



Danvm Drainage Commissioners

MINUTES OF THE FULL BOARD MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 6TH FEBRUARY 2024 AT MOSS & FENWICK VILLAGE HALL

PRESENT					
Elected	Mr D Atkinson	Mr N Welburn	Mr R Robinson	Mr S Lomas	Mr J Duckitt
Appointed	Cllr D Nevett	Cllr M Jordan	Mr C Crowe	Mrs G Ivey	Mr P Maddison
	Cllr R Tams	Cllr K Osborne	Cllr M Crane	Mr J Gilliver	
APOLOGIES					
Elected	Mr A Cooke				
Appointed	Cllr McCartney				
ABSENCES					
Elected	Mr D Platt	Mr Falkingham	Mr Thompson	Mr W Platt	
Appointed	Mr Grady	Cllr Hogarth			
IN ATTENDANCE					
Officers		Mr A McLachlan – Chief Executive Officer			
		Mr R Towse – Director of Operations			
		Mrs A Larkin – Director of Policy & Finance			
		Miss L Smith – Executive Assistant			
Others		1 x Member of Public			

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265. Welcome, Introductions and Apologies

265.1. The Chair welcomed Members and Officers to the Board noting apologies from Cllr McCartney and Mr A Cooke.

265.2. Cllr Osborne arrived.

266. Declarations of Interest

266.1. Mr Atkinson declared an interest in the solar farm.

267. Additional Agenda Items

267.1. None

268. Health & Safety

268.1. None

269. Natural Environment

269.1. The CEO informed the Board that members of staff had attended the annual ADA event on the natural environment, a point had been raised that the current government policies on main river channel maintenance may have accelerated loss of habitat due to premature flooding of land.

269.2. Cllr M Crane arrived.

270. Minutes of the Previous Full Board Meeting

270.1. The Chair drew attention to minutes of the previous meeting.

270.2. It was PROPOSED by Cllr Jordan and SECONDED by Mr Crowe and UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the Board approve these minutes as a true record of that meeting.

271. Matters Arising

271.1. Minutes 218.2, 247.3, 249.3, 260.4 and 262.12 were confirmed to have been resolved.

271.2. The CEO advised that in respect of 212.4, enforcement against a navigation authority may be limited due to savings in the Board's byelaws, although the Board's Development Control Officer had commenced enforcement in any case, beginning with initial contact.

271.3. The CEO advised that the Board had taken advice from the Board's Solicitor regarding the Sickness & Absence Policy, as had been previously queried by Mr Gilliver. The Solicitor had confirmed that the introduction of the policy did not constitute a contractual change and although the Board were not required to give formal notice, staff had been notified one month in advance.

271.4. Cllr Nevett advised that a query had been received from a member of the public regarding outfall doors. Officers confirmed that the location of these doors were within the Doncaster East Internal Drainage District.

271.5. Mr J Gilliver and Mr J Duckitt arrived.

272. Minutes of the Policy & Finance Committee Meeting

272.1. The Chair highlighted the minutes from the meeting held on 9th January 2024 for noting.

273. Joint Consortium Committee (JCC) Meeting

273.1. The Chair drew attention to minutes of the JCC from 29th November 2023 and invited questions from the Board.

273.2. The CEO confirmed that the JCC had agreed a shared services budget which was noted in the minutes and formed part of the Budget for approval by the Board.

273.3. The CEO advised that the Chair and the Vice Chair were members of the JCC by default, however the Board should also appoint two other ordinary members. The current ordinary Members were Mr Maddison and Mr Welburn.

273.4. It was PROPOSED by MR GILLIVER and SECONDED by CLLR NEVETT and UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the Members reappoint MR WELBURN and MR MADDISON to the JCC.

274. Amendments to Constitution of the Joint Consortium Committee

274.1. It was noted at the last JCC that the wording in the constitution of the Consortium required very slight amendments, specifically exchanging a pronoun for an adverb “each” to “both”, that the meeting was to be chaired on a rotational basis and a substitute member could be called upon if insufficient numbers were available to attend the meeting.

