

GOUTHWAITE BOARD OF MANGEMENT

Incorporated by Act of Parliament - Bradford Corporation Waterworks Act 1890 for the management of Gouthwaite Compensation Reservoir, River Nidd

MINUTES of 2021 AGM

Held on
Thursday April 15th 2021 at 2.45pm
(Virtual Meeting)

AGENDA

1. Welcome.
As per 2020 AGM immediately preceding.

2. Attendance
As per the previous AGM

Chris. Hawkesworth – Chair (CH)	Glasshouses Mill
John Shillcock - Vice Chair (JS)	C. Robinson - Low Laithe Weir/NAC
Dave Gotto	Glasshouses Weir
John Goodliffe (JG)	NAC – Pateley Bridge Weir
Karan Main (KM)	Kirk Hammerton Mill

Cllr Stan Lumley	NYCC/Harrogate Council
Cllr Tom Watson	Harrogate Borough Council

David Lindsay (DL)	Environment Agency
Pamela White	Environment Agency
Miranda Foster (MF)	Yorkshire Water
Newman Booth	Yorkshire Water
Martin Walton	Canal and Rivers Trust

Observers:

Sarah Turnbull	Clerk (Nidderdale Partnership Plus)
Roger Wensley (RW)	Nidderdale Partnership Plus
Tom Wheelwright (TWh)	Gouthwaite Sporting Rights

Apologies:

Cllr Phil Ireland	Harrogate Borough Council
Ian Severs	Castle Mills

Abbreviations

EA	Environment Agency
PB	Pateley Bridge.

KFC	Knaresborough Flood Committee
NAC	Nidderdale Angling Club
NYCC	North Yorkshire County Council
HBC	Harrogate Borough Council
YW	Yorkshire Water
GB	Gouthwaite Board
NPP	Nidderdale Partnership Plus

3. Minutes

The 2020 Minutes will be approved at the next AGM in 2022.

4. Chairman's Report

Because of the high water flow during late 2020, discussions had been held with MF of Yorkshire Water. However, the rules remained unchanged.

5. Correspondence on matters not on the agenda

Mr Tony Richardson had sent a letter to the former chief executive of Yorkshire Water restating his view that Gouthwaite Reservoir should be manipulated by drawing down to 50% at times when precipitation is, or threatens to be, high, in order to prevent further flooding, specifically in Knaresborough. Approximately a year ago, he had forwarded this letter to Cllr Watson, who raised it at the current meeting.

CH stated that with global warming, rainfall was varying tremendously within the year, ranging from very wet to extremely dry periods. Harrogate North sewage works and a growing amount at Knaresborough were adding to the load on the river. As Gouthwaite was a compensation reservoir, he felt that, all things considered, it was difficult to see how the Board could satisfy Mr Richardson's requirements. The geography, the size of the reservoir and of the valves meant that arrangements were at the optimum. If they were adjusted to suit one set of demands, others would be disadvantaged.

MF (YW) and DL (EA) stated that it was very difficult at such times to draw down to 50% as requested in the letter and keep it there. It depended on the weather; for example, it had not been managed in 2017 during the syphon work. The reservoir was not for flood storage, but for regulating the flow downstream. The catchment area was too big for flood storage; doing so could make a medium-sized flood marginally smaller, but would have no effect on a larger one – the sort which could cause flooding in Knaresborough.

CH pointed out that it depended where rain fell. If it fell lower down than the reservoir, then if the valves were opened too early, one lot of water might catch the other up and cause flooding; if too late, it could also make flooding worse.

MF stated that if the valves were opened in contravention of the rules, it might make the flooding worse and the Board liable for damage caused.

It was agreed that at such times, the Board was required to do what statute required it to do.

Cllr Lumley asked whether silting which had occurred over the years could be removed.

Responding, CH pointed out that several surveys had been done, plus one using Lidar, showing that the reservoir is shallow and that, though silting is occurring, it is in very small amounts. Most of the silting occurred when the Angram and Scar House reservoirs were built.

MF added that the reservoir was an SSSI. The silting provided nesting habitat, and couldn't be removed without destroying this status.

It was also pointed out that removing the silt would require huge capacity trucks, and such an undertaking would have an enormous cost in terms of conservation and the environment. In addition, the largest amount of the capacity of the reservoir was in the top few inches, so little improvement would be achieved. Also, the reservoir and the river would become cloudy to the extent that much wildlife would be destroyed.

