BLACK SLUICE INTERNAL DRAINAGE BOARD
M I N U T E S

of the proceedings of a Meeting of the
Southern Works Committee

held at the Offices of the Board on the
25th March 2025 at 2pm

Members

Chairperson - * Mr C Wray

* Mr W Ash	Mr G Atkinson	
* Mr V A Barker	Mr M Mowbray	
* Mr J Casswell	* Mr R Dorrington	
* Mr K Casswell	* Cllr M Geaney	
* Cllr Z Lane		* Mr A Mair
* Mr M Taylor	*Mr D Leverton	

(* Member Present)

In attendance:	Mr D Withnall	(Chief Executive)
	Mr P Nicholson	(Projects Director)
	Mr S Harrison	(Maintenance Director)
	Mrs A Chamberlain	(Finance & Admin Director)
	Mr P Holmes	(Chairperson of the Board)
	Mr M Rollinson	(Executive Committee)
	Cllr P Bedford	(Executive Committee)
	Cllr S Evans	(Executive Committee)

2612 Recording the Meeting - Agenda Item 1

Members were informed that the meeting would be recorded.

2613 Apologies for absence - Agenda Item 2

Apologies for absence were received from Mr R Needham, Mr M Mowbray, Mr G Atkinson, Mr R Start (invited guest), and Mr M Rollinson only attended the tour.

2614 Declarations of Interest - Agenda Item 3

There were no declarations of Interest.

2615 Minutes of the last meeting - Agenda Item 4

The Minutes of the Joint Works Committee, which was held on 7th October 2025, copies of which had been circulated, were considered. It was AGREED that the Minutes should be signed as a true record.

2616 Matters Arising - Agenda Item 5

Cllr M Geaney pointed out she thought she did attend the meeting on 7th October 2025 and it is marked she didn't attend. The CEO confirmed this will be investigated.

2617 Discuss the Operations Report and Inspection - Agenda Item 6

The Maintenance Director led discussions On the Operations report with an accompanying presentation.

1. Point of Interest – Excavator Access Routes and Proposed Culvert Installation.

The Maintenance Director updated the Board are constantly evaluating access points for the machines, cutting the cost of moving the machines and implementing alternative bank cutting in accordance with the Biodiversity Action Plan.

To cut the cost of moving the machines, which is quite costly, two sites have been identified and a budget of £31,750 has been approved to facilitate the installation of culverts. This will be completed in the next financial year from April up to the cutting season in August. The locations are behind the Europa Tyre depot in Gosberton and the other site in Swaton.

The Projects Director led discussions about the inspection, as follows, with an accompanying presentation.

2. View / discuss Donington Northings Pumping Station

Site visit: The site visit commenced with a discussion regarding the proposed contribution from Network Rail towards the roadway associated with the site. It was noted that the roadway had originally been installed using Internal Drainage Board (IDB) funding, following discussions that began over ten years ago concerning the need for a new access point. This requirement was driven not only by the deteriorating condition of the culvert but also by significant safety concerns at the level crossing, where there have been two fatalities. Ongoing negotiations with Network Rail were acknowledged as challenging and protracted, with efforts continuing to secure agreement, particularly in relation to the closure of the crossing and potential financial contributions. It was emphasised that the crossing is no longer required operationally and is used only by the Board, and that it is now considered unsafe. A proposal was put forward to reduce the height of the culvert while retaining the box structure to avoid destabilising the railway embankment, with a request for Network Rail to contribute financially to these works.

The discussion then moved on to the pumping station refurbishment scheme. Members were informed that a budget of £2 million had been allocated for refurbishment works at this site and at Wyberton Chain Bridge. The planned works include the installation of new pumps and motors, all of which must meet fish and eel-friendly requirements. While restrictions posed by existing infrastructure, particularly outfall pipe configurations, were acknowledged, it was confirmed that the new pumps would incorporate less damaging fish and

eel impellers. The project has reached the tender stage, with three contractors invited to proceed and site inspections scheduled imminently. Due to pump lead times and operational constraints, installation is anticipated to begin from May of the following year.

