

**FLOOD AND WATER MANAGEMENT
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
20 FEBRUARY 2023**

PRESENT: COUNCILLOR R P H REID (CHAIRMAN)

Councillors T R Ashton (Vice-Chairman), P Ashleigh-Morris, A J Baxter, M Brookes, S Bunney, K J Clarke, A G Hagues, H Spratt and G J Taylor

District Councillors Mrs A M Austin (Boston Borough Council), P Vaughan (City of Lincoln Council), Mrs F M Martin MBE (East Lindsey District Council), Mrs L Hagues (North Kesteven District Council), M D Seymour (South Holland District Council), H Crawford (South Kesteven District Council) and I G Fleetwood (West Lindsey District Council)

External Agencies – Jonathan Glerum (Anglian Water), Andrew McGill (Lindsey Marsh Drainage Board) and Morgan Wray (Environment Agency)

Councillors Thomas Dyer, Stephen Roe and Martin Hill OBE attended the meeting as observers

Officers in attendance:- Matthew Harrison, Chris Miller, Kiara Chatziioannou, Jess Wosser-Yates, Thomas Crofts

18 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE/REPLACEMENT MEMBERS

There were no apologies received.

19 DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations of Members' interest were made at this stage in proceedings.

20 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 21 NOVEMBER 2022

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 21 November 2022 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record subject to the following amendment;

- Councillor H Spratt gave apologies for absence.

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21 ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE CHAIRMAN, EXECUTIVE COUNCILLORS AND LEAD OFFICERS

The Chairman announced that a Flood and Water Management Workshop would be held on 26 April 2022 to raise awareness of a series of themes that fall within the Committee's remit.

A verbal update was requested regarding the weed build-up in Boston and the River Witham from the Environment Agency (EA). Peter Reilly, Operations Manager - Environment Agency, reported that:

- The methods which could be used to clear the River Witham could be applied to the Ancholme as it was experiencing similar weed build-up. This would be more cost-efficient as the cost would be shared between the two rivers.
- A third meeting was organised on the 10 March between various partners and local businesses to discuss methods to address the environmental problems reported.
- The EA were currently identifying alternative methods to remove duckweed build-up; weed boats and tract excavator could only remove weeds that were rooted in the margins of the river.
- The EA could not acquire expenditure to remove the weeds as funding was reserved for mitigating against flood risks. Since the River Witham was at no risk of flooding because of the overgrowth, funding was currently unavailable.
- The incident on the River Witham and Ancholme was now classified as a category 1 environmental incident, however funding remained inaccessible.

A lengthy debate ensued, and the following was noted:

- Members expressed concern over the issue spreading further in warmer months if no prompt actions were taken.
- Unpleasant smells caused by the weed-build up and dead river-life were negatively impacting residents, especially in the Boston area.
- Members considered the weed-boats expensive and ineffective in removing the duckweed build-up.
- The under-shot design of the sluice in the River Witham exacerbated the inability to remove weeds because allowing the weed to flow out at times of low-flow resulted in a loss of water, which led to a public expense. The Operations Manager expressed that a replacement sluice would cost £17,000, and installation prices were quoted as a similar amount.
- It was clarified that the Canals Rivers Trust were responsible for maintaining the right of access to navigation on the River Witham, and the abstraction and transfer of the water was under the remit of the EA, although these responsibilities were not mutually exclusive.
- It was agreed that further information be circulated on the environmental impact of the decrease in fish population.

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- It was suggested that the Canals and Rivers Trust attended a Flood and Water Management Scrutiny Committee meeting to discuss their roles and responsibilities relating to the River Witham.

Councillor T Dyer, Support Councillor for Economic Development, Environment and Planning, made the following announcements:

- In November 2022, the National Infrastructure Commission published their review on reducing surface-level flooding risks and the amounts of investment needed to protect infrastructure against flood risks. It was suggested that £12 billion in investments between 2025-2055 would protect properties at risk of flood damage by 60%
- On 10 January, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) published their review into the implementation of Section 3 of the Flood and Water Management Act; it was recommended that the government must act to implement the legislation. The government had accepted this recommendation and the Secretary of State for DEFRA positively committed to a public consultation later this year.
- Progress was reported with Section 19 (S.19) Flood Investigations following the August 2022 flooding incident, and many had been concluded. After the floods, a town-wide Section 19 investigation in Market Rasen was initiated and had since been concluded. It deduced that further information on the current capacity of drainage assets was needed. A feasibility study and hydraulic flood risk modelling across Market Rasen was also recommended to better understand risks to properties.
- The Executive had provisionally released funding as part of the Development Fund Programme to address drainage and flooding issues across the county. There was currently a programme of work for investigating, cleansing, and starting repairs in 33 locations across Lincolnshire which would be completed before the end of this financial year. A number of these locations were also subject to ongoing section 19 investigations.

