

LOWER MEDWAY INTERNAL DRAINAGE BOARD



MINUTES OF THE MEETING of the BOARD
held via **Zoom Conference Call**
on **Monday 26 April 2021 at 1pm**

Members of the Board Present

Chairman: S Batt
S Attwood
Cllr H Browne
Cllr C Buckwell
Cllr D Carnell
Cllr D Davis
Ald D Dewar-Whalley
Cllr G Etheridge
G Fulton
R Hall
J Lewis
J Mair
S Mair
Cllr K Rowles
B Stone

In attendance

O Pantrey – Clerk
L Rowland – Office Manager
J Davis – Works Supervisor

G Metri-Renner, Environment Agency
P Cox, Environment Agency

The Chairman welcomed Ghada Metri-Renner and Penny Cox from the Environment Agency to the meeting.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from R Palmer, T Valentine and the Finance Officer.

G Whelan intended to join the meeting, however he was not present possibly due to technical issues.

Non attendees - no response received from B Martin.

2. ITEMS OF INTEREST DECLARATION

S Mair declared an interest in any discussions relating to the new office and depot.

3. EA PRESENTATION FROM GHADA METRI-RENNER

G Metri-Renner thanked the Board for the invitation for herself and P Cox to the meeting. She confirmed that she didn't have any slides to show today, but she had an IDB Annual Precept Report for 2020/21 that would be circulated to Members shortly, and the report will cover everything that she is going to run through today in detail.

She confirmed the total spend for 2020/2021 was £140,684 and the full breakdown is listed in the report. She added that through PSCA they were able to achieve £286,000 of work which included works on Harty Ferry and Leysdown pumping stations. She explained that this PSCA agreement was new for this year and was achieved through the hard work of her team and the Medway IDB team.

G Metri-Renner added that a letter of thanks/congratulations was received from a landowner regarding the Elmley embankment repairs.

P Cox confirmed that the complete breakdown of the spend is detailed in the report and asked Members if they had any questions on this to direct their questions back to The Clerk who can come back to them for clarification.

J Lewis said that on the EA Section 141 Statement it said that the precept was for £335,000 and his understanding that it was for in excess of £410,000.

G Metri-Renner explained that for year 2020/2021 it was £426,684 and for year 2021/2022 the precept is less because of the rationalisation exercise the EA have done with The Clerk and Mr Batt to make them more efficient on their delivery. She said the EA do not want to receive a lot of precept if they cannot spend it all because the money is lost into a national pot. She said that on page 4 of her report the planned projects are listed which total £335,000 for 2021/22. She confirmed this will be revisited every year, so they do lose money.

J Lewis said this was a splendid arrangement and is much better what was obtained in previous years and said thank you very much.

G Metri-Renner thanked J Lewis for the feedback and said she was very glad this was working.

G Etheridge asked about the nature of the works for the dock gates repairs, how quotes were obtained and how much it cost eventually. He also asked if they could elaborate on the permission required from Peel Ports.

P Cox explained that 3 sets of 2 gates were refurbished. She explained that ECS had initially provided a quote for around £45-50,000 for the repairs of the gates, but due to corrosion they required replacing, so the price increased to £90,000 which included £7,000 extra for the cost of having to work overnight because of the works having to be carried out on the main road to the port. She explained that £50,000 of IDB precept money was used for this and £40,000 of EA funds. She confirmed that with regards to the permission from Peel Ports

they asked the Health and Safety Manager at Peel Ports for permission and served notice of entry to them in order for them to carry out the works, and then liaised with Head of Health and Safety and Engineering department.

G Etheridge and H Browne requested that the information for this was emailed to all Medway councillors and a list of items that IDB would have any responsibility within Peel Ports. It was agreed that this information would be sent to the Clerk and then the Clerk can forward to the relevant Members.

The Chairman thanked G Metri-Renner and P Cox for their presentation and said that our co-operation is growing and growing.

G Metri-Renner and P Cox left the meeting.

4. EA SECTION 141 STATEMENT 2021

RECEIVED a copy of the EA Section 141 Statement 2021.

(As attached to these Minutes – Appendix 1)

The Clerk confirmed that the EA Section 141 Statement breaks down all the precept that they receive from the local area and as J Lewis pointed out the precept is £90,000 lower for this coming year than last year due to the negotiated reduction.

