

UPPER MEDWAY INTERNAL DRAINAGE BOARD



MINUTES OF THE MEETING of the **BOARD** held at
Upper North Hall, Bullen Court
on **Tuesday 23 January 2024** at **10am**.

Members of the Board Present

O Baldock
M Davis
D Goff (Chairman)
C Hosmer
Cllr King
Cllr Perry
H Rogers
C Wheeler
Cllr Coleman (In place of Cllr Millward)

In attendance

O Pantrey – Clerk
L Carey – Responsible Finance Officer
E Robertson – Sustainable Development Officer

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies received from Cllr Harper.
As Cllr Millward could not attend this meeting, she requested that a replacement for Wealden Council be sent instead, Cllr Coleman.

2. ITEMS OF INTEREST DECLARATION

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

Information was received that an old Board member Mr John Cannon has recently died and that another former Board member Mr David Ackman is very unwell at present.

3. REGISTER OF MEMBERS INTERESTS 2024

The Clerk reminded members that this was a legal obligation and that new forms would be going out in January 2024 and it would be appreciated if they could be completed and returned. The Clerk explained that all members must complete the forms and has sent the link to each and every one of them.

4. MINUTES

The Chairman requested any alterations to the minutes of 14 November 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 14 November 2023 be approved as a true and accurate account.

5. ACTION LIST & MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES

The Leigh Barrier visit has now been confirmed as 21st February 2024 at 10:00am
The Sustainable Development Officer and Mr Mark Davis had their proposed meeting.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL AGENCY PRESENTATION

There was no attendance from the EA, but a report was sent instead. The EA has agreed a £40,000 limit for PSCA works with the Board for the coming year 2024/2025.

For political reasons the Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS) project will be added to the PSCA works this year 2024/2025.

Following a workload rationalisation and efficiency review, the precept in 2024/2025 is expected to be a 3% increase on last year to £95,554, which has been agreed by the Clerk.

Action: Clerk to write to Sally Harvey, EA area director, for a meeting in the spring of 2024, for him and the Chairman to attend and discuss various points of interest.

7. CHAIRMAN REPORT

The Chairman and Vice Chairman attended the ADA annual conference meeting in November 2023 and have requested that the Clerk send out the 7-point plan from ADA to all Board members. They were informed that a lot of constituencies are changing within the area and that a new one for the Weald has become the biggest district in the catchment area.

The Chairman said that the Clerk and himself have now done all the appraisals for the managerial staff and would like to thank all the staff and ground team for their hard work during the past year.

8. CLERK REPORT

The Clerk said that they have now filled the vacancy within the ground team putting them back up to 5.

For future information there are potential items for recruiting in the pipeline as we now have an ageing workforce, within the ground team.

The Clerk attended a meeting at Tonbridge & Malling Council along with the Clerk from the Lower Medway IDB. To help build up a good rapport with the Councils, the Clerk will continue to attend meetings to advise them of what the Boards do.

Cllr Perry will follow this up with Maidstone Borough Council, so that the Clerk can have future meetings with them.

Cllr King thought that this was also a good idea and would take it back to his council, to enable The Clerk to attend meetings with them also.

9. WORKS REPORT

The Chairman asked if the Board had any questions regarding the report, to which there was no comment made.

The Clerk asked for a record to be made that there was a change in the Works Managers role after the retirement of John Davis to Jordan Schuiling. He indicated that the total works have increased for this year from 79% (2022) to 89% and that this is the first year that we have changed our waterways from watercourses to reaches, to enable us to get a bigger picture of the works for costings and timings in the future.

He affirmed that very few accidents have occurred, none serious.

The Clerk said that they are looking to raise completion into the mid 90% next year while also carrying out PSCA and Section 20 works.

He confirmed a new diary system is being put into place for Area 1 (River Beult) and going forwards, if this new system is proficient, they will begin to bring in other areas. This is to allow us to inform Landowners when we would like to access their property, if convenient with them, or if we need to go back at a later date.

A question was raised concerning the one accident. The Clerk said that it was a **minor** cut on the hand whilst chipping.

A question was asked about us doing the EA works, would this not upset our new diary system. The Clerk replied that EA works would be added to the end of our maintenance works, so therefore not impacting on our normal day to day works.

A question was asked about the Benenden School project.

The Clerk informed the Board that we could not start on the date that was agreed, as SGN (Gas Company) were still working at the site. However, once they moved on our works were completed successfully under Section 20 of the Land Drainage Act.

We were recommended by KCC Highways to complete these works. The collaboration between KCC and the IDB in year 1 under PSCA works could result in about £15,000 - £20,000 of income for the Board.

The Chairman said that this is a positive outcome.

10. FINANCE REPORT

The Chairman asked the RFO if she would like to say anything, she asked if they could get the top reconciliation sheet approved before delving into the budget.

The Clerk said that it should be minuted that the Board were asked that they had all seen Appendix A5c.

The Finance Officer referred members to the reconciliation of the bank accounts top sheet from April – December 2023, which goes to the Finance Committee on a monthly basis, of which the Board has to approve as part of the Audit. She explained that the Board must be made aware of how the period expenditure and reconciliation looks like as part of the overall financial regulations of the Board. The appendix has been designed to show you the current financial position and get approval from the Board as well.

On proposal by H Rogers and seconded by M Davis, it was **AGREED** to accept the reconciliation top sheet for the period April to December 2023.