274.2. The CEO advised that any structural changes would need to be referred to the Board’s solicitor, however any minor non-structural amendments could be made by members appointed to the JCC.

274.3. It was PROPOSED by CLLR JORDAN and SECONDED by MR LOMAS and UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that Members appointed to the JCC are authorised to agree minor ‘non-structural’ amendments to the constitution wording with other members of the Committee.

275. Budget & Rate Setting

275.1. For the current financial position, the CEO referred to the charts within the meeting papers and highlighted that the largest cost component for pumping stations was electricity, and that standing charges alone this year would be around £136k.

- 275.2. The CEO explained that electricity would be placed in an independent cost centre next year for clarity. £60k has been profiled per month for Jan – March and as the bills were received nearly four months late in some instances, meter readings were having to be taken manually.
- 275.3. Mr Crowe queried if meter readings could be taken at TCA funded pump stations, to which the CEO advised it would be possible. **Action DO.**
- 275.4. The CEO estimated that there would be at least a £40k difference in expected vs actual electricity charges, due to the exceptional flooding events over the Christmas period.
- 275.5. Cllr Jordan queried if any pumps were running 24/7 to which the CEO confirmed that this was only the case during flooding events, for example the river Don flooding in October.
- 275.6. Cllr Jordan asked if this highlighted a need for a larger pump in that area to which the CEO advised that this was not the case, as the river was being pumped back into the river, but it did highlight issues with the Environment Agency's current maintenance regime on the river Don.
- 275.7. The CEO confirmed that he had informed the EA that the Board would attempt to recover c£60-70k of costs incurred to pump the river back into the river.
- 275.8. He added that this issue would be raised with the Chairman of the regional flood and coastal committee and the area director, however, could not guarantee that the funding claim would be met by the EA.
- 275.9. Cllr Nevett queried if there was a plan to automate the electricity readings, to which the CEO confirmed that the Board's telemetry software provider, Schneider had been asked to look into this.
- 275.10. Cllr Jordan queried the action which would be taken once the current fixed energy contract ended in October, to which the DO advised that the Board would assess the options available at that time.
- 275.11. Cllr Crane queried whether nighttime rates were cheaper, to which the DO presented the section presented in the papers which displayed this information, highlighting that there was no substantial difference between the two rates, and that any effort to manage flows to take advantage of the minor rate differences would result in marginal benefits at best.
- 275.12. The CEO drew attention to the Budget Setting Report and explained the calculations of agricultural rates and special levy.
- 275.13. The CEO advised that the outturn position was expected to be a balanced budget, within 1%, and that any surplus funds would create an opportunity to increase the Board's reserves.
- 275.14. Mr Crowe commented that 1% was a tight budget to outturn. The CEO responded, informing the Board that there were strict financial management measures in place, including monthly budget meetings, to regularly assess the Board's situation.