5. MINUTES

RECEIVED the Minutes of the Meeting of the Board held on 23 November 2020.

(As attached to these Minutes – Appendix 2)

It was **AGREED** that the Minutes of 23 November 2020 were correctly recorded and should be considered as approved.

6. ACTION LIST & MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES

RECEIVED a copy of the Action List of the Board held on 23 November 2020.

(As attached to these Minutes – Appendix 3)

The Clerk confirmed that a lot of the items on the action list would be covered in the Clerk report and today's agenda.

7. CHAIRMAN REPORT

The Chairman confirmed that his report would be very short today as he was sure Members did not want to hear repetition. He said that he has already read the Clerk Report and he believes that by the end of today's agenda we will be up to date with everything that has occurred since the last Board meeting. One thing he said he must say was through the very

wet winter the Clerk and Works Supervisor needed to be congratulated for the sterling work they did during the very wet periods especially when UK Power Networks grid failed twice supplying power to Bells Pumping Station. The Clerk and Works Supervisor were working 18-hour days and the Works Supervisor even slept in his truck overnight to make sure everything ran smoothly, and he would like to record the Board's thanks to them both.

8. CLERK REPORT

The Clerk thanked the Chairman for his kind words. He apologised for the length of his report and confirmed it had been a very busy time. He gave his report as follows:

COVID-19 Response

With COVID-19 being essentially part of life now it has become easier to manage into the future as the advice became simpler to interpret and the development of the vaccine given better roll out timings. Since the last meeting staff have been working from home but from the turn of the year, we have been keeping an office presence 3 days a week on a rota. John continues to operate from the office due to personal circumstances.

This rota has served to bring routine back to office working, albeit on a small scale, and allows for workloads relating to post, printing, and other tasks to be spread across the 3 other members of the office team. While the timeline for a full office return is still some way off due to the vaccine, it is likely we will all be back working from the office as a base around the end of May/start of June, as an estimation. Clearly there is a need for the office, and it is the best way for collaboration to occur, but the pandemic has highlighted the uses of remote working, and the option will remain opening going forward, although on a more relaxed basis.

The workforce is now back in full time with a full complement of staff present. They are operating in separate teams to limit the risk of spread in the event of someone contracting COVID-19. We have also provided digital thermometers to each depot to check for fever each morning as a precaution.

Staffing

D Dewar-Whalley, D Goff and I held interviews on April 1st (of all days) for the Technical Assistant role. I am delighted to say this position has been filled on a probationary basis and I would like to congratulate William Smith on a very professional and composed interview. William has now had 2 days with us in the office and his first project is underway. We will continue to appraise William regularly going forward and ease him into what I hope will be a very successful career within the office. I would also like to thank Shane Miles for taking the opportunity to have an interview with us. Although unsuccessful, he gave it his best efforts and I wish him luck on future applications for management roles at the IDB.

As you may be aware that the Works Supervisor will be leaving us in the next few years, and we thank him for his long-term notice. This will require someone to shadow and then replace him, discussions of which are ongoing between us. While there will be ample opportunity to say farewell, on a personal note John has been invaluable to me as a mentor and friend since my arrival at the company and it will be extremely sad to see him go. His replacement has extraordinary boots to fill, but I am sure that he will have the right person in place and prepared for when the time comes. It is important to say again this is a long-

term notice and there is plenty for the Works Supervisor and myself to achieve before he leaves.

Health and Safety

Although the Christmas period was very busy, with flooding occurring throughout both districts we maintained a good safety level with no injuries recorded. We did have a Near Miss report which was for slipping on ice by a watercourse, and I am pleased to see that this vital form is now being utilised by the ground teams. Since the flooding, near misses are now being reported slightly more frequently and are providing better insight to problems that would have otherwise gone unchecked. These will be discussed at the Works, Health, and Safety meeting to assess the risk and how we are mitigating it.

