

## **BLACK SLUICE INTERNAL DRAINAGE BOARD**

### **MINUTES**

of the proceedings of a Meeting of the  
Environment Committee

At a Meeting of the Environment Committee held at the Offices of the Board on  
Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> May 2011 at 2:30pm.

#### **Members**

Chairman - \* Mr J R Wray

|                      |                   |
|----------------------|-------------------|
| * Mr R Leggott       | Mr R Welberry     |
| Mr M J Scott         | * Mr P Robinson   |
| * Cllr D R Dickinson | * Mr F W C Holmes |
| * Mr J Blaylock      | * Mr V A Barker   |
| * Mr J F Atkinson    | * Mr K C Casswell |

\* Member Present

In attendance: Mr C A Fretwell (Southern Works Committee)  
Mr S M Hemmings (Chief Executive)  
Mr I Warsap (Operations Manager)  
Mr I Watts (Technical Engineer)  
Mr M Redding (Environmental Officer Witham 4<sup>th</sup> IDB)  
Mr C Manning (Environmental Officer Lindsey Marsh IDB)  
Mr Alan Ball (Wildlife Conservation Partnership)  
Fran Hutchinson (Lincolnshire Biodiversity Partnership)  
Mr Craig King (Natural England)

#### 942 **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman welcomed guests to the meeting. He informed the Committee of the sad loss of Mr J Harpley who died in March 2011.

#### 943 **APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Mr M J Scott and Mr R Welberry.

#### 944 **MINUTES OF LAST ENVIRONMENT MEETING**

The Minutes of the last Meeting of the Environment Committee held on 19<sup>th</sup> May 2010, copies of which had been circulated, were signed by the Chairman as a true record.

945 MATTERS ARISING

(a) Fens Waterways Link – Minute No 769e

The Chief Executive reported that Fens Waterways Link has not progressed further and consulting engineers would only be delivering an interim report.

He also confirmed, in response to a question, that the EA have not formally renamed the South Forty Foot Drain as the Black Sluice Navigation.

946 REPORT ON ENVIRONMENTAL WORK COMPLETED IN 2010/11 – Agenda Item 4

(a) Frampton Town Drain

The Chief Executive explained that the environmental scheme which involved filling 80 metres of the Frampton Drain to quicken the flow had been completed.

A question was raised as to how we measure success of this project in water quality and biodiversity. The Chief Executive responded that the EA measure dissolved oxygen levels downstream and he would request these measurements.

(b) Fishing Platforms at Langrick Road

The Chief Executive explained that works on the North Forty Foot Drain had been completed and reeds have recently been planted in the coir rolls. The Board's workforce have also completed repairs to the toe erosion on a section just upstream of the fishing platforms.

(c) Review of Water Level Management Plan for Horbling SSSI

The Chief Executive explained that the water level plan first written in 1999 had been reviewed and agreed by Natural England.

In response to a question on the RSPB reserve on Frampton Marsh, the Chief Executive explained how the Board was working with the RSPB to provide satisfactory levels to allow abstraction to create wetland areas on the reserve.

(d) Development of Tom Tom Device

The Chief Executive explained that it had taken a few months to sort out the configuration to allow the information from the Tom Tom units to be transferred to the mapping system. However it was now working satisfactorily.

946 (d) Cont.....

The Committee RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND that six additional units should be purchased and that 50% of this cost should be paid for out of the environmental budgets.

(e) Early Cutting of Wyberton Marsh Drain

The Chief Executive stated that early flail mowing and drain cutting to one side of the drain continued to be undertaken to encourage nesting birds. The cover provided on the uncut side of the drain attracts the birds and Chris Manning stated that it does not matter which side of the drain is left uncut.

(f) Maintenance of Owl Boxes

Alan Ball stated that the twigs brought in to the owl boxes by Jackdaws needed to be removed every 2 to 3 years. He added that the Wildlife Conservation Partnership were trialling a new type of box which it is claimed will limit the use by Jackdaws.

He commented on the schedule of use of the boxes which had been circulated, and stated that the boxes maintained by the EA had similar number of owls and jackdaws. He also reported that the longest living owl has not been seen in the last two years.