The Vice Chairman said the Budget report was looked at by the Finance Committee but was left for the main Board to agree the levy at this meeting.

11. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT REPORT

The SDO showed on screen all the planning applications that she has commented on recently and if anyone was interested in any particular one, she would be more than happy to discuss this further outside of the meeting.

There are two planning consents to be considered by the Board as follows:

1. Church Lane East Peckham, this is a service water development contribution (SWDC) for the sum of £21,500.

The SDO requests for this application to be approved.

On proposal by H Rogers and seconded by M Davis, it was **AGREED** to accept this application.

2. Lower Haysden Lane Tonbridge, this is a SWDC for the sum of £51,500.

The SDO requests for this application to be approved.

On proposal by Cllr King and seconded by O Baldock, it was **AGREED** to accept this application.

To date we have received 9 consent applications two of which have been approved, and the condition is that they are paid before the consent is issued.

We have received our first application under Byelaw 3 from Wrotham School Sevenoaks, outside of our district.

The Chairman congratulated the SDO on the amount of work that is involved in getting these applications to consent level for the Board to agree on.

It was noted that the SDO will need additional help in the new financial year, as this work increases.

A member of the ground team is now upskilling to become our Ecology Conservationist and is out at present planting trees alongside Kent County Council and the Medway Valley.

12. BIODIVERSITY REPORT

The Chairman asked if there were any questions relating to the report – no comment from Board members.

13. HEALTH & SAFETY REPORT

It was reported that 2023/2024 had been a good year and that the meetings with the staff had proved successful and informative.

The work safety report has helped the Clerk and Safety officer see what the near misses were and to help them be more safety conscious in the future.

Mental Health issues have arisen amongst the staff, and this will be brought up at the next annual H & S meeting. We have however sent both the Team Leader and the Clerk on courses relating to Mental Health and how to identify it.

There was a further discussion concerning meetings with other councils in the future.

Action: Clerk and Chairman to arrange meeting with Wealden Council

14. ESTIMATES AND SPECIAL LEVIES

The Board's policy is to diminish surplus funds and work at a loss each year, until the funds have reached a level that they are happy to hold. However, we have now seen that with the PSCA & SWDC works that have occurred this year we will once again make a surplus, if the predicted funds come in before year end.

Action: The Clerk & RFO are to arrange a meeting with Handelsbanken in the next couple of months to discuss investing some of the funds that are available and then to report back to the Board in June 2024 meeting.

This year is the first time that we are going to include a risk into our income, by using funds from PSCA & SWDC works. There is potentially a £65,000 risk, but this is controlled and will be watched carefully by the Clerk and RFO.

The first £30,000 received from these funds will be placed into revenue spend to offset against the wages for the SDO, the balance will be placed into savings.

Our long-term plan is to level off the levy increase over a five-year period. The recommendation for this coming year 2024/2025 is for the levy to be set at 3%, any additional funds required will be offset from other monies coming in.

It was suggested that we look at the Public Body overall restrictions on how much we can invest and to look at the Local Government Policy, before speaking with the bank.

The proposal from the Finance Committee was that the levy be set at 3%.

On proposal by M Davis and seconded by C Hosmer, it was **AGREED** by all members to set the penny rate for the coming year at 4.2582p in the pound and that the Clerk and Chairman should duly sign the rates certificate for the coming year.

Action: Letters to be sent to the respective Special Levy paying councils to notify of the rate set.

Action: Clerk and Chairman to sign the rates certificate for 2024/25.

15. **STRATEGY AND OBJECTIVE** – Update on 2023 achievements

The Clerk gave a report on the achievements that have occurred during this year and that it has been a major improvement going forwards.

The Chairman suggested that we invite Mr Innes Thomson, CEO of ADA to our next meeting to give as his thoughts on District expansion and frameworks.

Action: Clerk to arrange meeting with Innes Thomson of ADA.

The UMIDB are to pilot a scheme to extend our area into the catchment and take a much wider responsibility. The catchment is ten times bigger than our present district area, so we will have to factor in the increase in costs, consents and manpower.

There are two areas that we intend to extend into under this pilot scheme and they are as follows:

1. Marden Beach Area to incorporate Staplehurst (west Side) watercourse 116 and Maplehurst watercourse 110.
2. The Rowden System

All stakeholders will need to be made aware of this scheme before it is undertaken.

A question was raised, will the landowners be levied.

The Clerk said that answer will need to be discussed at future meetings.

A 2nd question was asked, will we need a PR/Social Media person to help with notification to stakeholders?

The Clerk said that the Board will discuss this further once we have seen how the pilot scheme has worked.

16. **GOVERNANCE**

The Chairman asked the Board if they were happy with the updated policies.

On recommendation from the Chair, it was **AGREED** to approve the policies on bulk for the coming year.

Chairman thanked the Clerk for keeping the policies updated.

17. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Clerk informed members that our SDO, Emma Robertson, was selected to represent us and the country in Brussels at the EUWMA Professionals Event 2024 in February 2024.

The Chairman said this was excellent news and that the Board wished her all the luck and look forward to hearing all about it on her return.

18. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

End of Year Finance Committee – Tuesday 28th May 2024, 10:00am – Bullen Court

End of Year Board Meeting – Tuesday 18th June 2024 – Bullen Court

19. PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL MATTERS

There were no issues to be raised on this occasion.

20. CLOSE

The meeting was declared closed at 12:10pm.