Further details of the refurbishment were provided, including the installation of a new Motor Control Centre (MCC) to improve automation and control. Additional works include structural steel refurbishment, where corroded support stanchions have been replaced, and shot blasting and repainting have been carried out across most sites. Gosberton pumping station remains outstanding due to difficulties in installing a new access door, pending input from structural engineers. Site improvements at the current location also include enhanced access to the lower pump room and general refurbishment of internal structures, alongside planned upgrades to crane operations within the building.

Discussion also covered water management proposals, specifically the potential installation of a tilting weir across two gravity channels discharging into the South Forty Foot Drain. This would allow improved control of water levels, which are currently dictated by downstream conditions. However, there remains uncertainty as to whether such works are eligible under grant funding criteria, and further investigations are ongoing. Members also discussed operational improvements, including the introduction of variable speed drives for pumps, which would enhance efficiency and reduce energy consumption compared to the current fixed-speed operation. It was noted that existing pumps operate on an on/off basis and cannot adjust output dynamically, whereas new systems would provide greater flexibility and improved operational efficiency.

Further technical discussion addressed system design considerations, including the positioning of pumping stations relative to drainage channels and the implications for efficiency. It was concluded that while right-angle configurations may not significantly affect larger stations, they can have greater impacts in smaller systems. Members also discussed the benefits of increased capacity in new pumps to account for climate change projections, with a minimum uplift of approximately 10%. However, it was recognised that increased pumping capacity may not yield benefits if downstream capacity is constrained.

At the committee's meeting later: Discussion returned to matters concerning Network Rail and the culvert at the crossing. It was noted that engagement with Network Rail has been difficult and fragmented, with limited progress despite over a decade of discussions. While the Board had initially anticipated that Network Rail would undertake or fund much of the work associated with closing the crossing and providing alternative access, this has not materialised. Concerns were raised regarding the structural stability of the railway embankment should the culvert be modified or removed, particularly given the risk of bank slippage if vegetation and existing structural support are disturbed.

Members debated possible approaches, including leaving the culvert in its current state until failure occurs, undertaking partial removal to mitigate immediate risks, or proactively modifying it while retaining sufficient structural

integrity. It was suggested that formally notifying Network Rail of intended works, rather than seeking prolonged discussion, may be a more effective approach. The ownership and responsibility for the culvert remained unclear, though it was believed to date from schemes implemented in the 1960s.

Safety concerns were emphasised, with consensus that the current condition of the crossing presents a hazard and cannot be left unaddressed indefinitely. Proposed interim measures included removing unstable elements such as loose blocks, retaining supporting structures on the railway side, and installing physical barriers to prevent use by vehicles. It was also suggested that Network Rail should formally close the crossing and install permanent fencing. Members acknowledged the need to balance cost, safety, and long-term liability, noting that failure of the culvert during high flow conditions could result in additional operational challenges.

3. Visit / discuss Horbling – Overflow Spillway

***Site visit**:* The visit proceeded with a discussion on the Horbling spillway works. Members were reminded that the scheme had been undertaken approximately one year prior, around early spring. Reference was made to previous site discussions where the Board had outlined intended measures to mitigate overtopping onto the adjacent roadway. It was confirmed that the agreed works had now been completed; however, it was emphasised that these measures were not expected to fully resolve the issue. Instead, they were anticipated to provide only partial alleviation, as the fundamental problem of a low point in the road profile remains unchanged. It was noted that during high water events, water is still likely to overtop at this low point despite the implemented interventions.

Members were informed that feedback had been received from a local landowner, who reported observing water beginning to trickle over the bank following the works. While this provided some early insight into the scheme's performance, it was acknowledged that no sufficiently significant storm event had yet occurred to fully test the effectiveness of the solution. Consequently, a definitive assessment of the scheme's success could not yet be made. The Board reiterated that the completed works involved lowering the bank height to better manage overtopping flows, alongside the presence of an existing siphon beneath the road, which transfers water into the adjacent drain system. This siphon had been referenced in past correspondence from the landowner, and the matter itself has a long history, with previous considerations dating back to the early 2000s under successive Chief Executives.