- 275.15. The CEO highlighted the reserves and explained the policy position, which is to hold 75% of Board's operational costs. It is hoped that by the end of March 2025, an additional £138k would be placed into reserves which would mean the Board would hold 63%.
- 275.16. The CEO explained that there would be an inflationary pay increase for staff this year, which again remained below the retail price index over two years to March 2025.
- 275.17. The Board were informed that a revised budget would be brought to the meeting in May, however the estimated budget presented should be used to allow the Board to set the rate.
- 275.18. It was PROPOSED by Mr J GILLIVER and SECONDED by CLLR M JORDAN and UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the Board the approves an estimated budget of £2,737,710.
- 275.19. Mr Robinson queried the percentage increase last year in comparison to this year's increase, to which the DPF advised that the 2023/24 land drainage rates increased by 39% compared to a proposed 3.13% increase.
- 275.20. Mr N Welburn commented that over the Christmas period, he had personally faced significant financial loss due to flooding and the failings of the Environment Agency. He queried why payments were increasing whilst maintenance was decreasing and failing to protect land from flooding.
- 275.21. The CEO explained the hypothecated payment made to the EA every year and made members aware that Danvm pays the largest amount of any IDB and acknowledged that there is a significant frustration that the EA continues to fail in delivering effective channel maintenance on main rivers.
- 275.22. Mr Crowe advised that Doncaster East IDB had refused to pay until action had been taken against the EA. The CEO advised that Danvm had also withheld funds this year but had eventually agreed a limited way forward.
- 275.23. Cllr Osborne acknowledged the concerns of Mr Welburn, as a member of the RFCC, and cited another relevant example. He noted that a failure to ringfence the funds for the purpose of which it is collected is a common theme.
- 275.24. Mr Paul Maddison raised concerns in the areas around Low Ackwith due to flooding along the river Went.
- 275.25. Cllr Tams asked if there was a specific reason for the lack of maintenance, to which the CEO advised that EA maintenance was unfairly biased against sparsely populated areas, with residential areas more likely to see an increased level of work.
- 275.26. Mr Gilliver queried if the meeting had taken place with Mr Keir Mather. The CEO and Chair provided feedback and the Board concluded that lobbying should continue via local MPs to encourage Government to make a change in policy. **Action Chair/Vice Chair/CEO**
- 275.27. It was PROPOSED by Cllr Jordan and SECONDED by Mr C Crowe and UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that to meet the approved budget the Board set a rate of 16.9p£.

276. Invoices Paid and Accounts Settled

- 276.1. The Chair drew attention to invoices paid and accounts settled.
- 276.2. Cllr Jordan queried the weed-screen payment of £2.5k to which the DO advised it was a replacement and installation of an electrical unit which had then had to be reprogrammed.
- 276.3. It was PROPOSED by Cllr Crane and SECONDED by Cllr Nevett and UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the Board approves the invoices paid and accounts settled, totalling £815,715.97 (net), as a true record.

277. Review of Bank Accounts

- 277.1. The DPF advised that the Board's Lloyds current account was largely redundant and although the monthly fees incurred were relatively small (approximately £15 per month), it was no longer serving a useful purpose and would seem appropriate to close it down.
- 277.2. It was PROPOSED by Cllr Jordan and SECONDED by Mr Maddison and UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the Board authorise the CHAIR, the VICE CHAIR, the Chief Executive, and the Director of Policy & Finance to action the closure of the Board's Lloyds current account and transfer the closing balance to the Board's Barclays current account.

278. Internal Audit

- 278.1. The DPF confirmed the Board's internal auditor had completed a second interim audit for 2023/24 and drew attention to the report within the meeting papers, adding that no concerns had been reported.

279. Capital Programme

- 279.1. The CEO raised Clay Dike, and as per previous discussions, reiterated that funding was not available to complete these works and that improvement would be met by revenue funding.
- 279.2. It was proposed that the Board revisit this scheme at the May budget meeting, to discuss commencing improvement works dependent upon Board funds available at that time.

280. Public Sector Agreements

- 280.1. Regarding works on the River Went, the DO confirmed there would be a meeting with the ecologist and the Board were awaiting confirmation that the operational team could commence clearance works.
- 280.2. Due to the recent weather conditions and the raised water levels, it was expected that works would commence within the next three to four weeks, beginning at Topham Ferry and working towards the aqueduct.
- 280.3. Mr Duckitt queried whether spoil would be removed however the DO advised that the instructions currently, were to remove growth within the channel to aide normal conveyance.

280.4. The operational team would commence wracking works along the river Aire. Cllr Jordan queried if both sides would be cut; the DO confirmed this would be the South side only.

281. Plant and Vehicles

281.1. At the latest Policy and Finance Meeting, the plant and vehicle strategy was adopted subject to ratification by the Board. The CEO drew attention to the strategy within the meeting papers.

281.2. The DO advised that £16k had been spent hiring a 13 tonne excavator, and that £8k of this was purely due to moving the machine around the district. He added that not moving plant placed a risk of it being stolen and vandalised.

281.3. It was recognised that the Board previously owned plant, but previous management decisions had been made to dispose of this.

281.4. The DO proposed the purchase of a second-hand excavator, tractor, and low loader to reduce costs and improve efficiency and capacity of the machinery.