I have also been working on, and subsequently launched, an app for our ground staff to record and document the location of hazards. This app has multiple uses including that of tracking work started and completed. This in turn should offer us better understanding of how much maintenance we are completing and the need for additional staff or contractors. The app also includes locations and photographs of invasive species, and I would like to thank the Board's Biodiversity representative, Gareth Fulton for this excellent addition. The hazards list will prove to be a very useful tool not only for the existing ground teams, but for contractor safety. The format used gives a good visual representation of potential problems and dangers while also allowing the teams to add new hazards as they find them. We will continue to monitor this, but initial signs are positive. My hope is that this will grow into a comprehensive list that improves safety and biosecurity throughout both districts. Something that has arisen from the use of the digital format is the need for Display Screen Evaluation. The feedback we have is showing signs that working from the phones for inputting has caused some levels of difficulty due to the way the devices display the content. As a result, I will be trialling tablets in the coming months to see if this improves the overall experience.

Training

Training continues to be held back although opportunities are looking more promising as the year progresses. We will be looking to conduct regular training such as fire, health and safety at work, and manual handling in the coming months. There are also renewals required later this year for the excavator operator. The Clerk, Works Supervisor, and eventually the Technical Assistant will all go through the CITB SMSTS (Site Management Safety Training Scheme) course to make sure we are suitably qualified for the EA PSCA.

Office Admin

We continue to use and develop the in-house system for paperwork and while there is still the occasional bug, it is proving to be very successful in our drive towards a paperless office. There have been new forms added to track holidays and make this task slightly less contrived than in the past, while also increasing the transparency.

I am pleased to say that our website now has a form that members of the public can use to report blockages. Over the Christmas period we were overwhelmed by calls and I decided that a system needed to be introduced that allowed us to catalogue and plan responses. This has proven so far to reduce the length of time we spend on the phone, while allowing retrospective action to be better recorded also.

Our discussions on HR led us to organise an external specialist to come in and organise our current arrangement. Janet Marshall came in on Friday 12 March to go through the HR files and put them into an order that made the digitisation more straight forward. She also discarded unnecessary papers we were still in control of so that we were not in breach of GDPR. These files will now be transferred to our server so that we can remove the need for paper elements where possible. It is important to note that we will retain past employee files for a set number of years to comply with regulations.

Planning and Development has now been running for 8 months with the WLMA. We have managed to handle some simple consents internally but the partnership with the WLMA is starting to bear fruit. We will be receiving monthly updates instead of quarterly in the future so as to keep a better track of what is and is not being commented on, while also letting us know the progress of consents that are underway.

I can report that both the Upper and Lower are now seeing a return from the development strategy. The Upper Board has successfully processed and received the first ever Surface Water Development Contribution, and the Lower is in the process of finalising the first every commuted fee for an alteration. We continue to work closely with Phil, Cathryn, and their team with potential developments requiring consent in both districts being tracked at this time. The funds, although not ringfenced, are going to prove vital sources of funding for additional projects around the district.

EA Partnership

The renewed PSCA with the LMIDB has now been signed and approved, paving the way for a similar agreement with the UMIDB later this year. This follows on from the project in November at Sharfleet where the IDB, EA, and local contractor ECT (Conservation) successfully carried out sea wall repairs under the agreement. The next projects are likely to be Capel Fleet, White Drain, and Spitend, although plans are subject to change due to assents that need to be acquired from Natural England, and of course the weather.

We continue to hold a close relationship with the EA, and I thank Ian Nunn, Ghada Mitri-Renner, and Penny Cox for their continued help and support in building this.

Local Issues

This winter saw very high levels of rainfall that caused problems across both districts. Saturated soils combined with nearly 220% of the expected average rainfall meant that Christmas, New Year, and the early months of 2021 were extremely busy. The Works Supervisor and his ground team forfeited parts of their statutory holiday to keep a presence and to clear blockages. I would like to take this opportunity to thank him and them for the excellent effort during what was a very wet season.

We saw unusual levels of flooding on Sheppey, with properties at Halfway receiving sublevel runoff causing problems for localised flooding. The Lower Road also proved to be a continuing issue and conversations with KCC Highways were consistently ongoing. We had issues at Brambledown with localised flooding, especially at Elmley Road, and although not an IDB watercourse, we have taken action to resolve this by jetting the offending culvert. We will also be installing a trash screen to the culvert entrance in an attempt to prevent debris collecting in the pipe in future. We have let the landowners know that they are responsible for this culvert from now on, although the screen itself will remain on our ground team's radar.