Attention was drawn to a potential operational implication arising from the works, namely that additional water may now be diverted into the Horbling Fen catchment, potentially exceeding what would naturally occur. It was noted that under normal conditions, this water would be expected to flow toward the Environment Agency's main river system. Members clarified that the drain in question had been de-mained in 2018, transferring responsibility from the Environment Agency to the Board, which has since resulted in a more proactive management approach to the issue.

Further discussion considered potential future mitigation options should overtopping persist. Suggestions included raising the road level or installing additional drainage features such as gullies; however, these options were acknowledged to be constrained by practical limitations. In particular, the absence of a roadside verge and the close proximity to the highway would necessitate involvement from the local highway authority (Lincolnshire County Council), and significant engineering challenges would likely arise. It was also noted that previous temporary measures by the Environment Agency had included the use of sandbags, though these were not considered a sustainable solution.

Members concluded that, while the implemented works represent a reasonable and proportionate response, they do not eliminate the underlying issue caused by the road's low point. It was also highlighted that the works had been carried out largely in response to the requests and proposals of the tenant landowner. The Board considered that it had fulfilled its obligations in undertaking the requested measures and that, should the scheme prove ineffective in future flood events, there may be limited further action available without causing adverse impacts elsewhere. Specifically, it was acknowledged that preventing overtopping in this location could potentially transfer flood risk to adjacent land, thereby creating wider management challenges.

4. View / discuss Gosberton Pumping Station

***Site visit**:* The tour continued with a detailed briefing on the operational status and planned works at Gosberton Pumping Station. Members were informed that the station is broadly comparable to Donington, comprising a three-pump configuration with a similar overall capacity. However, it was noted that the Board is required to undertake significant investment at this site as part of its ongoing capital and maintenance programme. Specifically, the existing pumps are scheduled for refurbishment, which will be carried out sequentially to maintain operational continuity; each pump will be removed, refurbished, and reinstated before progressing to the next unit.

In addition to pump refurbishment, structural repair works are required at the site. While a budget has been allocated, progress has been delayed pending resolution of access constraints. The primary issue concerns the installation of a new access door from the weed screen deck to the lower pump room. The preferred location for this door was found to be directly beneath a structural support beam, raising concerns regarding structural integrity. Following a prolonged period awaiting guidance from consulting engineers (Stantec), it has recently been confirmed that the proposed location is not feasible. Consequently, alternative options are now being explored to identify a suitable position for the new access point.

The creation of a lower-level access door remains a priority due to the operational and safety benefits it would provide. At present, access to the lower pump room is via a hatch and internal steps, which constitutes a confined space. This necessitates adherence to strict confined space entry procedures, including additional personnel requirements for supervision and safety compliance. By installing a direct access door at low level, the site could eliminate the need for confined space entry protocols, thereby improving efficiency and reducing resource requirements for maintenance activities.

Members were advised that the Board has invested in specialist equipment, including a core drilling system, to facilitate the creation of new access openings through substantial concrete walls, typically 18–24 inches in thickness. This approach has already been implemented successfully at other sites, improving accessibility and operational efficiency, and it is intended that similar improvements will be made at Gosberton once a suitable design solution is agreed.

The discussion also highlighted broader refurbishment plans, noting that Gosberton will eventually be incorporated into a wider programme aligned with prioritisation criteria, particularly those relating to fish and eel compliance requirements. It was acknowledged that regulatory obligations are a key driver for these works, and failure to comply could expose the Board to potential legal challenges. As such, alignment with environmental standards and regulatory expectations remains a critical consideration in project planning.

Structural issues identified during inspections were also reviewed. In particular, corrosion and deterioration of steel support stanchions, especially at the base of I-beam sections within wet-dry zones, have been observed across multiple sites, including Gosberton. These elements have been or will be replaced as necessary to maintain structural integrity. While it was not considered that the deterioration posed an immediate risk of structural failure, members agreed that replacement was essential given the role these supports play in spanning significant widths within the pumping station structure.

