

**NORTH KENT MARSHES INTERNAL DRAINAGE BOARD**



**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE BOARD  
HELD AT 13 CONQUEROR COURT, SITTINGBOURNE  
ON MONDAY 17 JUNE 2024 AT 1PM**

**Members of the Board Present**

Chairman: Cllr S Curry  
A Bates  
Cllr H Browne  
Cllr L Croxton (remotely)  
D Long (remotely - part of the meeting)  
J Nash (remotely)  
J Nottage  
Cllr J Wallace (remotely - part of the meeting)  
B Wright (remotely)

**In attendance**

P Haselhurst – Clerk  
C Longden – Finance Officer  
L Rowland – Office Manager  
A Soloman – Sustainable Development Officer  
W Smith – Works Manager  
P Britten, Environment Agency (remotely - part of the meeting)

**1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS**

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and asked everyone to introduce themselves.

**2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies received from G Etheridge. No response received from G Harding.

**3. ITEMS OF INTEREST DECLARATION**

No items declared.

**4. MINUTES**

**RECEIVED (Appendix 1)** the Minutes of the Meeting of the Board held on 15 January 2024.

These minutes were circulated to Members via email on 5 February 2024 with a request for any amendments to be advised by 1 March 2024. They were then added to the website.

The Chairman asked Members if they had any comments/changes they wished to make to the minutes.

No comments/changes made.

All Members were in favour of considering the Minutes from 15 January 2024 as approved.

## **5. ACTION LIST & MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES**

**RECEIVED (Appendix 2)** a copy of the Action List as of the meeting held on 15 January 2024.

The Clerk talked through the following items:

**Unassigned Land** – 90% dealt with, still in progress and we will refer back to the Board if we require any particular help.

**Bank Account** – purposely held back on this due to the forthcoming amalgamation. A lot of work has been done with the Lower Medway IDB to diversify risk and an investment account is in the process of being set up with the CCLA (who specialise in investments for public bodies). The Finance Officer is also looking at an additional high street bank account.

**Environment Day** – this hasn't been prioritised yet, but would like to perhaps host something with KCC, Making Space with Nature project within the next year.

**Site Visit** – this hasn't been prioritised either. Change action to send out details of outfalls to Members. If there are any specific ones that Members want to look at, they can let us know.

**Thames Estuary Growth Board** – this has not progressed.

The Chairman confirmed that this board is a non-governmental body set up by the government through the EA, to look at green and blue action plans for the Thames Estuary area. However, things are currently on hold with the election. He said there is probably going to be a bit of a gap before we need to do anything further on this at the moment.

**Supporting Education** – has been looked into and a meeting was held with the University of Greenwich. Lower Medway IDB has just approved the recruitment of a Technical Assistant which will expand the current team. Will keep in contact with the university with the view of possibly getting an intern in for 3 months over spring/summer time.

## **6. CLERKS UPDATE**

The Clerk confirmed we are currently working on the amalgamation and further updates will come out throughout the rest of the meeting.

## **7. HEALTH & SAFETY UPDATES**

The Clerk was pleased to report that there were no incidents/accidents or near misses to report. She confirmed the Works Manager has recently completed the annual review of our risk and method statements.

The Works Manager confirmed that for the 3 watercourses that we will be doing maintenance on this year, we will need to undertake surveys for hazard awareness to ensure machine safety.

## **8. ENVIRONMENT AGENCY UPDATE**

**RECEIVED (Appendix 3)** a copy of the EA Annual Precept Report for 2023-24.

The Chairman welcomed P Britten to the meeting.

P Britten confirmed that not much has changed since his last update in January. He confirmed the following

### **Spend for 2023/24**

- £10,600 - Shorne and Higham track repairs.
- £10,000 – external plant hire.
- Cost TBC – Snakey Lane access crossing.
- £5,000 – materials for Cliffe and St Marys access track repairs.

