

UMIDB
UPPER MEDWAY INTERNAL DRAINAGE BOARD



MINUTES OF THE MEETING of the BOARD
held at **Zoom Conference Call**
on **Tuesday 20 June 2023 at 10am.**

Members of the Board Present

Cllr Baker
O Baldock
Mr Davis
D Goff (Chairman)
C Hosmer
Cllr King
Cllr Perry
Mr Rogers
W Thompson
C Wheeler

In attendance

O Pantrey – Clerk
L Carey – Finance Officer
J Davis – Works Supervisor

The Chairman proceeded the meeting by a round table introduction of members.

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies received from Cllr Millward, Cllr Farr, Cllr Wakeman, Cllr Harper, and L Young.

2. ITEMS OF INTEREST DECLARATION

No pecuniary interests were noted by members for the upcoming meeting.

3. REGISTER OF MEMBERS INTERESTS 2022/23

The Clerk reminded members that this was a legal obligation and that anyone having issue with the register form please contact him as soon as possible.

4. MINUTES

The Chairman requested any alterations to the minutes of 24 January 2023. He then requested that these were approved as correct.

On proposal from the Chair, it was **AGREED** by all Members present that the minutes of the meetings held on 24 January 2023 be approved as a true and accurate account.

5. ACTION LIST AND MATTERS ARISING

The Chairman asked the Clerk if there were any issues arising from the action list.

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The Clerk said there was nothing considerable that needed immediate attention.

He said the resilience fund was hoping to be completed later in the meeting.

The Clerk said the EA report was quite short and so he had requested a more detailed report for next year. He did confirm that £40,000 had been earmarked for PSCA.

The permit to work system was questioned.

The Clerk said there has always been a permit to work system but he was digitising it to make it more accurate in regard to timings and also to improve the format for method statements that were unique to the permit.

6. CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

The Chairman said he had visited the Leigh Flood Storage Barrier and that despite the costings and delays, the EA were hoping to complete next year.

He asked if the Clerk might look into a visit for members at some point in the year.

A question was asked about the Hildenborough Scheme, to which the Clerk said they had received a consent application and it seemed to be under way.

The Chairman continued saying there was a productive meeting with Sally Harvey, the Regional Director at the EA.

He said that there were good discussions relating to demaining, improvement in work relationships and PSCA, and the struggle with landowner interaction and communication.

There was a discussion about the EA and how our future relationship with them might look.

There was a question about how PSCA works and how it is funded.

The Clerk said that it is a collaborative relationship to ensure the delivery of working need of authority bodies. He said that we weren't contractors as such but to all intents and purposes it could be viewed as that. He said that the funding was from the precept that the Board pays for the maintenance of main river. He said that on occasion it is possible to gain grant in aid money but that was for considerable projects and that wasn't really what he wanted to do.

He concluded that if demaining did become policy, then the watercourses would need to be in an acceptable condition, prior to the re-adoption, at the expense of the EA.

There was a question regarding staffing issues and how we might deal with PSCA works.

The Clerk said we were at a stage of limit testing the ability to complete maintenance and carry out works. He said it was vital we remained safe in our practice, and that any further employment must be costed and paid for from contracted works to avoid heavy increases in the levy.

He said that we would almost certainly need more staff in the near future and that we needed to see how best to pay for these increased liabilities.

The Chairman finished by reminding members that the Clerk had written to the councils with a view to meeting with the Board and we had not had a great response. He asked members if they could chase this up.

ClIr King offered to help with facilitating a meeting with TMBC.

Action: Clerk to organise meeting at Leigh Barrier.

Action: Clerk to speak with TMBC about a meeting once again.

7. MEMBERS ROUND TABLE *NEW ITEM*

The Chairman opened up a new item where members could bring up issues within their respective areas or industries. He said this was an open forum to air any concerns or contributions relating to surface water drainage.

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It was asked how the pollution incident at Transfesa was handled.

The Clerk said the EA were dealing with it and the waste was being transported off site in tankers.

There was a question about flooding at a woodland in North Tonbridge.

The Clerk said that if it was woodland, it might be that it was beneficial to surface water flooding downstream. He confirmed it was outside of the district and as such as difficult issue to get involved in and might be best brought up with KCC.

There was a request that the IDB engaged with committees from councils and that the IDB provided a report for councils to see what it was the Board did.

The Chairman said we had made efforts to engage and there had been very little response.

