

**FLOOD AND WATER MANAGEMENT
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
30 NOVEMBER 2020**

PRESENT: COUNCILLOR P A SKINNER (CHAIRMAN)

Councillors R P H Reid (Vice-Chairman), W J Aron, T R Ashton, Mrs A M Austin, Mrs P Ashleigh-Morris, A G Hagues, Mrs C J Lawton, C R Oxby and S R Parkin

District Councillors R Austin BEM (Boston Borough Council), Mrs F M Martin MBE (East Lindsey District Council), Mrs L Hagues (North Kesteven District Council), H Crawford (South Kesteven District Council) and I G Fleetwood (West Lindsey District Council)

External Agencies –

Councillors C J Davie, D McNally and E J Poll, attended the meeting as observers

Officers in attendance:-

Paul Brookes (Flood Risk Manager), Deborah Campbell (Environment Agency), Jonathan Glerum, David Hickman (Head of Environment), Tracy Johnson (Senior Scrutiny Officer), Andrew McGill, Peter Riley (Environment Agency), Rachel Wilson (Democratic Services Officer) and Morgan Wray

47 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE/REPLACEMENT MEMBERS

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor P Vaughan (City of Lincoln Council).

The Chairman welcomed Councillor H Crawford to the meeting as the representative for South Kesteven District Council.

48 DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Cllr Fleetwood declared that since last meeting of this Committee he had been appointed to the Scunthorpe and Gainsborough Water Management Board.

49 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 1 SEPTEMBER 2020

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 1 September 2020 be signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

50 ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE CHAIRMAN, EXECUTIVE COUNCILLORS

AND LEAD OFFICERS

The Executive Councillor for Economy and Place advised that the flood alleviation scheme at Digby was nearing completion so there would be a further 58 properties better protected from flooding. It was expected that this scheme would be completed by Christmas 2020. Defra had recently announced a £150m innovation and resilience scheme and the County Council was working with the Flood Risk Partnership to develop a strong bid for Greater Lincolnshire. There was an intention to submit an expression of interest by the mid-January deadline, and if successful, work up a more detailed business case. The fund was designed to support new, innovative ways of promoting community resilience, and officers would be looking to incorporate a number of activities into the bid. The Committee would be kept informed. It was noted that Defra aimed to support 25 schemes between 2021 and 2027 and the intention was to submit a strong bid to be one of the those 25 successful schemes

The Head of Environment reported that the Government was undertaking its spending review this month, and this was likely to have a significant impact on the funding available nationally for flood alleviation and service delivery for the next few years.

It was also noted that the Government had announced £4billion towards a levelling up agenda, and Greater Lincolnshire would be looking for its share of that funding. However there may be further opportunities to bid for funding which would be explored.

51 INVESTIGATIONS UNDERTAKEN UNDER SECTION 19 OF THE FLOOD
AND WATER MANAGEMENT ACT 2010

Consideration was given to a report which informed the Committee of the status of all current flood investigations within the County. It was acknowledged that there was a backlog of S19 investigations, officers were working their way through them. There had so far been 30 S19 during 2020, but this was on top of the 160 that had been received the previous year, and it was commented that it had been an exceptional 18 months. It was reported that officers were almost in a position where the reports were starting to come through and would be able to publish the outcomes. The authority was required to publish the outcomes and also the recommendations that were made in the reports.

Members were provided with the opportunity to ask questions to the officers present in relation to the information contained within the report and some of the points raised during discussion included the following:

- It was queried whether there was any further news on the major investigation which was taking place regarding the centre of Kirton. Members were advised that this was being dealt with through an invest to save programme.

RESOLVED

That the update be noted.

52 ENVIRONMENT AGENCY UPDATE

Consideration was given to a report which updated the Committee on the activities of the Environment Agency, primarily in relation to Covid-19 with particular reference to the ongoing delivery of the capital programme and recovery.

Members received three presentations which provided updates on Boston and the recovery programme; the East Coast and Projects and the Steeping.