281.5. Cllr Jordan queried whether appropriate licenses were required to move the vehicles. The CEO confirmed that so long as the weight limit was not exceeded, a tractor can tow with a low loader on a public highway.

281.6. Cllr Osborne queried how many days this plant item was in use, to which the DO responded that the excavator had been hired for 32 weeks.

281.7. Mr Gilliver queried if it could be stated within the document that plant cannot be sold in the future [without appropriate levels of input from Members]. The CEO explained that that was the main purpose of the strategy, which sets out a methodology to be approved by the P&F Committee.

281.8. Mr Robinson queried if any equipment would still need hiring and the DO confirmed this would be the case for the long reach where purchase was not currently justifiable.

281.9. Authority was sought from the Board to place an order for a Spearhead Alpha for delivery in time for the 25/26 season, to be part exchanged with the current Spearhead SPV3 with an estimated net cost of £175,000.

281.10. The DO advised that to secure a position on the production line, a deposit of £51k was required, which would be accounted for in the 2024/25 balance sheet as a prepayment.

281.11. It was PROPOSED by Mr Crowe and SECONDED by Mr N Welburn and UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the Board ratifies the Plant & Vehicle Strategy.

281.12. It was PROPOSED by Cllr Jordan and SECONDED by Cllr M Crane and UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the Board authorises the purchase of a Spearhead Alpha machine (PX with SPV3) for 2025/26 season.

282. Maintenance

- 282.1. The DO reported that 68% of that Board's area had been flailed and 60% de-weeded.
- 282.2. Due to recent storms, reports of blockages and trees fallen has meant time had been spent on remedial works.
- 282.3. Mr Welburn queried if the CRT had requested monitoring between the East Coast main line and Pollington as there had been subsidence highlighted on Balne Moor and concerns with undermining. **Action DO.**
- 282.4. The DO confirmed that the current apprentice had completed L2 apprenticeship and had successfully gained new employment. The Board would be advertising for a new Apprentice MEICA Technician.

283. Development Control & Planning

- 283.1. Further discussions had been held with the developer of a large Fenwick solar farm, and drainage principles had been agreed. The DO confirmed that there were no concerns at this stage.
- 283.2. An outline application had been received for a large industrial development near Goldthorpe, which was in line with pre-application discussions. The developer was confirmed to have communicated with the Board at an early stage.
- 283.3. A meeting was held recently with Board Officers in relation to the redevelopment of Askern Sawmill site where it was agreed that the discharge rate would be 35l/s, into Mill Drain.
- 283.4. The DO informed the Board that various applications had been received for battery storage facilities. Cllr Tams queried where these would discharge. The DO advised there would be French drains into a soakaway and calculations submitted for consideration before approval.

Ongoing Planning and Enforcement Matters

- 283.5. The DO confirmed that discussions were ongoing regarding a North Yorkshire Council scheme to alleviate flooding on Lunn Lane, Kellington, an open cut culvert. Although the Board must be consulted in relation to the culvert, the Board would not be responsible for its future upkeep.
- 283.6. An enforcement notice had been served against a landowner for spoil on a Board-maintained watercourse in the Balne area.

Consents

- 283.7. A consent had been issued for a replacement footbridge by Doncaster Council at Thorpe Marsh Nature Reserve.

283.8. A consent had been issued for a replacement pole belonging to Northern PowerGrid at East Ings Pumping Station.

284. Future Meetings

284.1. The 2024/25 meeting dates were confirmed as follows:

Tuesday 30th April 2024 – Policy & Finance Committee

Tuesday 21st May – Full Board Meeting

Wednesday 17th July – Driffield Show

Tuesday 30th July – Policy & Finance Committee

Tuesday 15th October - Policy & Finance Committee

Wednesday 13th November – ADA Conference (London)

Tuesday 19th November – Full Board Meeting

Wednesday 27th November – Joint Consortium Committee

Tuesday 3rd December – ADA AGM (Online)

Tuesday 21st January 2025 – Policy & Finance Committee

Tuesday 11th February – Full Board Meeting