

NEWSLETTER

September 2006

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Newsletter No.4

By Bruce Gelsthorpe

As we all enjoy the last few days of summer and look towards Autumn, here is the latest edition of the Shire Group newsletter.

IDB Review

The Newsletter would not be complete without an update on the Defra IDB Review. After a lengthy form filling exercise we now sit and wait for Defra to advise Internal Drainage Boards, hopefully quite soon, but probably by the end of the year, on the role, shape, size etc. that they would like Internal Drainage Boards to take, or be. We hear via the media/grape vine that Defra is short of money. Let's hope it does not change their attitude to what should be the correct outcome.

IDB Accounts and Auditing - Jennifer Cooke

Accounts - JBA staff have successfully computerised all the Shire Group Boards' accounts where we are appointed as Clerk. After a transition period in 2004/2005, when the computerised system was run "in tandem" with the manual accounts, we moved to fully computerise accounts in 2005/2006. All this has been achieved at no additional cost to the Boards.

The exercise has also allowed us to complete the accounts in line with the deadlines set out in the Accounts and Audit Regulations, which state that the accounts to 31 March 2006 must be signed and approved by the Board by 30 September. However, transitional arrangements have been put in place allowing this date to be advanced one month at a time, such that by 2009 that year's accounts will need to be approved by 30 June. This date of 30 June is in line with the date by which other relevant bodies, mainly local authorities, have to prepare and approve their accounts.

This specific change has been made, together with a number of amendments to the other accounting and auditing rules, by a Statutory Instrument, which came into effect on 1 April 2006 amending The Accounts and Audit Regulations 2003.

We also now have an Audit Commission Practitioners' Guide on the "Governance and Accountability in IDBs in England" which runs to over one hundred pages.

Audit - There are new annual reporting arrangements for the year ended 31 March 2006. All Boards have had to submit a statutory annual report to Defra by the 31 August. This was formerly known as the IDB1 but the information on it has been much reduced. This is because we have a new Annual Return, which has to be submitted to the external auditor, appointed by the Audit Commission.

For larger Internal Drainage Boards operating over a £1 million threshold of income or expenditure, audit arrangements will remain unchanged, and this is the case for Ancholme Internal Drainage Board and Dun Drainage Commissioners. All other Boards will have what is called a lesser assurance audit, which we have recently advertised, and all the information required has to be submitted to an office of the Audit Commission in Bolton. There is a published scale of "fixed" audit fees for Boards where a limited assurance audit is applicable, and those Internal Drainage Boards with gross income and expenditure above £1 million will be subject to the same fee scales as local parish and town councils etc. These will be reported on in detail at the forthcoming Chairmen's meeting.

ADA Triennial Show - Romney Marsh - Riley South

The ADA Demonstration was held on 5 and 6 July 2006 at Snargate, Romney Marsh, Kent, and over one hundred and twenty exhibitors made the demonstration a firm success.

The weather favoured the event, for a change, and there was the usual working demonstrations along watercourses around the site.

Included in the working demonstrations were the Laneham Drainage Board's JCB Fast Track 3170 tractor, fitted with a Herder Grenadier long reach flail mower. Also on demonstration was the McCormick MTX 185 tractor owned by the Dun

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Drainage Commissioners and fitted with a Spearhead long reach flail mower.

All the regular demonstrators were taking part, and quite a number of new and local traders.

A new feature of the show was a series of presentations made on both days. These were presented by:-

Jean Venables OBE, Chief Executive of ADA - A review of current consultations.

Jeremy Benn, JBA Consulting - IDB Review.

Dr Jonathan Newman, Centre for Ecology and Hydrology - Aquatic weed control and climate change.

Michael Oliver, Rural Development Service - Environmental Stewardship, best Practice and Internal Drainage Boards

The JBA marquee had numerous visitors and at times we did not have enough chairs to seat everyone. We were extremely pleased at the number of members from our Boards that were able to attend and join us for a drink.

In addition to the JBA display within our marquee, there was Mark Duell of Controlstar UK showing their telemetry software and Mike Hopkins of Maltby Land Surveys showing the latest Smart net GPS survey equipment.

Considering the relatively remote location of the Demonstration, it was well attended and considered by the Association to be a great success.