The Clerk asked if there was a need for an ongoing report or an annual document. He said that we did send the newsletter out to councils and had not received anything. He said that he would create a newsletter to outline the works the Board does and the Board could view it in November.

The Chairman said the public engagement was still not as he would like, but it has been discussed and the Board did need to seek ways to improve its presence.

The Clerk said he would be attending the West Kent Ploughing Match in an attempt to do this, but the social media element required a far more concerted effort and maybe even an employee specifically for it, which seemed unfeasible at this time.

The Clerk suggested that perhaps a collective IDB stand would be a good idea at the Kent Show, involving all IDB's from the region.

It was suggested that we perhaps went to the Agri Show at Detling in March to target the people who we helped.

There was a question about how the councils could approach a better understanding of the IDB because we sat on no committees.

The Clerk said there were likely to be funds for surface water that were presumably managed by the council somehow, and that this is a better way to generate interest in the topic. He said that he had sat on an advisory group for Maidstone Council and that they were being proactive about the situation and that other councils should take note of this. He said it wasn't for him to drive the council's interest, it was for them to get involved.

It was reported that this group was extremely useful to the council and the presentation from the Clerk was very well received.

It was asked if there was an update on the wetland project at Grave Lane.

The Clerk said it was being held up by the flood risk assessment and the planning application.

There was a question again about the Parish Council interaction, to which the Chairman said it was difficult due to the number. He said the newsletter might be extended to these also.

The Clerk said they had visited Marden PC and that he was entirely open to meet with those that were willing to be proactive. He reiterated that he felt the onus was on the councils to set something up that identifies the importance of surface water drainage and looks to the IDB for advice or guidance.

The Clerk said that outcomes he expected to see revolved around utilising the Board and its resources to improve the surface water situation within the councils. He said he wanted to speak with them about practical outcomes as a priority.

Action: Clerk to set out newsletter for councils

Action: Clerk to investigate the Agri Show in March

Action: TMBC to invite the Clerk to committees relevant to the IDB

8. **CLERK'S REPORT**

Groundwater and Weather

The Clerk said that the wet weather in the early part of the year led to a good level of recharge across the district with soil moisture deficit reduced to zero by April. Since then, warmer, drier weather has led to an increase in soil moisture deficit again as we enter what is expected to be a very warm summer once more.

He said the wet start to the year has meant that reservoirs within the district were around the high 90 percents by May, which represents an above normal level for the time of year.

He reported that groundwater and river levels were considered to be above normal for the time of year and will remain above normal into the summer. The general expectation, however, was a very warm, dry summer period, although there is potential for very heavy localised bursts as has become common in this part of the country.

Staffing

He continued by saying that they have made good progress with recruitment after several stumbling blocks were put in the way after the last Board meeting. The Depot Leader is now settling into his role and performing well, with works completed to or above expectation and a new system of weekly meetings proving to be of good use for feedback and planning.

He explained that after much effort we have now found a replacement for John, who sadly leaves us after 38 years in the industry. He said that John leaves behind a legacy of exceptional working standards, key input at practical and strategic level, vast practical knowledge, and tireless friendship to myself, the staff, and Board members alike. He continued that John has proven to be an incredible asset for the Board and leaves us in a position of great practical, organisational, and financial strength to which he hoped he can be extremely proud. The Clerk said he was honoured to be able to call him a close friend and wished him and Anne every success in their retirement. The Clerk reported that his replacement will be Jordan, who makes the step up from the ground team into senior management. Jordan has a history of management within landscaping and maintenance companies and no doubt will offer the board excellent advice and guidance as he learns and moulds the role to become his own.

Office Admin

The Clerk said that they were continuing to refine the new works plan and improve our ability to calculate and utilise data in our attempts to properly quantify costings down to a much narrower scale than before. He said the office had been busy working on promotion of our hybrid approach to maintenance and continuing to offer services to our local partners and stakeholders. He said the April newsletter allowed him to extend the offer to the rate payers to which they have now submitted our first external quotation and completed our first works with KCC as a contractor. This pilot is set to pave the way for a PSCA between the two organisations in the coming months and further improve our ability to generate funds outside of the levy.

He explained that after the initial burst in April, the rates demand payments have settled, and we are preparing to issue first reminders to all those who have not paid their rates above £5. This will commence in early July.

The website suffered a major malfunction during an update and exposed a weakness in its backup procedures.