The Chief executive stated that the proposed action in the BAP was that the Board should maintain existing owl boxes and look into alternative new sites for owl boxes. He added that now that all suitable pumping stations had a box then it would be difficult to progress this further.

947 BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN – Agenda Item 5

The Chief Executive stated that the Biodiversity Action Plan was approved by the Board in February 2010 and at the last meeting of the Environmental Committee it was recommended that parts of the report should be amended, following a review of the work completed to date. This review shows the following actions have been carried out:-

Habitat Action Plans

- |                 |   |
|-----------------|---|
| 8.1 Common Reed | No large areas of common reed created.<br>Lengths of fringe reed created:<br>160 lin m of 1 metre width at Frampton Towns Drain.<br>No reed fringe lost.<br>Amend future target to record reed fringes created. |
|-----------------|---|

947 Cont.....

- 8.2 Wet Woodland No wet woodland identified in area.  
No opportunities for formation of these.  
Should we revise/remove as BAP target.
- 8.3 Drains We have created 200m of new watercourse.  
We have resisted long lengths of culverting.  
BAP Target satisfactory.
- 8.4 Hedgerows We are going to list all hedgerows alongside  
drains by July 2011.  
We will then classify these.  
BAP Target satisfactory.

### Species Action Plans

- 9.1 Water Vole Revised survey areas.  
Continue to record and inform LERC.  
Add mink control (which we have undertaken) to  
actions.  
BAP Target satisfactory (with above addition).
- 9.2 Otter No sightings of otters in the District at the present  
time. There was an article in Lapwings recently  
about otters in the Bain.
- Alan Ball stated that an otter had been found dead  
on the road side on Clay dyke Bank. It was a  
young male, which indicates populations are  
increasing in this area.
- 9.3 Reed Bunting This target is aligned with 8.1 (Common Reed).  
The only bird survey we have had carried out is by  
Barry Hancocks on the Wyberton Marsh Pump  
Drain.
- Craig King stated that farmers are having RSPB  
surveys carried out showing a range of birds and  
the results of these surveys could be forwarded to  
BSIDB.
- The Chief Executive stated that he would look into  
the possibility of arranging courses to recognise  
species for the Workmen.
- 9.4 Barn Owl We have achieved all our targets with regard to  
maintenance of owl boxes at pumping stations.  
However we need the Tom Tom devices to be  
operational to record sightings along Board's  
drains.

947 Cont.....

9.5 Grass Snake No work has been carried out on introducing records of sightings as yet.

9.6 Eel We attended the IDB Workshop arranged by ADA, and are considering what could be done to improve connectivity at Chain Bridge and Cooks Lock Pumping Stations. We are discussing with the Environment Agency how to record how many eels there are in both the South Forty Foot Drain and IDB drains.

A report on the number of eels and fish in IDB drains is included at the end of this report.

Martin Redding made the Committee aware of illegal nets being placed in drains, the Witham 4<sup>th</sup> have found and removed two.

9.7 Toad No system of recording has as yet been set up.

9.8 Bats No work has been carried out which would warrant a bat survey.

Fran Hutchinson informed the Committee that there are local Bat Groups who record local bat activity, these details could be sent to the BSIDB.

9.9 Fish In addition to the above species the Board adopted the action plan from the Lincolnshire BAP on fish. No specific works have been carried out to promote fish habitat in 2010/11.

It is recommended that ponds should be added to the list of habitat action plans and invasive species added to the list of species action plans.

Chris Manning stated that the cost to the Board of invasive species like ragwort if not controlled could be high. Any soil with invasive species will be classed as hazardous waste and cannot be spread on the farmer's field and there will be a cost to dispose of it.

The Committee RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND that the revised copy of the BAP should be adopted by the Board.

948 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROPOSED ENVIRONMENTAL SURVEY AND DRAIN WORKS TO BE CARRIED OUT IN 2011/12 – Agenda Item 6

(a) Review benefits of Risegate Eau Scheme

The proposal to raise water levels and form deeper ponds at Risegate Eau is under ongoing review with regard to the environmental benefits the Board might gain from this work.

(b) Eel Flap valves at Pumping Stations

The Chief Executive informed the Committee that he is still continuing to look into the alternative flap valves at pumping stations, particularly Cooks Lock and Chain Bridge. The Board may be able to apply for grant aid.