Finally, members revisited the earlier discussion regarding recent plant acquisitions. The new Energreen Alpha machine, although delivered later than anticipated, is now operational and has not presented any issues to date. Similarly, the newly acquired mobile elevated working platform was discussed in more detail. While its maximum height capacity exceeds typical requirements, the key advantage lies in its extended outreach, which allows safe access to otherwise difficult-to-reach areas, particularly where physical proximity to structures cannot be achieved.

5. <u>View / discuss Dunsby Fen Pumping Station - New Weed Screen Cleaners</u>

Site visit: The meeting continued with a detailed update on planned works and operational improvements at Dunsby Pumping Station. Members were advised that provision has been made within the current budget to fully replace the existing weed screen cleaner, which has proven unreliable and subject to frequent breakdowns. It was noted that this unit operates inconsistently and often fails, and therefore full replacement is considered necessary to ensure dependable and efficient operation at the site.

Dunsby is also included within a wider programme of works covering five sites scheduled for upgrades to pump motors and associated control systems. One site, at Ewerby, has already been completed, while the remaining four sites, including Dunsby, are still to be delivered. The principal cause of delay was identified as constraints relating to electrical supply upgrades. The installation of larger pump motors incorporating variable speed drive technology requires an

enhanced power supply, necessitating the installation of new, higher-capacity transformers at each site.

At Dunsby, it was explained that the new transformer will be pole-mounted and will require an H-pole configuration due to its size. Two potential siting options have been identified by National Grid; however, only one location is considered suitable by the Board, as the alternative would adversely impact access to the pumping station and present safety concerns. Progress has been delayed pending the securing of necessary consents, including either a wayleave agreement or a Flood Risk Activity Permit (FRAP) from the Environment Agency, owing to the site's proximity to the South Forty Foot drain.

Members were informed that the FRAP application process has been a significant contributing factor to delays, with approximately one year having elapsed without meaningful progress. Despite this, all connection offers issued by National Grid have been accepted and paid for, and the Board is now awaiting the necessary approvals before works can proceed and installation dates can be confirmed.

The proposed upgrades are expected to deliver substantial operational benefits. The introduction of new motors and modern control panels will provide improved flexibility and efficiency in pump operation. In particular, the adoption of variable speed drives will enable pumps to operate at lower, sustained outputs during routine conditions, reducing the need for frequent start-stop cycles. It was noted that under the current system, pumps operate at full capacity for short durations before shutting down, leading to repeated restart cycles that are energy-intensive and costly. The upgraded system is therefore expected to reduce energy consumption and improve overall efficiency.

A suggestion was raised regarding the potential installation of a second, smaller pump to improve operational flexibility. While this was considered, it was noted that the planned upgrades already offer significant improvements in control and efficiency. Furthermore, it was explained that the original IDB funding programme required delivery within a single financial year, which constrained the ability to consider more extensive redesign options at the time. It was acknowledged that this timeframe was ultimately impractical, given the delays encountered, and that a longer funding window may have allowed for different design decisions. However, it was also recognised that, without external funding, the Board would not have been in a position to undertake any work.

At the committee's meeting later: Further discussion was held regarding the condition and replacement requirements of the weed screen cleaner at Dunsby Pumping Station. Members were informed that multiple attempts had been made to secure external funding for its replacement through the IDB funding streams; however, these applications had been unsuccessful. It was noted that this item was one of the few projects that did not receive approval under the initial funding round, and a subsequent application under Tranche 2 was also unsuccessful. Despite this, the need for replacement remains clear, as the existing weed screen cleaner is currently unreliable and fails more frequently than it operates effectively.

The operational importance of the weed screen cleaner was emphasised, particularly given the volume of weed accumulation experienced at the site. Although Dunsby is a single-pump station, the quantity of debris and weed present

can be significant, as evidenced by observed conditions at the site. As such, the proper functioning of the weed screen is critical to maintaining efficient pump operation and preventing blockages or reduced performance.

Members also discussed ongoing issues related to the electrical supply and pump performance at the station. It was highlighted that the current motors are susceptible to overheating and failure during periods of high water levels when the pumps are required to operate against a high hydraulic head. While Dunsby is not considered the most problematic site in this regard compared to others within the Board's network, it remains one where failures do occur and therefore requires attention as part of the wider upgrade programme.

