaints Procedure:

All the recommended amendments have been incorporated into the draft documents.

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\* Proposed by G. A. J. Paton, seconded by M. A. Paul.

† The situation of East Harling IDB might be incongruous because its catchment drains into the Great Ouse River Basin via the River Thet, although from other geographic perspectives it might sit more comfortably with the Norfolk & Suffolk grouping. The Board is considering these options.

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All of these documents will become available to everyone through the Consortium's website in due course.

The situation was noted.

### 2. **Byelaws:**

The Board received the draft set of Byelaws, noting that they are fully modelled on DEFRA's approved template.

It was **resolved**\* unanimously that the Byelaws should be adopted by the Board.

The Chief Executive commented that the Byelaws would be published on the website, for all to see and that they would reinforce the Board's ability and Power to regulate development within the District.

Mr. Paton recommended that copies of the Byelaws should be sent to all local authorities within the District.

PJC/  
IWH

### 3. **DEFRA's Rationale for Proposed Sub-catchment IDBs – Chairmen's Meeting:**

The Chairman and Chief Executive reported on the discussions at the meeting held in Norwich on the 17<sup>th</sup> June, which was attended by representatives from the Norfolk Rivers, Broads, Waveney Valley & Lothingland and East Harling IDBs, together with the Chairman of the EA's Anglian East Regional Flood Defence Committee:

DEFRA envisages that the local drainage service provided by IDBs could be improved if they were to be further amalgamated into units that would have an appropriate 'critical mass,' which, in the case of the eastwards draining areas of Norfolk and Suffolk, would be all of the above-mentioned boards. A less radical but acceptable change would be to arrange for all boards in the area to be managed by one organisation or consortium. In order to explore the proposal, DEFRA has recommended the establishment of 'regional catchment coordination committees.'

The consensus of the meeting was that the boards would oppose further merger on the grounds that it would erode local community interest but it observed that the overwhelming majority of boards already shared a common source of management, namely from WLMA. (The exceptions are the Waveney Valley & Lothingland and East Harling<sup>†</sup> IDBs.) Although there was reluctance to the formation of yet another committee, it was accepted that the alternative of using WLMA's Consortium Management Committee would not be satisfactory in that role because its membership extends beyond the relevant area of Norfolk and Suffolk. ADA had requested a response to inform them of the outcome of this meeting by 4 July 2008. The outcome of the meeting held on 17 June was reported to the Board as follows:-

- One single IDB was considered and rejected.
- The need for a degree of coordination between the activities of IDBs in

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this single catchment was recognised.

- It was accepted that the purpose of a group to oversee the activities of IDBs should be to look at policies, share knowledge and good practice, consider plans for the future and consider catchments as a whole.
- A sub-group was created, to be chaired by Henry Cator in his capacity as ADA chairman.
- The purpose of the sub-group is to develop the concept of this overseeing body including its terms of reference and membership.
- It was accepted that, in the longer term, invitations would be extended to the regional Agency level, Natural England, etc.
- A chairman will be elected by the membership of the group.
- Twice-yearly meetings were suggested.
- Administration support will be through the secretariat of the WMA.
- One objective in the longer term will be to consider the issue of further funding support for the administration of the proposed group.
- The sub-group will develop proposals in consultation with all IDBs in the Norfolk/Suffolk Region and bring recommendations/updates to the next meeting of the RFDC/IDB Liaison group in November.

IWH/  
PJC

The Board noted the situation.

#### **4. The EA's East Suffolk Catchment Flood Management Plan:**

The Board received the Engineer's report.

For the majority of the Catchment's area, essentially all rural areas, the proposal is that a policy of reducing existing flood risk management actions should apply.

Exceptions to this general rule are as follows:

For the Gipping Valley Corridor (from downstream of Stowmarket to Claydon), together with the town of Framlingham, the proposal is that a policy of continuing to manage flood risk at the current level should apply. However, as with the policy for rural areas, flood risk may deteriorate with time.

Ipswich and Debenham are intended to be the only areas that will benefit from the application of a policy of taking Further Action to reduce flood risk.

#### Commentary:

Economic Appraisal: It is understood that the decision to apply a further reduction to the already poor standards of maintenance throughout the Catchment's rural areas is based on economic analysis, from which agricultural benefits are weak. However, it may be that it is that analysis which is weak. For example:

The quality of agricultural land is described as poor but the analysis may have missed the point that, despite light land's supposed poverty, in the coastal plains areas in particular, the use of irrigation enables it to be used for intensive, highly profitable horticultural enterprises with high levels of employment, which belies its nominal, weak status.

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The appraisal of the benefits of agriculture appear to have been based on depressed, historic values of produce, rather than the resurgent values that are in force today.

The interdependence of the countryside and the tourist industry may have been under-valued. Mr. Paton observed that, for the area covered by Mid Suffolk D. C., tourism is worth £60m per annum.

The appraisal of the Gipping Valley Corridor appears to have entirely missed the significance of the Town of Stowmarket, which is one of the County's development 'hot-spots,' where urban regeneration is focussed on land adjacent to the River.