There was further flooding along the Warden Road where culverts, drains, and ditches were overwhelmed, and the IDB attended as many sites as was possible, even though they were not adopted, in an attempt to stem the problems.

Hoo St Werburgh also saw major problems with unattenuated building sites causing property damage and Network Rail culverts causing more localised problems out towards Stoke. We are now working with Medway Council and local property developers to overhaul the surface water system at Hoo St Werburgh, details of which I hope to present at a later date.

Lastly, there was major flooding to a property in Lower Halstow due to a broken culvert under a house near the Cricket ground. This was responded to by both KCC and the IDB although had to be explained that it was the owner's responsibility to resolve under his insurance. This required Fire Brigade attendance to pump out the water and highlighted a potential need for the IDB to better arm itself with similar pumping equipment to aid in the wet periods.

Pumping Stations

We had 3 events this winter that caused power failure at Bells, and various other power issues at the older pumping stations that required remedial action also. While these are covered by the Works Supervisor in his report, the cost of these ran into the tens of thousands due to the need for MEMS emergency power provision. It is also hugely important to note that the Works Supervisor had to spend several evenings and an entire night at Bells during the winter in order to ensure continuity of the pumping. These events highlighted several issues with our emergency response procedures and also the fragility of the power supply leading to Bells. This subsequently led to a root cause analysis that formed some of the basis for the renewal of the Technical Assistant position. I thank the Works Supervisor, the Chair, and Vice Chair for their help in managing this difficult situation.

We have now increased the speed of the pumps at Bells to 45Hz as recommended by ACE which has proven to be incredibly helpful in relieving the pressure of flood waters. While it is unclear why this was never the case before, I am hopeful this will provide more efficient pumping going forward.

Biodiversity

We continue to be as active as possible with local groups surrounding both flooding and biodiversity ideas, especially the South East Rivers Trust who we hope to work with in the future to create Natural Flood Management and sanctuary programs going forward. Carol Donaldson also continues to aid us with our biodiversity efforts and is beginning work at both Capel Fleet and Luddenham marshes to which I will provide further details later in the year.

We have made efforts to rid ourselves of an invasive species called Crassula on IDB LM7. Under advice from Carol, we have enveloped the plant in an attempt to smother and eradicate it. We may need to look into a biological solution such as weevils should this not be successful.

We recently completed works near the Amazon depot at Kingsnorth to reopen a channel using desilting and pioneering. This work was done outside of prescribed mechanical works timings, but due to the flood risk it presented was seen as essential. We carried out daily environmental impact assessments to mitigate the damage caused to the local wildlife and created a dead hedge that will be left to provide further shelter to species in the area.

Depot and Office Update

This will remain purposefully vague as there has already been a letter sent out by the Chairman regarding the incredible new building we will be moving to later this year.

We are currently finalising a lease for a new depot provision that offers increased security, health and safety, space, and accessibility for staff and their equipment. I would like to thank the Chairman, Vice-Chairman, the Finance Committee and the Works Supervisor for their support and vision while these buildings were procured. They represent a positive, exciting, and professional future for the Board that will aid us in providing a better service for the local communities and districts we serve.

The Clerk confirmed that he will also provide this report to Members.

D Dewar-Whalley said that it was very refreshing to have a decent, clear report and this was good for the Board. He thanked the Clerk and said this was very much appreciated.

9. WORKS SUPERVISOR REPORT

RECEIVED the Works Supervisor Report Numbers 170.

(As attached to these Minutes - Appendix 4)

The Chairman thanked the Works Supervisor for his comprehensive report.

The Works Supervisor thanked both the Chairman and the Clerk for their kind words. He also wanted to extend his thanks to the Office Manager, the Finance Officer and the workforce through these difficult times.