5. Point of interest – Culvert Issue - Quadring

Mr V Barker declared an interest.

The Planning officer has set up a site meeting with LCC to discuss a way forward. The main issue is the concern of the culvert's restricted flow and the integrity of the downstream headwall.

6. Enforcement Issue – Gosberton Clough

Mr V Barker declared an Interest.

The Board has been proactive and has contacted the adjacent property owner who will remove the overhanging trees by April 2026. Once this has been completed the Board will be able to gain access and will be able to maintain the drain from either side.

7. Proposed New Culvert

This had been covered by the Maintenance Director in the Operations Report and Inspection.

8. Tilting Weir - LAPSIP

These are fully functional and operational now. The telemetry is sorted and will be used to control water levels as was agreed within the funding application.

During the discussion, Mr K. Casswell queried whether the scheme had been delivered within the approved budget. In response, the Projects Director confirmed that the works had been completed on budget, providing assurance to members regarding both financial control and effective project delivery.

9. Enforcement Issue

The Projects Director presented a report on a further enforcement matter, which had been brought to the Board's attention by a member present. Officers confirmed that an initial site visit had been undertaken following notification of the issue, with photographic evidence from the first inspection included in the meeting papers.

Subsequently, it was identified that a culvert had been installed within the watercourse as part of the ongoing works, prompting a second site visit to assess compliance with the approved specifications.

It was reported that the culvert installed by the contractor did not meet the required specification. While the installed pipe was believed to be no larger than 900mm in diameter, the approved specification required a 1500mm culvert. Despite initial observations suggesting that the workmanship appeared generally satisfactory and fit for purpose, the deviation from the agreed design was considered unacceptable. As a result of discussions with the contractor, it was confirmed that the undersized culvert has since been removed and replaced with a correctly sized pipe, with works being undertaken to ensure compliance with the original consent.

The Board confirmed that it will continue to monitor the situation closely to ensure that the reinstatement is carried out fully and in accordance with the approved specification. Ongoing oversight will be maintained to ensure compliance and to protect the integrity of the watercourse and surrounding infrastructure.

10. Wetland Project – Bourne Fen

The meeting received an update on progress at the Bourne Fen Wetlands project. Members were advised that works have been underway on site since late November to early December, with Board involvement ongoing throughout this period. Although a site visit had been undertaken by officers in early December, it was noted that one of the Board's machines has remained continuously deployed on site since mobilisation, supporting delivery of the scheme.

The project is being delivered in phases, with Phase One enabling a defined scope of works aligned with the funding currently secured. The Board has committed to supporting the scheme as previously agreed, including the provision of quotations for works undertaken and the supply of hired plant and equipment as required. It was noted that the current phase is expected to conclude by the end of the month, with a return to site planned for mid-May to continue with subsequent works. These will include further drainage operations, specifically the rerouting of the weir drain around the perimeter of the site.

During the discussion, Mark Taylor declared an interest in relation to the new cut associated with the weir drain and culvert levels. Concern was raised regarding the potential for raised water levels to adversely impact adjacent landholdings. In response, it was advised that any concerns should be formally raised at the earliest opportunity with the relevant parties, including the Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust, and through appropriate planning channels. It was emphasised that this stage of the project represents the appropriate opportunity to address such issues before works are finalised.

Members also considered the implications of allocating Board plant and labour resources to the project. A query was raised regarding whether this commitment was impacting delivery of the Board's own maintenance programme, particularly desilting works. It was confirmed that the Board currently has one machine and one operator assigned to the site; however, this does represent a proportion of available operational capacity. Despite this, officers confirmed that desilting activities are continuing, with mitigation measures implemented to maintain overall programme delivery.

It was further noted that the duration of plant deployment at Bourne Fen has exceeded initial expectations, largely due to delays associated with planning approvals. However, this had been anticipated within the Board's operational planning to some degree. Additionally, efficiency savings identified within the desilting budget, alongside the implementation of overtime working over recent weeks, have enabled the Board to recover productivity.