22 FLOOD TEAM UPDATE (INCLUDING SECTION 19 INVESTIGATIONS)

Matthew Harrison, Flood and Water Manager, provided Members with an update on the recent work of the Flood Risk team including information on the status of all current flood investigations being undertaken by the County. It was reported that:

- S.19 investigations which were initiated following the August 2022 flooding incident were being concluded and had resulted in clear recommendations.
- When the flood and Water Team were made aware of a flooding that would trigger a S.19 investigation, the database on the LCC website was updated to show on the live-link online system and was updated at 7pm daily.
- There were significantly more near-misses reported than S.19s.

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- The outline business case for the Greater Lincolnshire Ground Water Project had been approved and funding had been received to commence works.
 - LCC were currently in consultation with multiple partners working on chalk and limestone models across the county to better understand the risk and where opportunities may lie to utilise existing groundwater areas as a resource.

During discussion of item, the following was noted:

- Recommendations that arose from S.19 investigations were not enforced, but rather were based on collaborative goodwill with other authorities through Flood & Water Management Partnership (LF&WMP).
- Managing the flood risk in Lincolnshire was highly important given the distressing impact it has on residents.
- There were still no set criteria/definition of a 'near-miss'.
- Issues regarding the availability of sandbags across Lincolnshire was being addressed through the memorandum of understanding established between Emergency Planning colleagues and District Councils. It was suggested that an amendment was added to the memorandum to facilitate the formulation of a portfolio of flood-preventing devices to be circulated to the public for them to purchase.
- The Flood and Water Manager agree to bring a report on the recent developments of the Riparian Project to a future Committee meeting.
- Members commended the work of various agencies who were involved in flood relief in Lincolnshire.

RESOLVED:

1. That the current list of completed and active flood investigations via the S.19 live-link be noted;
2. That the updates provided by the Flood Risk Team be reviewed and commented on;
3. That the comments made in relation to this item are taken into further consideration by Leading Officers and the relevant Portfolio Holders;
4. That the enforcement rights relating to the Riparian Project be noted;
5. That a response to the S.19 investigation of the High Street in Market Deeping is received as soon as possible

23 ENVIRONMENT AGENCY UPDATE

Morgan Wray, Area Flood and Coastal Risk Manager delivered a report which provided the Committee with an update on the Environment Agency's (EA) activities in Lincolnshire, including progress on key schemes. It was reported that:

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- The Saltfleet to Gibraltar Point Beach Management Scheme was provisionally scheduled to commence in May 2023 and was also costing other work for approval such as various outfall repairs and Chapel Penstock repairs.
- Water course modelling in Wainfleet was almost complete.
- The Natural Flood Management R&D Scheme in the Swanton Eau catchment of the South Forty Foot Drain had commenced. This involved ongoing natural flood risk measures to address the regular flooding to Awaton, Threekingham and Spanby.
- Public drop-in sessions had been scheduled to inform residents of works and progress in Wainfleet.
- The Boston Barrier works were expected to conclude before the end of 2024. This would provide protection to 525 additional properties from tidal flooding, taking the total number of properties better protected from this threat to 14,256.
- The EA was working with Risk Management partners to agree the benefits apportionment regarding the Lower Witham Flood Resilience Project.
- The East Coast and River Trent scenario used in a multi-Lincolnshire Fire Rescue (LRF) exercise at FloodEx22 was reported as a success and prepared various organisations for a potential tidal flood event in the county.
- Internal Drainage Board continued work across the county this quarter, and were supported by the Public Sector Cooperation Agreement (PSCA)

Members considered the report, and the following was noted:

- The Area Flood and Coastal Risk Manager agreed to circulate further information to Committee Members about the Boston Barrier project as per their request.
- Members commended the FloodEx22 event, and many were proud to take part. The LRF had reported planning was underway for FloodEx23; it was suggested there could be an exercise which aided the understanding of how diesel-powered second line pumps could be used in a potential flooding event if electricity was not available.

Stephanie Lynes, Flood Risk and Coastal Management Advisor - Environment Agency, also provided an update on the River Slea Flood Resilience Scheme on behalf of the Flood and Coastal Risk Management Advisory Partnership and Strategic Overview for Lincolnshire. It was further reported that:

- The Scheme involved EA assets on the River Slea, Old Slea and the Nineford River. All were predominantly groundwater fed and resultantly suffered with significant high and low-flows.
 - When groundwater levels were low, a borehole supplemented supply.
- Historical structures in the watercourse caused an obstruction to water flow and subsequently created a flood risk. These structures were insensitive to operate during a flood event, therefore the EA were identifying a sustainable replacement.
- Two workshops were held with key stakeholders, and a business case had been submitted to the Large Projects Review Group (LPRG) which was currently being appraised.