Environmental Impact: There seems to be a presumption that reduced maintenance of the drainage system will allow an automatic improvement to the 'natural' river corridor. One of the action plan schedules suggests that river control structures could be dismantled, since they impose an obstruction to the passage of migratory fish. This tactic overlooks the point that the river valley eco-systems of the rivers Deben and Gipping have acclimatised themselves to centuries-old regimes of mill impoundments, with associated maintenance and management practices, which, if abandoned, could have damaging consequences for those systems. Members' opinion was that the Plan may have overlooked environmental costs that may arise if the Plan is promoted in its present form.

Objectives: The Plan has seven stated objectives:

- minimise the risk of harm to life
- minimise community disruption
- maintain critical infrastructure
- protect and improve cultural heritage and landscape
- minimise economic harm of flooding
- ensure flood risk management expenditure is risk-based
- protect and enhance habitats and species

In the context of reduced risk and its inverse, improvement to the quality of life, none of these objectives may be achieved other than in the settlements of Ipswich and Debenham.

Prioritisation: There is inference that reductions in the standards of flood risk management are not proposed because the historic standards are no longer worthwhile (i.e. the benefits do not outweigh the costs) but because there are more deserving, higher benefits to be achieved elsewhere in England, especially in the conurbations afflicted by serious flooding recently. This prioritisation of resources may be justified in the medium term but, if the proposed policies for East Suffolk are adopted in their present form, it may be very difficult to reinstate aspirations for higher standards of service, notwithstanding the report's assertion that the Plan will be reviewed periodically in the future.

Partnership Implications for the Board: There is an expressed expectation that IDBs will collaborate with the Agency to develop "System Asset Management

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Plans” to consider where and how we can reduce flood risk maintenance activities. Thus the Board may be expected to alter its own management practices in line with the Plan, irrespective of its own, locally-focussed priorities. Therefore, the Plans policies are inimical to its own core objectives.

### Conclusions:

The Board endorsed the Engineer’s conclusions:

- The Plan envisages a deterioration in the standards of protection from flood risk over much of the Board’s District. As such, the Plan is defeatist, rather than aspirational.
- The appraisal of the economic benefits from flood risk protection may be flawed because enterprises such as agriculture and tourism may have been under-valued.
- The environmental impact of implementing the Plan may have been mistaken.
- The Plan may frustrate the Board’s own objective to provide a high standard of drainage and flood protection.

The Board instructed the Engineer to respond to the Agency’s invitation to comment on the Plan by expressing its dissatisfaction with the Agency’s proposals, using the above commentary and conclusions as examples of the reasons for its critical opinions.

IWH

### **5. Maintenance Works:**

The Engineer reported that he had recently inspected the Minsmere drainage system with the support of Mr. Rowlands, during which they met representatives of the Minsmere Levels Stakeholders’ Group. The inspection revealed that much of the stock of main drains is in need of attention, although the performance of the Board’s drains is heavily dependent on the performance of the EA’s main river system, in particular, the Minsmere New Cut and Minsmere Sluice, into which all the watercourses flow. The Engineer will assemble a programme for future maintenance.

IWH

The situation was noted.

### **6. Finances:**

The Board received the Engineer’s reports in respect of the former Alderton, Hollesley & Bawdsey IDB and the Rivers Deben and Gipping IDBs. It was noted that corresponding reports are outstanding in respect of the Lower Alde IDB and the four boards formerly administered by the EA. In the case of the Lower Alde IDB, the Engineer explained that the delay arose from complications in VAT reclaims in respect of the recent major capital pumping station scheme. In the case of the EA boards, the Chief Executive commented that he is still awaiting a

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response from the Agency.

IWH/  
PJC

The Chairman was authorised to sign off the accounts and associated reports for the former boards, in the instances of those boards for which accounts are overdue, he was authorised to act as proxy for the Board.

IWH/  
EBG

**7. Water Level Management Alliance's (WLMA's) Services:**

The Chief Executive confirmed that the Board is now a full member of the Alliance.

Overhaul of the Alliance's website is proceeding satisfactorily. The site will include a suite of pages specific to the Board, which will include the policy documents approved at the first meeting, the Byelaws, Minutes of the current previous Board Meeting, public notices, contact details of officers and members and links to other relevant websites. Maps of the Board's District will be added to the website as soon as they have been compiled in digital format.

IWH/  
PJC

The next meeting of the Consortium Management Committee was scheduled for the 30<sup>th</sup> June.

The Chief Executive's advice was received and noted.

**8. Other Business – Draft Floods & Water Bill 2009:**

The Chief Executive reported that the Government had just announced the draft Bill, which closely followed publication of the Pitt Report on last year's floods. A report will be prepared for members as soon as more detailed information becomes available.

IWH/  
PJC

**9. Date of Next Meeting:**

Friday, 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2009, commencing 2:00pm, at Kirton Lodge, courtesy of Michael Paul.

ALL.

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