Officers confirmed that, based on current progress, all scheduled desilting works are expected to be completed by the end of April. Members were therefore reassured that, notwithstanding the allocation of resources to support the Bourne Fen Wetlands scheme, this has not resulted in any material delay to the Board's core maintenance obligations.

11. Proposed New Culvert

This had been covered by the Maintenance Director in the Operations Report and Inspection.

12. Cliff Beck

The Maintenance Director confirmed the Cliff Beck is classed as a low consequence system. It was confirmed that the watercourse is not included within the current year's maintenance programme due to its classification. However, members were advised that representations have been made to the Environment Agency to review this status in light of significant planned development within the catchment. In particular, it was highlighted that approximately 1,500 new homes are being constructed at the upper end of the system, and that, following changes in criteria effective from 1 April, post-2012 developments can now be considered when assessing watercourse classification. The Environment Agency has acknowledged this request and is reviewing the applicable methodology, with the potential for reclassification being considered, particularly in relation to the impacts on areas such as Handley Chase and the wider Quarrington and Silk Willoughby locality.

Members noted that the Board's drainage network receives flows from these developing areas, with particular reference to downstream impacts where previous issues have been recorded. It was considered important to monitor the effect of recent clearance works on the system, including the Cliff Beck and North Beck channels, as well as potential impacts on downstream villages should a significant rainfall event occur. It was confirmed that the North Beck has also been cleared by riparian landowners, which should improve conveyance capacity and provide a more continuous flow path through the system.

Further discussion addressed recent works undertaken to assess the condition of the watercourse. It was clarified that initial clearance had been carried out primarily to enable inspection and surveying, allowing officers to better understand the condition and identify required works. Members were advised that the condition of the watercourse was better than previously anticipated, with much of it found to be in reasonable order following clearance works undertaken by landowners. While some constraints remain—notably access difficulties, dense vegetation, and the presence of several mature willow trees within the channel—it was estimated that a relatively modest investment (approximately £55,000) would be sufficient to bring the watercourse up to an acceptable standard for potential adoption or ongoing

maintenance by the Board. This represented a significant reduction compared to earlier estimates, which had suggested substantially higher costs prior to inspection.

The meeting also considered the broader funding and governance context for maintaining such watercourses. It was noted that a paper is to be presented to the Regional Flood and Coastal Committee (RFCC) in April, proposing a review of the demaining arrangements implemented in 2018. Specifically, it was suggested that consideration be given to utilising the IDBs' collective precept contribution (approximately £2.2 million) to support maintenance of low consequence watercourses. This proposal aligns with current RFCC funding allocations, whereby an additional £1.5 million of local levy is being directed toward medium consequence watercourses. Members discussed the view that increased central government funding should support medium consequence systems, thereby allowing locally raised funds to be redirected to manage lower consequence assets more effectively.

2618 Receive the Engineer's Report - Agenda Item 7

The Projects Director updated much of the report was discussed during the tour and can be taken as read.

Graft Drain

Mr V Barker highlighted the Graft Drain has a full drain up to the tunnels that were put in at the Pinchbeck end. Is the assumption to be something is wrong or someone has made a mistake with the levels?

In response, it was suggested that the situation may be attributable to a combination of factors. Officers advised that the system operates across a relatively flat gradient, which inherently limits the efficiency of water conveyance. It was also noted that recent maintenance works have been completed across parts of the system, with remaining works at the upper end scheduled for completion within the current and following financial year, for which budget provision has already been made.

Members discussed the potential for improving flow within the system, including whether lowering levels within the drain might provide a more effective solution. However, it was confirmed that investigations into downstream culvert capacities had already been undertaken, and it was considered unlikely that enlarging these structures would significantly improve conditions. Instead, it was suggested that there may be a low point within the system, potentially contributing to water backing up and creating standing water. Comparisons were made with similar issues elsewhere in the catchment, where land settlement or shrinkage has resulted in depressions within the channel profile, further restricting flow.

The Board acknowledged that while recent works, including culvert replacements and channel improvements, have enhanced the condition of the drain compared to its previous state, water levels remain relatively high. This is compounded by substantial reed growth within the channel, which can further impede flow and reduce conveyance capacity.