### **Proposed spend for 2024/25**

- Millmarsh Pumping Station refurbishment.
- Cliffe and St Marys access track repairs.
- Contribution to North Kent Marshes IDB – The EA is currently undergoing the process of renewing a Public Sector Cooperation Agreement with the NKMIDB. The EA has agreed to contribute in the region of 50% of the annual precept funding to the IDB for them to conduct works which have mutual benefits. Detail is yet to be finalised, but such works are likely to include contributions towards:
  - Higham North, Church Lane small culvert which has collapsed.
  - Desilting works within Higham Marshes, including the new Snakey Lane crossing.
  - North Kent Marshes IDB/Lower Medway IDB Wise Use of Water project.

P Britten asked if there were any questions.

On the Clerk's request P Britten shared a map of where the Millmarsh Pumping Station is on screen, the key locations of the outfalls were also pointed out.

D Long asked if it was necessary to keep paying for mowing, as it seems that mowing is not done like it once was. He also asked if there was any update on St Marys sluice.

P Britten confirmed that the primary reason for mowing is to allow for adequate inspection of assets and their mowing is done to a ME3 regime which is a national policy.

P Britten said it is not good news regarding St Marys sluice. He confirmed there have been further contracting issues and errors in programming and St Marys design completion has

been pushed back to mid-2025. He said he was not very happy about this, and he has asked if something else can be moved to get this put back in and he is currently awaiting a response.

D Long confirmed the levels are currently down and that salt water is coming in regularly and requested an updated programme to be sent through,

P Britten said he would hold off doing this for now and will do so once he has received a response from the Programme Manager.

**Action** – P Britten to send an updated programme of works for St Marys sluice when appropriate.

Members discussed the frustration and the funding difficulties in detail.

The Chairman suggested the Board write to the EA directly and said he would also like to attend a site visit.

**Action** – Board to draft an EA letter and arrange a site visit for St Marys sluice.

## 9. PSCA WORKS

The Clerk confirmed that the asbestos testing undertaken at Shorne and Higham Marshes has come back clear, and we can proceed with desilting confidently. She confirmed we will be looking to use precept funding for this.

The Chairman thanked P Britten for his attendance.

P Britten left the meeting.

## 10. BIODIVERSITY UPDATE

The Clerk confirmed that the Sustainable Development Officer is taking the lead on the Biodiversity Action Plan and she is currently contacting relevant bodies to form Steering Partners for each BAP priority species.

The Sustainable Development Officer confirmed she has made contact with the RSPB who are going to help with the lapwing and Natural England for the tubular water dropwort. Richard Andrews has been approached for a quotation for a water vole survey and she is struggling to find anyone who can help with a survey for eels.

The Chairman said that the Fisheries Agency should be able to help with eels.

J Nash said that Tom Reid at the EA could help with eels, and he was also aware that the Zoological Society of London (ZSL) has done a lot of eel surveys, and he will come back with a contact name.

The Clerk confirmed following the successful completion of the Snakey Lane crossing, the Sustainable Development Officer is engaging with an ecologist to look at some ecological

improvement for some mitigation for those works so we can have this as an example for any consenting and regulation work that we do.

## **11. PLANNING AND CONSENTS**

**RECEIVED (Appendix 4)** the Sustainable Development Officer's Planning and Consenting Report.

The Clerk confirmed there had been a slight increase in the number of planning consultations and only 1 drainage consent received and gave a summary of the planning consultations received.

The Chairman confirmed that Medway Council is in the middle of its local plan process and the public consultation phase will be coming out in July for a 6 week period.

## **12. WORKS MANAGER REPORT**

**RECEIVED (Appendix 5)** the Works Manager Report Number 3.

The Works Manager confirmed that 3 main watercourses have been identified for maintenance this year which include Cooling Sewer, Allhallows, and Shorne Marshes. He said that he is aiming to get into the North Kent Marshes area earlier this year.

B Wright commented that the Shorne Marshes are very choked with brambles.

The Clerk raised that we are going to be doing some invasive species removal for DP World of parrots feather.

A Bates confirmed that this now appears to have gone as the reeds have taken over and he will be visiting the site tomorrow.

The Clerk asked if anyone is aware of main river sections that are in poor condition to let her know.