The Works Supervisor gave an update by confirming some of the works have now been completed as mentioned by the Clerk. He said IDB30 was identified as a problem due to the Polly Adams flooding at Stoke Road in Hoo and the Upper excavator was used for these works. He added that unfortunately the excavator is at the end of life and discussions are ongoing regarding a possible replacement. He said improvement works on IDB7, Rosemary Avenue had been carried out along the playing field as the ditch had become compromised as it did not have a decent depth. He confirmed that he had met with Mr Stone last week and they had identified that a couple of areas on IDB26 and IDB126A require work which will be carried out next week and also in the winter period to improve drainage. He said works will also be carried out at IDB34 as this has been identified as a flood risk.

The Works Supervisor also said that although we are running Bells Pumping Station at 45Hz at the moment, it can run at 50Hz and ACE would prefer us to run it at the maximum of 50Hz. He added because of the Hull University eel study, we need them to change the way they monitor the eel's migration because one of the pumps is a lot lower on hours and we need to bring the hours up so we do not run into any problems when he has left and they are running to their full efficiency.

Finally, the Works Supervisor gave an update on the gantries, he said he has had an email this morning that they will be fitting those on Thursday of this week.

10. BIODIVERSITY UPDATE

The Clerk informed Members that Carol Donaldson had now completed the audit phase of the BAP, and legislation has been updated. He confirmed the practical elements are also mostly complete and meetings with Carol and the ground teams will further reinforce the standards already produced by the Works Supervisor and his team and new techniques can be discussed and implemented where possible.

The Clerk also explained that Carol is also going through water level management plans to determine their impact and how we might further utilise these extensive documents and it's worth mentioning that this largely pertains to the Lower district as opposed to the Upper, but she is going to go through them to identify what's relevant and what isn't. A draft copy of this has been seen by himself and G Fulton and a full copy of this will be available to the Board in the coming months.

11. NEW OFFICE/DEPOT UPDATE

The Clerk said that he would like to give Members the option to put their thoughts forward. He said it is a wonderful new office building that the Board are in the process of buying and if they have any questions himself or S Mair will answer them.

The Chairman said that he had given quite a comprehensive update a few weeks ago and asked if Members were happy with the progress.

C Buckwell said this is fantastic for the Board and thanked everyone involved in the search for these premises and said this is a very positive development.

S Mair said he wanted to give Members a quick update with regards to the offices. He said the legal contracts are with the solicitors now and are being reviewed and subject to searches coming in and we are expected to exchange contracts in approximately 3 weeks.

S Mair said with regards to the depot, heads of terms have been agreed and have been sent off to advisers to be signed off. He confirmed we have requested some work to be done on the restroom, toilets and showers that need to be installed, and quotes have been received for those.

S Attwood asked whether the office had air conditioning.

The Clerk confirmed that the office does have a full air conditioning and heating system. He said there was an issue with the heating system and as a condition of the purchase we requested this be fixed ahead of the contract and the warranties/guarantees be given to us first.

S Attwood raised a point regarding culverts leading to Windmill Creek.

A discussion regarding this took place between the Clerk, The Works Supervisor, G Fulton, J Mair and S Attwood and it was agreed that a meeting should take place to discuss a long-term plan.

12. REGISTER OF MEMBERS' INTEREST

REPORTED that over half of the Register of Members' Interest Form have already been received for 2021/2022 and the Office Manager confirmed she will start to send reminders to Members who have not sent in their form from next month.

13. POLICIES REPORT

RECEIVED a copy of the updated Governance Documents List.

(As attached to these Minutes - Appendix 5)

The following policies were emailed separately to Members from the agenda for Member's review/information:

Updated - Approved

Members Expenses Policy (approved by Joint Services December 2020)

Updated - Approval Required

Anti Fraud & Corruption Policy

Gifts & Hospitality Policy

Members Code of Conduct

Pension Policy

Whistle Blowing Policy

New - Approved

Biosecurity Policy & Procedure (approved March 2021)

Contracts Standing Orders and Procurement Policy & Procedure (approved by Joint Services March 2021)

Environmental Policy (approved March 2021)

New - Approval Required

Debt Policy

The Chairman requested that the policies be approved together and asked Members if they had any questions.

No questions were asked.

On a proposition by D Dewar-Whalley seconded by J Mair, it was **AGREED** to approve all policies requiring approval as above.

This was unanimously **AGREED**.

14. JOINT SERVICES MINUTES

RECEIVED the Minutes of the Joint Services Committee Meeting held on 14 December 2020.