Unfortunately, the website database error led to a corruption of the custom theme and left the Board entirely without a useable website. He said he has now commissioned the building of a more modern and resilient site which should be live this week.

EA Partnership

The Clerk reported that PSCA discussions have moved forward, and we are now identifying locations for works this summer which will represent Year 1 of a 5 Year PSCA. Starting locations for the works will be Paddock Wood, Bethersden, and Headcorn, with potential works in coming years around the Bourne, Forest Row, and Tonbridge. This marks another exciting partnership that should offer good outcomes for both the EA and the Board.

He confirmed the office had received the Section 57 Highland Water Contribution for the year which came in just over £123,000. He explained that this money pays for the work it takes to manage water coming in from the catchments above the district that we then must manage.

Local Issues

The Clerk said that he had been asked to consider whether or not the IDB might approach the EA to manage a sluice on the River Teise but this has been rejected by the EA at this time. He agreed that this is not entirely unreasonable considering the investment about to go into the structure, but he would continue to monitor the situation and, where possible, offer our services under the upcoming PSCA agreement.

He finished by saying that the ground team have commenced flail mowing of the local roadside ditches under our control, on the basis of road safety, and were preparing to start our regular maintenance on July 16th as normal. He confirmed the Board would utilise Keaveney Plant as our contractor and hope to have this work completed by December.

Action: Clerk to look at backup and resilience of Board data.

9. WORKS SUPERVISOR REPORT 168

The Chairman asked the Works Supervisor if he had any comments to add regarding his report, and he impending retirement.

The Works Supervisor gave a short history of his working time at the Board and the industry. He explained that he had been fortunate to experience so much with both the IDB and the EA.

He gave his views on the separation of the Board and said that he was proud to be here and to see the outcome of the works he and the Clerk have put in. He concluded that it has been a privilege to work for the Board and he was excited to see how the work with the other authorities would develop.

The Chairman thanked John on behalf of the Board and said it had been an absolute pleasure to be able to work with him. He said that his approach to the works and the reporting had been first class and he hoped Jordan understood the boots he had to fill. He wished John every success and happiness into the future with his wife Anne.

The Vice-Chairman said he echoed the words of the Chairman and said he was touched by the thanks John gave for the efforts of the board to accommodate him and Lorna during the separation. He said the fact he felt the Clerk was his greatest achievement was a real endearment and agreed that the work they had done together was excellent.

The Chairman presented John with some champagne and thanked him again, to which the whole Board echoed.

Several members gave their individual thanks and praise to John on an exceptional career.

10. FINANCE REPORT

The Finance Officer gave her report on the financial situation of the board.

She said that we had received 90% of the rates so far and that all council's had paid on time this year.

She said the bank balance stood at just over £1.1million although a lot of that money was ear marked for plant and projects. She confirmed that the board was still attempting to diminish the excess funds as was planned.

She confirmed that £23,000 had been received in surface water contribution so far and that we had now raised £5,000 through private works under section 20 of the Land Drainage Act.

She explained that Natwest accounts were causing issues because of the way the mandate worked which made the account a trust. She said she wanted to work with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman to get it resolved and close the account entirely.

It was reported that the internal audit went far more smoothly than in previous years and we are happy with the outcomes which related mostly to fixed asset registers and the need for resilience. There was also a need to improve the way the bank statements and financial reports were communicated and recorded by the Board. It was now essential that the Board acknowledge the financial top-sheets and were happy with their content.

On proposal from the Chairman and seconded by S Highwood it was **AGREED** that the Board had seen, discussed, and approved the financial reports for the period as submitted by the Finance Officer.

The Clerk then explained the internal audit changes to the financial risk assessment. He said he had made minor word changes and alterations as per their recommendations.

On proposal from S Highwood and seconded by M Davis, it was **AGREED** to accept the amendments to the financial risk assessment and that it be published on the website.

The final point was the request from the Clerk to change the Responsible Financial Officer from himself to the Finance Officer. He said it didn't make sense for him to sign the starting figures when Lorna had prepared them, and that it was better that he countersigned as the Clerk after explanation from her.

All members **AGREED** that this change should occur from today.

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Action: Finance Officer and Chairs to close Natwest account

Action: FRA to be published on the website

11. BIODIVERSITY REPORT

S Highwood reported that as the Board nears its maintenance season, we continued to press forward with our attempts to improve the conservation and biodiversity within the district.