During consideration of the report, the following was noted:

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- Ecological questions about river-life were raised, especially in instances where water was trapped or there was a lack of base-water. The Area Flood and Coastal Risk Manager provided assurance that the purpose of the augmentation flow was to ensure wildlife was safe in those water conditions.
- The Slea Navigation Trust was a key stakeholder, and it was thusly assured that the navigation restoration works would not be negatively impacted by removing the obstructive historical structures in the Slea.
- A Committee site-visit to the Slea was suggested to be scheduled following the Flood and Water Management Workshop in April.

RESOLVED

1. That the update offered by the Environment Agency be received;
2. That the satisfaction of the Committee is recorded in relation to the works being undertaken in Lincolnshire by the Environment Agency; and
3. That the comments from the discussion be forwarded by the EA representatives to relevant colleagues and interested parties.

24 ANGLIAN WATER UPDATE

The Committee received an update from Jonathan Glerum, Flood Risk Manager, on Anglian Water's activities in Lincolnshire. It was reported that:

- The Groundwater Project continued to support Lincolnshire despite its vulnerability to a change in the climate.
- Potential risks to assets along Lincolnshire's coastline were being explored.
- Identifying a strategic approach to long-term planning from the perspective of water recycling remained a high priority for Anglian Water; £1 billion had been invested to improve water quality and reach the net-zero target of 2030.
- Lincolnshire continued to benefit from a collaborative approach to flood risk management which was driven by an excellent working relationship between partners.
- Operational teams in Greater Lincolnshire had recorded 10,000 jobs being raised per year.
 - 2,000 external floodings, 100 internal floodings, and 3000 loss of facility incidents were reported annually.
 - Approximately 80% of all flooding incidents reported were caused by blockages, although the proactive planned preventative maintenance programme continued to prevent these blockages from occurring regularly.
- Progress was reported in relation to the Strategic Pipeline Alliance (SPA) infrastructure project, which would help facilitate the movement of water across the county. 52% had been approved from local planning authorities including LCC.

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Coverage between Lincoln and Grantham was expected to be completed by summer 2023.

- Works on Horseshoe Way in Market Rasen had concluded and were being monitored.

During consideration of the report, the following was noted:

- The Flood Risk Manager thanked LCC for its ongoing support and acknowledged the excellent working relationship it has with Anglian Water.
- Members suggested that communication could be improved to strengthen the relationship Anglian Water and LCC had with residents and local media. It was assured that there were conduits for better communication in place, including a dedicated team charge with ensuring information-sharing was sufficient between parties.
- The Flood and Water Manager agreed to circulate an outline of works done in East Lindsey in the current investment period, including information regarding proposals for the future.
- The release of effluent into water had resulted in Anglian Water receiving a fine; it was expressed that discharging waste was a last resort in attempting to improve water quality or mitigate against a flood risk.
- The Flood and Water Manager agreed to circulate a response to the issue of rogue signage fines received by Anglian Water. It was noted there was an item on the agenda for the Highways and Transport Scrutiny Committee about the street works carried out by Anglian Water which could be of interest to Members.
 - Road closures were considered as being in place for too long which caused frustration amongst residents.
- Additional information would be circulated on the number of emergency sewer outfalls, as well as information on the length of combined sewers that Anglian Water had separated into foul and surface water.
- Concern was raised regarding the installation of pipelines in Lincolnshire as damage was considered substantial. The Flood Risk Manager gave his assurance that this would be forwarded to relevant colleagues.
- LCC and Anglian Water co-owned underwater systems, and improved communication about them were requested; it was assured that data-sharing occurred between Anglian Water and the Flood and Water Team, and that alternative avenues were still available to increase communication.

RESOLVED

1. That the verbal update and presentation provided by Anglian Water be received by the Committee;
2. That the satisfaction of the Committee is recorded in relation to the works being undertaken in Lincolnshire by Anglian Water; and
3. That Anglian Water will provide a written submission to the Committee ahead of meetings;

4. That comments from the discussion be captured and forwarded through Anglian Water representatives to relevant colleagues and interested parties.

25 INTERNAL DRAINAGE BOARDS

Jane Froggatt, Witham and Humber Drainage Boards, and Andrew McGill, Lindsey Marsh Drainage Board, delivered a report which provided an overview of the financial pressures facing Internal Drainage Boards (IDBs), District Councils and drainage rate payers.

The Vice-Chairman, Councillor Tom Ashton, gave a brief introduction to this item.