Members were provided with the opportunity to ask questions to the officers present in relation to the information contained within the report and presentations, and some of the points raised during discussion included the following:

- It was clarified that in relation to work on the lock at Black Sluice, the substantial work was largely complete, there was just snagging and final finishing off and commissioning of the site that was still going on.
- In relation to the gravity sluice, it was confirmed that it had been out of commission for some time, but it was now fully operational. However, this may be by manual control rather than fully automated.
- It was queried which part of the Haven Banks work was still outstanding. Members were advised that the final section was on the right bank, downstream of the barrier, there was a 40-50m section, where there are still some slight low spots of 100 - 150mm.
- It was reported that the Boston Barrier was part of a number of different projects of the Boston Combined Strategy. The Barrier was designed with a higher standard with the intention that it would be needed for the next 100 years and should offer protection for a 1 in 300 event, and the banks designed for a 1 in 200 event. It was noted that further work was expected to be needed in 30-50 years to combat climate change.
- In relation to the decommissioning of the black sluice pumping station building, future uses were being investigated, but this work had been delayed by the pandemic, and it was queried whether the decommissioning period could be extended by the environment agency to allow for plans to be fully developed. Members were advised that all options were being explored and how any potential timings could be extended. It was noted that a meeting of the Project Board would be taking place shortly where this issue would be discussed.
- It was commented that it was good to see that work was coming to a close in the Short Ferry area, which particularly suffered in the winter floods of 2019/20. It was noted that some wet weather was expected in the coming weeks, and reassurance was sought that the EA assets would be able to cope with the same strength of rainfall as was seen during the previous winter. Members were advised that the banks at Barlings Eau were put back immediately as a temporary defence and work to finalise the repairs including reprofiling the bank had recently taken place. It was reported that the overall condition of the assets had been improved, and the Environment Agency was working on countless sites across the county where it had become aware of damage. The wider programme of work continued to improve the standard of the assets.

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- It was commented that projects such as this could inspire future engineers, which was positive.
- S19 flooding notices – there had been 2 major reports in Skegness in September. Investigations created a large amount of work and extra budget had been brought in to resource this. Concerns were raised that some of reports were slow in being concluded. It was requested that the details be sent to officers, so they could look into them.
- Members thanked the officers for an interesting and detailed presentation in relation to the work underway on the East Coast and were pleased with the emphasis on continuing with the work with minimal delay. It was commented that this was very encouraging and members looked forward to seeing details of further progress.
- In relation to the beach nourishment, it was queried whether there was an infinite quantity of sand available, or was it a resource which would be diminished over the years. Members were advised that there was plenty of sand available to continue with the nourishment for the short and medium term. It was reported that the sand came from licensed areas which were licensed through the Crown Estate. There were five or six areas which were licensed and reasonably close to the Lincolnshire coast which could be used which had the right grade of sand. However, detail around the specific amounts available was commercially sensitive and so it was difficult to find out exactly how much was available. An additional aspect being explored was around the carbon footprint of this process and alternatives which could be used. It was being explored whether it would be better to have structures that held more sand so that less would be needed in the future.
- In terms of the hiring of additional vehicles for social distancing, it was queried whether there would be an impact on the budget from this. In terms of the overall maintenance programme, this had managed to keep the majority of it on track. It was noted that there would be wider impact on the budget as a result of Covid-19, and there would be some increased cost. However, when this was looked at in the context of the overall budget, some of the costs were relatively minor. It was also noted that additional PPE had also been purchased at the start of the outbreak. The additional costs had not had an impact to the extent that the Environment Agency could not deliver any of the critical activities during the Covid-19 restrictions.
- It was queried if the Steeping did have more silt than expected would work continue to remove it all, and if this was the case would additional budget be requested in order to complete this work. Members were advised that this was currently being explored. In terms of the budget for the project, it was noted that the contingency had not yet had to be used, and so it was expected that any further expenditure would be covered by this.

RESOLVED

That the report and information provided be received.

Consideration was given to a report which provided the Committee with an opportunity to consider its work programme for the coming year.

The next meeting would be taking place on 22 February 2021 and then 21 June 2021 which would be an induction meeting following the election in May 2021.

It was highlighted that the Steeping Update would be included within the Environment Agency Update rather than a separate item.

RESOLVED

That the work programme as presented be approved subject to the Steeping Update being included within the Environment Agency Updates.

The meeting closed at 11.34 am