He said that since the January meeting, the Clerk and his team have made several in roads with partner authorities and stakeholders alike, with meetings taking place with the Environment Agency, Kent Wildlife Trust, South East Rivers Trust and various landowners about opportunities. Some of these are grander than others, with a river wide scheme potentially being discussed with the EA for the River Teise, which runs from Tunbridge Wells to Yalding.

He was delighted to say that the Board will be carrying out several firsts in the coming weeks with regards to conservation. Firstly, the staff will be undertaking woody debris training and installing the first deflectors within the Hammer Stream near Headcorn. This training is being carried out by Carol Donaldson, who you will know also does our conservation study work, and will involve the practical delivery of the deflectors, plus some additional training on site identification etc.

He reported that secondly, we will be working with a landowner in the catchment of UMIDB watercourse 116, who we will be helping to create light pooling and improving a wet woodland. This work has multiple benefits as it will improve storage of flood waters above the district, increase light onto the woodland floor to increase foliage, which will in turn increase overland water slowing potential, and will also create an opportunity for hibernacula creation.

This multi-pronged approach is being part funded by the IDB and part funded by the landowner on a 50% basis due to the impressive outcomes available from the work in relation to surface water in the area. He said it represents a new opportunity to demonstrate our attitude towards hybridised working, and also represents the benefit of match and part funding of projects that are improving the district.

There was a question as to why there had been deflectors had been installed on the Hammer Stream.

S Highwood confirmed that there were several benefits to the installation. He said that it related to the meander creation in a straightened section which should create a low flow channel for summer, improve natural processes in the stream, and act as a slowing feature to hold water and create deposits.

There was a question about the conservation efforts and how the maintenance worked around this.

The Clerk said they were changing to a single bank cut and also looking to remove sluices where there was no need. The Works Supervisor said that we were holding water in sluices only where there was a need for expansion.

It was requested that the boards were left in slightly longer at Haviker this year to allow for some water collection.

There was a request for a presentation from Carol to understand the work she did and how she hopes it might go forward into the future.

Action: Sluice boards to be left until reservoir on Haviker was filled.

Action: Clerk to ask Carol for a report or presentation at the next Board meeting.

12. HEALTH AND SAFETY REPORT

O Baldock reported that the most recent health and safety group has once again demonstrated the success of having a round table approach. He said that the Board continues to provide an excellent environment for the staff to operate within and those members of the ground team members who were in attendance are showing an increased interest and improved level of input into the decision-making process.

He explained that the new plant that the Board has invested in has sparked fresh discussion about the need for in-house or third-party training. The group concluded that while the current tickets on offer may not provide a full course of what we as an IDB might experience in the field, they are still the preferred method of training and testing. From a liability point of view, the Board has a responsibility to provide suitable and satisfactory information, training, instruction, and supervision. We are able to cover these areas by using inhouse or third-party, but the majority still feel that a grounding from a recognised provider is the best start. From a supervisory perspective, the Depot Leader has settled well and

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seems now to be in a role that compliments the increased work expectation from the office, meaning that the Board is compliant with the base requirements.

During the last meeting he was also able to view the new works plan and how it is demonstrated to the staff and public. The system continues to home in on improvements that can be made to efficiency of the works and displays a much clearer picture of how much work is completed at any given time. He warned that the Board should be aware that with increased staff and increased work expectations there does come an increased risk of accident and incident. He said he will be keeping a close eye on accident reports and complaints from the staff to ensure we are not running before we can walk in safety terms.

He concluded that the health and safety management is running smoothly, and we continue to see a very low level of incidents, which shows that the investment in both kit and staff is having a beneficial impact upon the conditions and general working environment. It also shows that the relationship between John, Jordan, and Kevin allows for this expansion in the works and that the standard of oversight from the works management team remains very high. I feel they should be congratulated for navigating this overhaul of the way we manage our works with such professionalism, and I am sure this excellent momentum will be taken into the extremely busy maintenance period.

Before finishing, he gave his thanks to the Works Supervisor and praised his standards of work, knowledge, and leadership during his time at the Board.

This was once again echoed by the members present.

Action: Chairman to meet the staff at the depot

13. STRATEGY AND OBJECTIVE

Resilience Fund

The Clerk said he had been working on the fund for about 18 months and after the last meeting a request was made to quantify the funding amounts and give the board greater understanding of the expectation of the Board. He said he had now created a calculator to allow a straightforward reading of the project and how it related to the Board and it's activities.