The Works Manager requested that information be shared as soon as possible as the work program is arranged a year in advance.

Getting in contractors as an option was discussed if necessary.

The Chairman asked about the use of chemicals, and what our policy is for the treatment of invasive weeds.

The Works Manager confirmed that the workforce has done an invasive species training course, and we ask other organisations such as RSPB for information when necessary. He said that in terms of chemical treatment, we have guys that can apply glyphosate, and we have done this in the past and applied for an EA licence to be able to do so. He confirmed for something like parrots feather, it would be mechanical removal and we have recently purchased floating booms to place in watercourses to prevent any small debris from floating away. He said this is not an area we have a lot of experience with, but we are progressing.

The Clerk confirmed we currently do not have a chemical policy and would look into this further.

**Action** – The Clerk to look into policy surrounding chemical use or to include this in our biosecurity policy.

The Clerk raised the Japanese Knotweed found on LN99 in Hoo.

The Works Manager confirmed the landowner had not come back to us on this.

**Action** – The Clerk/Works Manager to follow up with the landowner regarding the Japanese Knotweed on LN99.

J Nash said there is a lot of crassula in the ditches near the railway crossing in Shorne to the north of the footpath.

The Works Manager confirmed that the Shorne Marshes watercourse will require a survey and he has created a new in-house invasive species tracking system, which we can build on and improve our experience.

H Browne thanked the workforce on developing their skills and using technology to get information that we need.

### **13. REGISTER OF MEMBERS' INTEREST FORMS 2024/25**

The Office Manager confirmed we were waiting to receive 2 final forms from Gravesham Borough Council Members.

### **14. GOVERNANCE UPDATE**

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

- Risk Management Strategy
- Financial Risk Assessment (Corporate Risk Register)
- Statement of Internal Control

The Clerk confirmed that the Financial Risk Assessment has been replaced by the Corporate Risk Register which she has put together for the Lower Medway IDB and is more comprehensive. She confirmed there are no changes to the risk strategy itself and displayed the document on the screen and talked through the various areas of the Corporate Risk Register.

Under the procurement section, large contracts were discussed. The Clerk confirmed that the Lower Board agreed in their Board meeting to increase this from £10,000 to £25,000.

On a proposition by H Browne seconded by J Nash, it was **AGREED** to increase the large contracts that require Board approval to be increased to £25,000.

All Members were in agreement.

The Clerk confirmed that we are looking to adopt the Investment Policy that the Lower Medway IDB has in place at amalgamation.

The Clerk confirmed there was a new Governance section in the report.

When looking at the “Damage to environment as a result of works (adopted watercourses)” section it raised questions about what would be included in the letter being sent to the Environment Agency.

J Wallace said it was crucial to put something in the letter emphasising we are the junior partner.

The Chairman said that shared risks/responsibilities should be included in the risk register and we should also include a list of the organisations we partner with.

**Action** – The Clerk to highlight shared risks and include the organisations we partner with in the Corporate Risk Register.

J Nash added that it was important as well as having the risk included, that we also keep a note of what we have done about the risk.

On a proposition by The Chairman seconded by J Nash it was **AGREED** to approve the Corporate Risk Register.

All Members were in agreement.

The Clerk displayed the Statement of Internal Control on screen and explained this is the annual statement that accompanies our end of year finances. She confirmed there had not been any changes to this document.

On a proposition by J Wallace seconded by B Wright it was **AGREED** to approve the Statement of Internal Control.

All Members were in agreement.

## **15. END OF YEAR ACCOUNTS 2023-2024**

**RECEIVED (Appendix 6)** End of Year Accounts for 2023-2024 including Quarter 4 outputs.

**RECEIVED (Appendix 6a & 6b)** Quarter 3 and Quarter 4 bank reconciliations.

The Clerk displayed the End of Year accounts on screen and focussed on the budget monitoring section. She confirmed we are now starting to split out our reserves since we have adopted our byelaws. She explained the breakdown which shows the breakdown for SWDC, interest and EA section 57 monies received back. She confirmed there was a budget saving of £17,000, an overspend of £60 on Land Registry fees because we didn't have a budget in place for this. She confirmed we also had a £25 overspend on ADA Subscription due to them increasing fees after the budget was set. She confirmed there were significant savings on professional fees and maintenance which led to the £17,000 contribution to reserves.