(c) Surveys of Water Voles

The Chief Executive reported that survey work has been carried out for five years and more targeted surveys will be carried out to ascertain whether vole populations change after desilting works.

(d) Surveys of Hedges

Hedge surveys have been completed in the North West catchment areas of the Board's District, and this work will continue and should be completed in 3-4 months time. This will allow review of how to continue with the future maintenance of these hedges.

(e) Continued work with Wildlife Conservation Partnership

The Chief Executive stated that the BSIDB were committed in their BAP to maintain existing owl boxes at pumping stations and look into alternative sites in the Boards area.

Alan Ball recommended that the Board could finance a rolling programme of installing pole boxes within their area on feeder drains. The cost of installing three boxes using the Wildlife Partnership contractor would be approximately £1,300 and Alan asked the Board to consider financing three pole boxes per year. Bob Sheppard of the Wildlife Partnership would survey the Board's area and recommend the best locations, and BSIDB could liaise with the landowner to gain permission to install the box. The expected life of an owl box is 15 years.

(f) Alternative Energy Sources

The Chief Executive reported that he was looking into the possibilities of solar panels and wind turbines at pumping stations. A report was due to be considered by the Executive Committee at their next meeting.

949 REPORTS – Agenda Item 7

(a) Fran Hutchinson – Lincolnshire Biodiversity Partnership (LBP)

Fran informed the Committee that the Black Sluice IDB was a member of the Biodiversity Partnership along with 45 other company members. The LBP Record Centre is the first accredited scheme to qualify on data quality, standards and providers.

LBP are in the process of drafting the third edition of the Lincolnshire Biodiversity Plan which will be presented at their Conference in October 2011 and there will be six week consultation period in June 2011.

Fran congratulated the Black Sluice IDB on their BAP report.

(b) Alan Ball – Wildlife Conservation Partnership

Alan informed the Committee that their group is not now named the Hawk & Owl Trust, their new title is Wildlife Conservation Partnership.

He stated that the minutes of previous meetings which referred to Barn Owls eating water voles was not correct. The main diet of Barn Owls are short tailed field voles followed by wood mice, bank voles and shrews. Whilst it is recognised that Barn Owls do take water voles the instances are relatively rare due to the fact that it will be a high risk strategy to target prey that will predominantly reside very close to or in water. Barn Owls are not waterproof and cannot afford to get wet.

Results for 2010 after a prolonged cold spell at the beginning meant that those Barn Owls that survived were in generally poor condition at the start of the breeding season, and suffered both low site occupancy and low productivity. However 7 pairs of Barn Owls and 3 pairs of Kestrels occupied the Board's 24 boxes raising 3 young Kestrels and 12 young Barn Owls.

Early indications for 2011 suggest that it will be a relatively good egg laying year. It is possible there will be a good number of second broods, depending on prey available.

Since the first nest box scheme by the Black Sluice and EA along the South Forty Foot Drain in 1987, all the Drainage Boards in Lincolnshire now have individual schemes and there are now 150 boxes provided by the Drainage Boards and another 100 provided by EA. These boxes support nearly 100 pairs of Barn Owls, and as a result Lincolnshire is now recognised as the top county for Barn Owls in the UK with possibly around 900 pairs. The Black Sluice, EA and subsequently other drainage boards must take much of the credit for this healthy Barn Owl population.

949 (b) Cont.....

Around 1,000 Lincolnshire Barn Owls chicks have fledged from the Forty Foot boxes since the schemes' inception.

(c) Craig King – Natural England

Craig informed the Committee that he is involved with the Agricultural Environment Schemes for farmers locally and added that these schemes require a bird survey to accompany their application. He confirmed that Horbling Fen SSSI was in good hands and agreements are in place with the local venison farmer to grass retain the land in the next ten years.

950 NOTES ON THE ADA LINCOLNSHIRE ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 1<sup>st</sup> March 2011 – Agenda Item 8

The Chief Executive presented notes on the ADA Lincolnshire Branch Environment Committee held on 1<sup>st</sup> March 2011.

951 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There being no further business the meeting closed at 4:35pm.