A suggestion was made to install gauge boards both upstream and downstream of the affected section to provide a visual reference for water levels during future inspections. While it was noted that existing level data, including invert levels of

culverts, is already available and generally aligns with design expectations, members agreed that additional monitoring could provide a clearer understanding of system performance over time. Officers indicated that they would review this suggestion and consider appropriate measures, including further level surveys, to inform any future actions.

Dunsby Bank Repair

Mark Leggott raised concerns regarding the condition of the South Forty Foot bank in the vicinity of Dunsby Fen Pumping Station that the Environment Agency (EA) appeared to have effectively created a spillway by lowering and hardening a section of the bank with aggregate, thereby allowing water from the South Forty Foot drain to overtop into the adjacent fen. It was observed that the bank at this location appeared notably low and did not represent an improvement on the previous condition. It was suggested that this could result in increased flood risk to agricultural land and surrounding areas.

In response, officers acknowledged that similar concerns had been raised previously and that the Board shared reservations about the works undertaken. It was noted that the situation may appear more pronounced at present due to the absence of established vegetation, which previously masked the low point. However, it was accepted that the level of the bank remains questionable. Officers confirmed that, based on discussions with the EA, the works undertaken were not intended to represent an improvement but rather a reinstatement to what the EA considered to be the original condition. The bank had initially been raised to approximately 3.05m but was subsequently reduced to around 2.95m following EA instruction, on the basis that enhancements beyond the original level were not permitted under their guidelines.

Members expressed frustration with this approach, particularly as overtopping at this location results in water being redirected into the Board's drainage system, effectively creating a cycle of pumping water back into the same catchment. It was noted that the EA had undertaken the works primarily to stabilise the bank and prevent structural failure by armouring the surface, ensuring that, if overtopping occurs, the bank itself would not erode.

The broader rationale behind the EA's approach was discussed, with officers explaining that the Agency operates within strict regulatory and legal guidelines which prevent them from raising bank levels where doing so would transfer flood risk elsewhere. It was suggested that their strategy is to retain and manage known low points, allowing overtopping to occur in predetermined locations rather than risking uncontrolled flooding at unknown or potentially more sensitive locations. This approach was described by some members as effectively creating a "designated" or "stealth" floodplain, often to the detriment of agricultural land.

Members voiced significant concern that this policy places disproportionate impact on farmland, with the risk that repeated overtopping could adversely affect agricultural productivity and land value. It was emphasised that the Board has consistently sought parity between the protection of agricultural land and residential property; however, it was felt that the EA's current approach undermines these efforts. It was further noted that the precise identification of low points remains uncertain, with historical interventions elsewhere having failed to

demonstrate expected overtopping behaviour, suggesting that the system is not fully understood.

Officers confirmed that the Board has made repeated representations to the EA regarding this issue, both independently and alongside affected landowners, but that progress has been limited. It was acknowledged that the EA's position is largely constrained by policy, guidance, and legal advice, and that their ability to undertake enhancements is therefore restricted.

The possibility of undertaking independent surveying, including the use of modern technologies such as drones and remote sensing, was raised as a means of identifying critical levels and improving understanding of the system. However, it was concluded that while such data may provide additional insight, it would have limited practical value given that the Board does not have jurisdiction over the watercourse or the bank in question and therefore cannot act unilaterally. Resources were considered better directed toward the Board's own assets and responsibilities.

A further query was raised regarding the potential for landowners to undertake their own mitigation measures; however, it was noted that such matters would require careful consideration and should not be discussed in an open forum.

2619 Report on Rainfall - Agenda Item 8

The rainfall figures at Black Hole Drove were circulated. The Committee RESOLVED that this report be noted.

2620 Any Other Business - Agenda Item 9

The Chairperson queried the scheduling of the Southern and Northern Works Tours and why the usual arrangement, whereby the Southern and Northern Works Tours alternate their timing within the year, had not been followed. It was noted that, traditionally, one tour is scheduled earlier in the year whilst the other takes place later, typically in more favourable weather conditions.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 15:06