Jane Froggatt, Witham and Humber Drainage Boards, guided the Committee through the report and the following was noted:

- IDBs had experienced a challenging year financially and many had to increase their Penny Rate (in the pound) to set balanced budgets; cost pressures were exacerbated by increased fuel costs.
 - Witham and Humber DBs would have contained a Penny Rate increase from 5.5% to 6.75% for 2023-2024, however the increased cost of electricity resulted in three out of the four DBs increasing the Penny Rate to 15%, and one raising it to 29%.
 - Challenges were being experienced nationally; however Lincolnshire was in a more vulnerable position than areas that had modernised their diesel pumping stations. Unit costs had increased from 12 pence per kilowatt hour (kWh) to 30 pence kWh. This was projected to increase further to 40 pence in October 2023.
- The remit of the work carried out by IDBs had increasingly broadened to include flood risk management and water level management.
- Procurement for IDBs in Lincolnshire were facilitated by the East Shires Purchasing Organisation processes.
- Following the Ofgem Targeted Charing Review, Standing Order charges had risen from £13,000-£14,000 per year to £128,000 per year (before the pump was switched on). Thus, the budget had been calculated on the assumption of a unit price of 40 pence kWh.
 - According to historical analysis, pumping stations tended to consume 80% electricity usage from November-March every average rainfall year therefore budgets were also calculated on this assumption.
- Assurance was provided that switching a pump off was a last resort.
- Budget reserves were insufficient on a local and national scale. This meant IDBs would not be able to afford to manage a period of flood events or a significant wet period.

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- The main sources of income for IDBs were the Council and the level of Drainage Rates which the occupiers of land in IDB drainage districts contributed.
- It was requested the Committee supported IDBs through engagement with DEFRA, Lincolnshire MPs, Association of Drainage Authorities (ADA) and District Council's to raise the matter to the Secretary of State level.

Andrew McGill, representing Lindsey Marsh Drainage Board, reported that:

- Increasing numbers of assets in drainage areas were below sea level and required management through the County Council and Environment Agency.
- Initial monetary concerns were raised in August 2022; an agreement was reached with EPSO as they had offered the best quote of electricity prices, and the agreement was signed off in January 2023.
- Discussions with East Lindsey District Council had been held to request their support for a programme which would see the modernisation of several Lindsey Marsh Drainage Boards over a six-year period. Meetings had also been held with DEFRA in Doncaster.
- There was public interest for the programme as 136,000 residents were split between the East Coast which was protected by Lindsey Marsh Drainage Boards and the high land level of the Lincolnshire Wolds, rendering them vulnerable to coastal flooding.
- Electrical costs last year were £338,000; this year, the cost was expected to be £282,000 however if it was a wet year it would cost an additional £500,000.
 - IDBs did not have access to the Public Works Loan Board to help manage this cost; they could only access funds for refurbishing capital assets.
- Lindsey Marsh Drainage Board reserves were limited as they were previously used to manage 2019-2020 flood events on the Isle of Axholme because North Lincolnshire failed to file a billing claim to request financial support.
- It was assured that Lincolnshire IDBs remained proactive in finding solutions, and it was requested that the Committee lent its support.

During consideration of the item, the following was noted:

- The Committee acknowledged the concerns of IDBs, and commended the partnership-working that consistently occurred between them, LCC and other organisations.
 - Some members of the Committee sat on IDBs thus were aware of financial restraints.
- The public were not explicitly requested to pay rates to support IDBs but were contributing, nonetheless. Furthermore, it was suggested that the money contributed by residents for IDBs could potentially be used for other means, but given the financial difficulty experienced by IDBs this was not feasible.
- Assurance provided by government was insufficient and failed to acknowledge the severity of the problems facing IDBs.

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- Members questioned whether IDBs use renewable energy; it was assured green energy was used, and that IDBs kept to a pump regime of midnight to 7am to avoid overwhelming the grid. Wind or solar power could not be provisioned when refurbishing pumping stations at the end of their design life, and there were no viable alternatives to electric pumps – diesel pumps were considered back-ups.
- A significant amount of the energy cost experienced by IDBs came from starting up the pump; in some locations, pumps had been moved higher above the water level as to not trigger them as often.
- The proposed updates to the pumps along the East Coast would include channels being built to store water in surge times through gravity discharge to limit the frequency the pumps are turned on.

The Committee agreed to extend the meeting by 30 minutes.

RESOLVED

1. That as the lead flood authority, LCC to write to Ofgem and DEFRA about the specific challenges raised by standing charges and electricity costs
2. That the Committee writes to the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities in support of lobbying efforts already engaged with by the department by district colleagues, boards and ADA in soliciting a Section 31 grant to support additional costs or a variation in a referendum cap for authorities which pay a special-levy

26 FLOOD AND WATER MANAGEMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

Consideration was given to a report from Kiara Chatziioannou, Scrutiny Officer, which invited the Committee to consider and comment on the content of its Work Programme. It was noted that:

- In the future, the Scrutiny Officer could liaise with members of the Centre Port project at the Wash to invite them to a future Committee meeting.

RESOLVED

That the Work Programme be approved, subject to the addition of the item listed above.

The meeting closed at 1.42 pm