6. Environment Agency report

1) 2019-20

Rainfall

2019 saw below average rainfall January-May, apart from March, while June to the end of 2019 saw higher than average rainfall.

2020 started dry, but February 2020 had been the wettest on record for the Nidd catchment, with several periods of flooding.

River Flow

Recorded at the riverflow gauge in Birstwith, in 2019-20, readings largely reflected rainfall patterns and were lower than average, except for March. In the remainder of the year, they were above average, apart from July, when the reservoir did not spill. Flows then were lower, based on the compensation arrangements.

Reservoir level

In March 2019, one brief spill tied in with rainfall, thereafter the reservoir remained below spill level till a brief period in June and then in August. However, from the autumn into early 2020 the reservoir was relatively full.

Compensation releases

The graphs showed that releases from the reservoir in 2019 -20 generally followed the rules, with a slight delay at times between the requirements changing and the levels being changed.

2) 2020-2021

Rainfall

2020 started with a quiet January, followed by the wettest February on record, with high flows recorded at Birstwith and the reservoirs filling for most of February and the first half of March. However, the second half of March to the beginning of June was very dry: the period from March to the end of May was the second driest in 130 years of records of the Nidd river levels.

River Flow

The very low level of rainfall resulted in very low river flow in April and May 2020, when reservoir levels declined below the average for the time of year, up to early June. After that, they quickly recovered in response to rainfall. The remainder of 2020 through to February 2021 was characterised by generally wet conditions. Monthly mean river flows at Birstwith were above average, particularly in October 2020 and January 2021

Reservoir Level

Throughout autumn and winter 2020-21, reservoirs were above the spill level for about 46% of days. In March 2021, the level fluctuated a little in response to rainfall and compensation releases. Since then, levels have declined at a rate 2 weeks behind last spring's recession: currently, the mean flow at Birstwith is just under 60% of the long-term average (LTA), but this is higher than at the same point last year.

Compensation releases

These have been well controlled in relation to the rules throughout the period of the EA 2020-21 report.

7. Yorkshire Water report

2019-20 and 2020-21

Compliance Report

The YW report reinforced much of the information supplied by the EA. Compliance levels were fairly high. MF pointed out that the actual compensation is changed at 10.00 am each day, but the actual compensation and required compensation may differ: the required compensation is based on

the average, which could rise several metres in a day, so there is sometimes a lag between actual and required compensation.

As a result of the very wet weather, there was a relatively protracted period of spilling during the winter 2019-20.

In 2020 – 21, following the unusually wet weather to March, there was an unusually dry period from April – June, with releases, which might normally fall to 40 megalitres per day, falling to 28 megalitres per day at times. Fortunately, rainfall in June and later in the summer meant that reservoir stocks recovered. However, a similar pattern is developing in early 2021. After a wet winter, we are experiencing a dry spring and reservoir levels are falling.

Installation of Syphon

This is the second of two phases: 1) 2018: downstream leg installed
2): 2021: upstream leg.

YW are aiming to minimise the drawdowns of water. However, excavation underwater will be necessary for the upstream leg. There will be a floating pontoon on the reservoir and excavation on the upstream side of the dam. Pipes will then be sunk into place. The works should last from this summer into early 2022. There should then be no further works there for the foreseeable future.

Discussion

CH pointed out that in February 2020, the river reached the top of the flood barriers. This was the closest that Pateley had been to a flood since the building of these barriers, and the EA declared a red 'danger to life' warning.

Also, while the installation of the syphon was welcome, there was concern at the effect on wildlife of artificially keeping the water level at less than 50%.

JS (NAC) said that particularly trout and grayling would suffer in the event of a hot summer with low water flows, and this would be monitored. Mark Broadey, MMB Project Manager, had indicated that he would maintain communication with NAC as per last time.

The NAC were concerned that, as the water would need to be drawn down very rapidly in May, those wading in the river might be endangered by the flows.

TWh observed that, as owner of the fishing rights and boating rights within the reservoir, he had not been consulted, despite this being a contractual duty. He pointed out that he had not been consulted last time either, nor had he

submitted a claim for loss of fish despite the fact that the fishing records diminished considerably as a result of the low water.

MF (YW) said that MMB had made initial contact about the scheme, and that TWh having raised concerns about access, MMB customer liaison would set up an onsite meeting with him as requested. There was a couple of weeks before the initial drawdown would start, and MMB would be in touch.

TWh said that he had only been contacted 'after the event' but did not wish to pursue the matter at this meeting.

MF agreed to get someone from YW to discuss the matter with TWh.