On a proposition by Chairman seconded by A Bates it was **AGREED** that the Board have seen and agreed with the End of Year Accounts for 2023-2024.

All Members were in agreement.

It was **AGREED** to approve the bank reconciliations for quarter 3 and quarter 4 of 2023-2024 (quarter 1 and 2 were approved in the last Board meeting in January).

All Members were in agreement.

The Clerk raised the subject of reserves, and the guidance is to hold at least one year's worth of operating costs. She confirmed it was raised by the auditors that we have never had this officially approved and requested we do so now. She explained we are over this currently because of SWDC.

On a proposition by J Wallace seconded by B Wright it was **AGREED** that the Board will follow ADA's good governance guidance of holding at least one year's worth of operating costs.

All Members were in agreement.

## **16. CHANGE COMMITTEE**

The Change Committee item was brought forward in the agenda to accommodate Members that had to leave early.

**RECEIVED (Appendix 7)** the Change Committee Minutes held on 22 April 2024.

The Change Committee Minutes were noted.

**RECEIVED (Appendix 7a)** the Clerk's Change Committee Paper.

The Clerk confirmed we had our first Change Committee meeting in April which was a positive meeting and she had created a paper showing the recommendations for the amalgamation. She confirmed that she also met with J Wallace on two separate occasions, as she was unable to attend the meeting. She confirmed she has also spoken to Stuart Bobby from Gravesham Borough Council about the proposal.

The Clerk raised adopting the new name of North Kent Marshes Water Level Management Board for the new amalgamated Board.

The Clerk discussed the new board's membership and confirmed that further to discussions with Stuart Bobby from Gravesham Borough Council, and his wish to retain two places on the Board, rather than the one proposed, this takes membership up to 25.

The Clerk confirmed that there will be no change to the electoral districts and boundaries at the moment and there is an opportunity under the Environment Act to review that in the future.

The Clerk explained that it was discussed standardising the penny rate across both Boards to align with the lower rate of the Lower Medway IDB considering the cessation of the £25,000 Service Level Agreement fee currently paid by North Kent Marshes IDB to Lower Medway IDB as a partial offset to revenue loss.

The Clerk explained that once we have the new Board in place, as well as having a separate Financial Committee she would also like to have a Technical Committee where discussions surrounding works and projects can be focused on.

On a proposition by A Bates seconded by J Nash, it was **AGREED** to the recommendations above, which are also included in the Clerk's Change Committee Paper.

All Members were in favour.

The Clerk explained that she would like to allocate a budget for administrative costs related to amalgamation from both Boards for £10,000 each. She confirmed this would cover costs such as website, logo redesign, signwriting and IT costs etc.

On a proposition by J Nash seconded by H Browne, it was **AGREED** to allocate £10,000 from reserves for amalgamation administrative costs.

All Members were in favour.

J Wallace and D Long left the meeting.

## **17. INTERNAL AUDIT UPDATE**

**RECEIVED (emailed separately)** Mid Kent Audit Internal Report for 2023-2024.

The Clerk confirmed the internal audit report was really positive and thanked the Finance Officer for her work on this. She summarised the key outcomes and the findings are listed below:

- Accounting Records (medium) - ensure that all sums are recorded in SAGE accurately to ensure transparency and reduce the risk of mis-reporting financial information. Provide an explanatory note on the AGAR and public Management Accounts. This was regarding a sum that had been recorded incorrectly as bad debt and will be coded correctly in the future.
- Financial Regulation and Scheme of Delegation (low) – reviews should occur when amendments are necessary or every four years at a minimum. Outdated references should be removed. The wrong Scheme of Delegation was on the website, which has since been updated.
- Service Level Agreement (low) - The SLA should clearly outline the period of validity, and accurate charges. If the Board is unsure whether VAT is applicable, professional advice should be sought in this respect. It was unclear which period it applied to which is a year, but dates should be included. They had also picked up that the SLA costs had been increased from £25,000 to £30,000. However, once approval had been granted by both Boards for the amalgamation a decision was taken to leave it at £25,000.
- Reserves Policy - A reserves policy in line with the JPAG should be introduced. Professional advice and further training on Sage and/or management of reserves should

be sought. Reserve levels should be clear. The reserves element has now been dealt with and the policy element will be in hand come amalgamation.