He said that now this was completed he felt the governance was in place and that the fund was ready to go to the public and that we should look to utilise it for works in and around the district.

A question was raised about how this would be publicised.

The Clerk said it would be put on the website and handed out to partners who may have an interest.

It was asked whether the Clerk felt it was better to do fewer projects with larger funding, or more projects with lower funding.

The Clerk said he would prefer to see more lower level delivery grants provided to see more projects completed.

It was asked if this was only going to be in the district.

The Clerk said it was designed to be available in the district and catchment to provide relief to the entire area during peak events.

It was **AGREED** that the resilience fund should be put into its pilot year.

The Clerk said he wanted to have a committee that dealt with any applications and that they should have a level of delegation in relation to the fund.

On proposal from the Chairman, S Highwood, C Hosmer, and W Thompson volunteered to form the Resilience Fund committee.

It was **AGREED** by the Board that the delegation would extend to initial oversight and recommendation to the board for all applications to the fund.

There was a question about when the Board would be asked to make a decision after a recommendation.

The Clerk suggested that it went by email for 12 months and then the Board could decide if it wanted to give full delegation into the committee, to which all agreed.

There was a second question as to whether the fund would be rolled forward if not used.

The Clerk said the money would be rolled forward and retained within the £150,000 earmarked for the fund.

Action: Clerk to publish resilience fund on website

Action: Clerk to arrange Resilience Fund Committee

14. INTERNAL AUDIT END OF YEAR REPORT

The members thanked the Clerk for his previous notification of the internal audit and thanked the Finance Officer for her work on this.

15. END OF YEAR ACCOUNTS – YE MARCH 2023

The Chairman asked if there were any questions about the figures submitted to the external auditor regarding the end of year figures.

On proposal from the Chairman, all members **AGREED** that the end of year accounts were approved and submitted to the external auditor.

16. ANNUAL RETURN (AGAR) – YE MARCH 2023

The Clerk showed the return and explained that this combines the results of the internal audit with the end of year accounts.

The Finance Officer explained that the change in reserves from the previous year were due to purchase of the tractors and excavator which were a considerable investment.

The Clerk said he hoped that the major purchases were now completed for the time being and that the figures should become settled going forward.

On proposal from the Chairman, it was **AGREED** to submit this AGAR to the external auditor and publish as the unaudited accounts on the Board's website.

17. GOVERNANCE AND POLICY

The Clerk asked members if they had any further changes to the amended policies which were:

Updated Policy

- Anti-bribery policy
- Breach notification policy
- Data compliance statement
- Data protection training policy
- Data retention and disposal policy
- Environmental policy
- Policy Statement

On proposal from the Chairman, it was **AGREED** to approve the policies listed

Updated Governance Documentation

- Financial Risk Assessment (Approved with item 10)
- Scheme of Delegation

On proposal from the Chair, it was **AGREED** to accept governance documents listed.

Action: Clerk to update website with governance documents

Action: Clerk to update website with policies

18. PLANNING AND CONSENTS REPORT

The Clerk said he would put a consent to the Board for the woody debris that had been installed in the Hammer Stream.

Action: Clerk to submit consent to the Board for woody debris installations carried out by the Board staff.

The Clerk said they had been approached by a person to be our Planning Officer, to which the Chairman and Vice-Chairman said they were very excited at the prospect. The Clerk said he would update everyone once he knew more.

19. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Depot Pool Vehicle Purchase

The recommendation from the Finance Committee was to purchase a third vehicle for the depot from the plant savings fund.

All members AGREED that the purchase of the vehicle should be made.

Action: Works Supervisor to make purchase of new works vehicle.

The Clerk also reiterated that staff were no longer able to take vehicles home as the internal auditor said that the Board was potentially setting themselves up for tax issues.

20. PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL MATTERS

There was a private and confidential conversation relating to the Works Supervisor.

21. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting was set as:

Board Meeting – Tuesday 14th November 2023, 10am – Bullen Court
Finance Committee – Tuesday 5th December 2023, 10am – Bullen Court

It was requested that future meetings be held in the office where possible.

22. CLOSE

There being no further business, the Chairman thanked the Clerk and his team for their efforts, wished the Works Supervisor a final thank you, and closed the meeting.