JS reported a member of NAC contacting him regarding the gauge at Pateley Bridge (displayed online) not reflecting what the river looked like.

During the period under discussion, the reservoir was full and when there was rainfall in the upper dale, it spilled and there were quite large perturbations in the river flow. He wondered if it would be possible to 'smooth out' the discharges so that large changes didn't occur at one particular time.

MF did not think this was possible at Gouthwaite as the valves were old. They were controlled by computers to change once a day to avoid multiple changes per day.

DL said that the majority of the gauges only updated once a day, usually at 5.00 am. This could explain why the river sometimes looked different from the data from the gauges appearing on the internet.

DG said that from the point of view of a trout farm, it wouldn't be helpful if the valves were adjusted at various times of day. Having them altered at 10.00 am provided the opportunity to do whatever was necessary before next change.

Also, regarding the syphon, after discussions with YW, the most exciting period would be when the dam was broken through and replaced by a coffer dam, which might take a couple of weeks. He personally had no strong concerns about this, but was going to see the contractors onsite in order to find out what was going to happen in practice.

MF said that Gouthwaite was already 0.8m down and would be expected to be 1m down in the next 2 weeks as no rain was forecast. As the aim was to reach 2 – 2.7 metres down by the 14th, the releases may be increased but the flows shouldn't be high – depending on the weather.

The aim was to keep the releases above 40 megalitres per day. The likelihood was that it would be quite wet, and they would be releasing more than this, but releases would be lower if the weather was dry. The plan was to keep the releases to not much more than they would be without the works, but this was to mitigate for the effects of the work, not against the effects of dry weather.

JS stated that, as for the trout farms, communication was key, and given this NAC would be able to keep its members suitably informed. He would be having a meeting with the contractors to that end.

8. Accounts

RW presented these. There were more columns than usual for an AGM, due to events over the period represented.

The accounts as presented here consisted of 5 months to bring the 2018-19 accounts up to the financial year end (Sept 2018-Feb 2019) plus the accounts for the next two full financial years, 2019-20 and 2020-21.

He noted that income in 2019-20 was higher than normal; however, costs were also higher than normal: it was thought best if the clerk's salary, which had previously been paid retrospectively, were paid in the same financial year. Therefore, there were two payments in one year (2019-20), leading to a loss of £1,200. Costs were also higher, as they included the build of the new website. However, when the situation normalised in 2020-21, there was a surplus of approximately £300, as expected.

Going forward, if the levy remained the same at £6.30, but the clerk's salary (which was paid to NPP, rather than to any individual) increased to £1150 as agreed at the 2019 AGM, the balance was expected to remain just within the expected income.

Discussion:

Asked about the web hosting costs, RW responded that these did not figure separately on the accounts, so NPP might be absorbing them.

CH pointed out that as the AGM was not held in 2020, due to the pandemic, the levy had remained the same as it was felt to be unfair to increase it. Now, however, things were getting close to the line.

Discussion ensued as to by how much to increase the levy, given that it was also necessary to retain £500 towards insurance costs, as a result of an agreement with Yorkshire Water. There was also the need to keep up with up with inflation.

Cllr Lumley suggested keeping in line with Parish Council guidelines, i.e. not more 1.5 times the precept.

CH pointed out that if income was based on the 1.5 formula, there would be a danger of eating into reserves. Also, the levy had remained the same for two years, and with inflation at 4%, 10-12p should have been added.

It was decided that the levy be raised to £6.50.

9. Initial discussion to consider the future of the Board

CH described the reasons why discussion had arisen. It had become difficult for the Clerk to secure payment of the levy. Riparian owners and authorities often did not understand the reason for it and questioned its necessity or use. However, to get rid of the Board would cost at least £250,000 for a Transport and Works Act to dissolve it.

The purpose of the Board had changed over the years: from manager of a purely practical compensation reservoir, it had evolved into an environmental organisation and custodian of the river. If the Board continued as it was, it would not be doing what it was set up for.

However, if the levy continued to be able to be collected, then change might not be necessary; alternatively, if the Board were no longer able to secure payment of the levy, the question remained as to how else might it be funded. Also,, if they were not obliged to pay the levy, riparian owners might not attend, thus producing a worse situation than existed at present.

Fortunately, it appeared that the levy was now being fully paid, so perhaps a change was not necessary.

JS added that the forum provided an excellent, and possibly unique forum for those with an interest in the river to be heard regarding the flows and condition of the river.