On a proposition by A Bates seconded by J Nash it was **AGREED** the internal audit report had been read and the Board will take the necessary recommendations.

All Members were in agreement.

The Chairman thanked The Clerk and team for their work resulting in such a positive internal audit report.

## **18. ANNUAL RETURN (AGAR)**

**RECEIVED (emailed separately)** the Annual Return (AGAR) for the year ending March 2024.

The Clerk displayed the AGAR on screen and read through the internal control objectives, highlighting that on items M and N we had to tick no because we the missed adding the announcement on the website.

The Clerk explained and talked through Section 1 of the AGAR that needs to be completed and signed today and this is linked to our Statement of Internal Control.

The Clerk explained that Section 2 of the AGAR relates to all of our figures.

The Clerk asked the Board if they had any questions and for their approval of the AGAR.

On a proposition by the B Wright seconded by J Nash, it was **AGREED** that the Chairman should sign and date Section 1 of the Annual Return.

On a proposition by A Bates seconded by J Nash it was **AGREED** the internal audit report had been read and the Board will take the necessary recommendations.

All Members were in agreement.

## **19. SNAKEY LANE CULVERT CROSSING**

The Clerk displayed photos of the completed Snakey Lane culvert crossing on screen.

The Board thanked the Sustainable Development Officer for her work in arranging this project.

## **20. WISE USE OF WATER FOR HOO PROJECT**

**RECEIVED (Appendix 8)** the Wise Use of Water, Hoo Peninsula Detailed Scope of Works.

The Chairman said this was hugely important and passed over to the Clerk.

The Clerk explained that this is work that is being co-delivered by RSPB and us and she is working closely with J Nash and A Johnson. She read out section 4 – Scope of the report as follows:

NKM IDB are seeking an appropriate proposal that will enable us to:

- a) Understand changes to the water balance in the medium to long term of the project area incorporating the impacts of climate change, population growth, and any other significant changes to regional water resources. Select appropriate range of climate change scenarios to determine the range of likely impacts and risks in the project area in the medium to long term. It is particularly important that the extremes of water availability are assessed, as they are key to the maintenance of key environmental features in the marshes.
- b) Assess the hydrological resource (inputs and outputs) in key landscapes and the predicted impact on this resource from climate change. Survey existing water management in key landscapes and determine future water requirements for people and ecosystems.
- c) Incorporating the likely impacts of climate change to determine the optimal water use at a site level, according to landowners / land managers and protected habitats future requirements.
- d) Create a spatial plan that considers the availability of freshwater supplies to ensure water management of levels and resources can be met.
- e) Create a programme of potential capital works, and opportunities for partnership working, to deliver the plan.
- f) Develop a plan to engage local communities and partners and access funding streams for the potential capital works and operational requirements.

The Clerk confirmed the next step is A Johnson is waiting to hear back from Heritage Lottery regarding funding. After funding approval, in August time we will then go out to tender.

The Chairman said that post amalgamation we will likely have a working group that will be looking at this regularly.

## **21. INSURANCE UPDATE**

The Office Manager confirmed that the insurance had increased by only 3% this year and due to amalgamation, we will receive a refund of 2 months as the new insurance will start 2 months earlier in April 2025.

## **22. ADA UPDATE**

The Clerk confirmed that she represented ADA in March at the European Climate Conference in Bruges, and we helped in hosting a special delegation from West Flanders last week. She also confirmed there will also be the usual ADA Conference in November and will send details of this to Members for anyone that wishes to attend.

## **23. ANY OTHER BUSINESS & CLOSE OF MEETING**

There wasn't any other business to discuss on this occasion.