The next demonstration is to be held in September 2008 at the East of England Showground near Peterborough, and it is proposed to hold the annual Conference of the Association during the event.

Environmental Issues - David Patrick

Environmental Policy - The Boards in the Shire Group of IDBs have all adopted a new

Environmental Policy which commits them to developing conservation orientated operational guidelines:

- Develop conservation minded operational guidelines.
- Work to promote the enhancement and protection of nature conservation interests
- Implement environmental Best Practice when undertaking works or developing plans to undertake works.
- Seek to control the inappropriate use, alterations and piping of drains and ditches where these may have a detrimental effect on natural features of conservation interest, habitat and/or notable species.
- Promote the targets of the local Biodiversity Action Plan where possible and report annually on these to the local BAP administrator.
- Publish annually a report of the conservation interests promoted, supported and safeguarded.

Natural Environment and Rural Communities

Act 2006 - The introduction of a legal requirement for Internal Drainage Boards to enact local and national Biodiversity Action Plans, places additional obligations on the Board for monitoring and reporting with consequential financial obligations. However, this ties in well to the High Level Targets, which require Internal Drainage Boards to report on the effects of their activities on local and national BAPs, and also to the Environmental Policy which reflects this requirement. We are currently looking at methods of assessing activities and impacts, and intend to report to all Boards in the Shire Group of Internal Drainage Boards at the first meetings in 2007.

Waste Management - Internal Drainage Boards are now required to register waste management exemptions for dredgings and plant material from watercourses placed on bank sides. We are awaiting confirmation that such a registration will allow the placing of material within 'one machine movement' as is currently accepted practice, and that the registration will not incur charges from the

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Environment Agency. If we are unable to secure the 'one machine movement' agreement and the exemption only allows literally placing on the bank top, then it may be necessary to either review practices or obtain further exemptions at significant costs.

On a brighter note, HM Revenue & Customs have confirmed that the debris removed from a watercourse - dredgings, weed, litter, or fly tipping - qualifies for exemption of landfill tax when placed in a landfill. The decision for exemption lies with the operator of the site, so it is not as clear as it could be.

Health and Safety - Ian Benn and Craig Benson

Review of a Strimmer Accident on Network Rail Infrastructure. (Maintenance Safety Bulletin No 24)

A member of a maintenance crew was strimming, using a metal blade attachment, cutting back brambles and small saplings. The injured person struck some debris in the undergrowth and a foreign object came up from the ground and hit his visor, piercing the visor and his neck on the right side, just below the jawbone. Initial investigations have revealed the wrong specification of visor was being worn for strimming operations.

This incident has led to a review of the current procedures, risk assessments concerning the strimming activity. A document has been circulated to the Internal Drainage Boards requesting them to examine the equipment used to ensure it complies with industry standard guidelines. All equipment not meeting these standards should be replaced. It is recommended that Internal Drainage Boards stop using safety glasses when strimming and replace them immediately with a Polycarbonate Visor to EN 166 1-B 3.9 Grade 1 with a Medium Impact Rating of 360ft. per second.

ADA Conference - 1st November 2006

The ADA Conference will again be held at the Connaught Rooms in London on 1st November 2006. This annual expedition to London, whilst knocked by some, does give you all, or at least those that attend the facility/opportunity to

complain, praise, or even make your own point on the topical issues that will affect us all in the following months. Let us make it a bumper year for attendance.

Shire Group Chairmen's Conference

Whilst on conference mode, will all Chairmen note that the Shire Group Conference is to be held at the Mount Pleasant Hotel, Bawtry Road, Doncaster on Tuesday 10 October 2006. Coffee at 10.30 a.m., with the Conference commencing at 11.00 a.m. There will be topics of interest to all for discussion and the opportunity will arise to meet, speak to, and question the Chief Executive of the ADA, Jean Venables

Shire Group Website. JBA's IT department continues to maintain and update the website. New features added since the last newsletter are:

- ◇ Information on Board Elections and the facility to download nomination papers.
- ◇ A search facility to check if your post-code lies in a Shire Group IDB district.

Future Newsletters

Feel free to provide feedback on subjects raised in this Newsletter, raise queries and also to provide an article for a future issue.