MF said that compared to other river flow improvement projects, Gouthwaite's range of flows from 22 cumecs to over 600 were very unusual. However, it did seem strange that income was collected exclusively to pay the clerk, ie a circular process. Nevertheless, the Board was a useful independent body which helped deal with complaints.

JS said that as well as providing a way of dealing with all interested parties, the Board was able to take advice from YW and the EA, so it was the perfect management system, and payment of the levy gave those who needed it the right to have a say.

Cllr Watson felt that it was necessary to continue, as the Board enabled the public and YW to communicate.

KM asked if payment could be by direct debit. CH said that costs might be too high, but that it could be looked into again.

Asked if he thought the Board was useful, DL(EA) said that Gouthwaite was unique: it was the most closely monitored reservoir of those he was involved with regarding water flow improvement, and he saw no reason to change.

It was agreed to leave things as per the status quo.

10. Election of Chair and Vice Chair.

CH and JS were elected unopposed as Chair and Vice-Chair respectively. However, CH and JS indicated that they were planning to retire as Chair and Vice Chair in 2022 and that new candidates should be found for these offices, to ensure progression.

CH explained that the riparian owner with the most votes would usually become Chair; normally, this would fall to Glasshouses 123, despite the fact that they no longer own the weir. However, as the redeveloped Glasshouses Mill would be handed over to a management committee in due course, it was unlikely that anyone from there would want to be Chair. It was likely that they would waive this right and have a Chair elected from the remainder of the Board.

11. Exchange of Information

Cllr Watson asked if the Board would be answering Mr Richardson's letter. This had been addressed to him, together with a letter sent to the former head of YW, Richard Flint, detailing Mr Richardson's issues with the Board. This letter had also been forwarded by Mr Richardson to NYCC council members, a York MP and Andrew Jones. Cllr Watson did not wish to give a response himself, as he did not feel in a position to.

MF stated that the response from YW would be that the position has not changed: YW disagreed with Mr Richardson's arguments, based on all the evidence.

CH pointed out that over the years since Knaresborough flooded, the Board had discussed and reviewed the issue at almost every meeting. Every day, the reservoir level was monitored and the gates adjusted. He did not see how the Board could comply with Mr Richardson's requests: the matter had been reviewed, and the Board was unable to do anything more.

JS said there were a number of factors, including the weather, which the Board had no control over. The Board had discussed things fully and was advised by two eminent hydrologists and took advice on putting the rules

together which enabled the Board to satisfy the various needs of the river. All the information showed that the Board was not able to comply with the requirement to reduce the reservoir to 50%. In fact, this reduction did not seem a good idea: it would endanger the river, since in a dry year, it might cause it to dry up. It had been discussed as far as possible, and there was nothing more to add.

CH pointed out that if the reservoir did, as a result, go dry, only half of the remainder would be clear water. So at 50%, there would only be about a quarter of the reservoir available, and that would only last a month with no rain.

Cllr Watson said that the Board had to go by advice given and the Act of Parliament.

Cllr Watson suggested minuting the discussion and letting Mr Richardson contact Members of the Board for a reply if he wished.

It was agreed that the draft minutes would be publicised at the next meeting or the AGM in a year's time, whichever came first.

JS informed the meeting that at Summerbridge on 4th March, the river had more or less dried up. A vast quantity of water seemed to have been taken out of the river between Pateley Bridge and Summerbridge in a short time.

CH suggested 4 possibilities for water abstraction: 1) Glasshouses Goit, 2) Glasshouses fish farm, 3) Robin Scott's fish farm, 4) The former Summerbridge Sawmill's sluices.

JG said that he had gone to investigate at Glasshouses bridge and the river level was normal. This placed the abstraction of water between Glasshouses and Summerbridge.

The meeting heard that the abstraction of water took place over approximately 5 hours overnight, so it probably wouldn't be because of a goit being filled up.

Cllr Watson asked about a YW monitoring station at Dobson Bank, Summerbridge. MF said she would investigate

Cllr Lumley said that there was a boundary wall down halfway between the dam and Ramsgill. There was a culvert running under that road. The road itself was collapsing into the hole and becoming quite dangerous. It had been going on for over a year and was an ongoing issue with the Parish Council.

Highways Area 6 were aware. It must be a partnership issue between YW and the landowner on the other side of the road, from where the water originated.

MF said she would find out who at YW was dealing with it.

12. The Chair thanks the clerk, Miranda Foster and EA officers and all for attending.

The next meeting will be in April 2022, date and time TBA.