(As attached to these Minutes – Appendix 6)

Minutes were noted and no comments made.

15. INTERNAL AUDIT UPDATE

The Clerk confirmed that after the discussion and approvals to use Mid Kent Auditors, a request was sent over to us for the initial finding of items in the year 2020/2021. He said there was an assumption that the preliminary audit would look at 2019/2020 but they decided to go for a full six monthly audit. This included previous arrangements for governance and finance and there were a lot of difficulties for the Finance Officer locating some of what they wanted because of the filing system of predecessors, however he wanted to point out this information was available, and The Finance Officer has got that altogether for them and they anticipate a final report towards the middle of May. At the time it showed some glaring errors in the way we were managing a lot of different elements and it's fair to say we've been given a bit of a going over by the auditor, which is good because we absolutely needed it.

The Clerk said the Financial Officer and himself are now confident now the Financial Risk Assessment has been updated and that it is about to go through the Finance Committee. He stated that we have now found, presented, changed and/or improved everything that was required of us so that this year's AGAR can go as smoothly as possible.

The Clerk confirmed they had a chat with Rich Clarke concerning the past filing systems and we did make it known that there had been a change in both finance and overall financial responsibility since the majority of those original findings were done and we were able to send back 99% of the items asked for. He concluded by saying we are still waiting for the final report to come back from the Auditors, which we are expecting back in time for us to send off stuff to the external auditor.

16. HEALTH & SAFETY UPDATES

D Dewar-Whalley said that the Clerk and the Works Supervisor have covered everything in their reports already. He said there is nothing desperate to deal with at this current time and they are hoping to have the Works Health & Safety Group meeting back to face-to-face again soon. He concluded by saying he would like to assure the Board that we are in a very good position indeed and the workforce are working extremely well to ensure safety of themselves and their colleagues.

The Clerk said that major inspections such as asbestos, fire alarm and fire extinguisher checks had been carried out at Albion Place as normal. He said we are also considering removing the High Voltage Detection System (HVDS) from our tractors and unless the latest fix can get these working more efficiently, he is of the opinion that we should get rid of them and work on a mechanical limitation as opposed to an electrical one and we will continue to assess that.

The Clerk said we still need to carry out a health and safety inspection of the entire company for this year, but COVID-19 restrictions have put this on hold. He said with the Technical Assistant now in place this should free up the ability for this to be carried out.

The Clerk said that 4 Near Miss Reports will be discussed at the next Works Health & Safety Group. He said Ground Staff should know it's important for these to be reported and that they were not going to land anyone in trouble. He concluded by saying that this was a massive positive.

17. PLANNING APPLICATIONS & CONSENTS

RECEIVED the Planning Report for 23 November 2020 to 26 April 2021.

(As attached to these Minutes - Appendix 7)

The Clerk confirmed that this report is now in a new format and he will be demonstrating an interactive way of viewing this report at the end of the meeting.

The Chairman asked if there were any questions.

No questions asked.

18. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Intranet

The Clerk shared his screen and showed Members the intranet he had created for Board Members and talked through all the elements available.

The Chairman thanked the Clerk and said this was marvellous work.

H Browne proposed that the Board formally thank and recognise the marvellous work by the Clerk and his team, and the Clerk should be very proud of this.

This was unanimously **AGREED** by all Members.

The Chairman said that this Board is now going to places that this Board has never been and we are really marching forward with technology and he is over the moon with it all.

Site Visits

C Buckwell asked that after COVID-19 restrictions are eased if Officers might try, if not too much additional work, to arrange for information site visits over the summer period. He said he has only been able to attend one, which was the Bells Pumping Station visit and he had found this absolutely brilliant and for new or returning Members these site visits are invaluable.

C Buckwell also wanted to take the opportunity to thank the Clerk and Works Supervisor for attending a site meeting approximately 6 weeks ago at Halling where they have a significant

breach of culvert and bunding. He explained this is not on IDB land, but their advice was immensely welcome and very timely.

19. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next Board meeting was confirmed as Monday 29 November 2021 at 1pm.

20. PRIVATE & CONFIDENTIAL MATTERS

S Mair gave an update on the situation with the Bells Lease.

21. CLOSURE

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