CONINGTON AND HOLME INTERNAL DRAINAGE BOARD

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26th February 2024

Dear Board Members

Special Meeting of the Board
Wednesday 6th March 2024

I enclose the Agenda for the Meeting of the Board to be hosted at the Holme Village Hall, Short Drove, Holme PE7 3PA at 6.30pm on Wednesday 6th March 2024.

Please telephone or e-mail to confirm your attendance as soon as possible.

Yours truly

P BURROWS

Clerk to the Board

To the Chairman and the Members of the Conington and Holme Internal Drainage Board

A G E N D A

1. Apologies for absence

2. Declarations of Interest

   Members to declare any interests relating to the agenda.

3. Confirmation of Minutes

   To confirm the Minutes of the Meeting of the Board held on the 8th June 2023

   (Copy pages 3 - 17)

4. Matters arising from the Minutes

5. Board viability

   Clerk to summarise the discussions that have taken place with Defra and other parties since the Board's last meeting

6. Conington Pumping Station Works

   To consider and advise on the proposed works of the landowners.

7. Ada Subscription

   To consider the ADA subscription for 2024.

8. Board Membership latest

   To review membership, advise on vacancies and Chair/Vice Chair positions

9. Date of next Meeting

10. Any other business

CONINGTON AND HOLME INTERNAL DRAINAGE BOARD

At a Meeting of the Conington and Holme Internal Drainage Board
held at the Admiral Wells Inn, Holme on Thursday 8th June 2023

PRESENT

J Racey Esq (Chairman)	R Elmore Esq
T Simpson Esq	D R Elmore Esq
T R West Esq	G P Bliss Esq
P Keates Esq	

Mr Paul Burrows (Clerk to the Board) was in attendance.

Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor T Alban and Ms A Glanville. The Chairman and Clerk reported on the efforts made to secure Ms A Glanville's attendance as a nominee to the Board representing the major landowner in the district Rochester Bridge Trust having highlighted to her the criticality of the meeting and the issues facing the Board.

B.1121 Declarations of Interest

The clerk reminded Members of the importance of declaring an interest in any matter included in today's agenda that involved or was likely to affect any individual on the Board.

B.1122 Confirmation of Minutes

RESOLVED

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Board held on the 22nd June 2022 and 7th July 2022 have been recorded correctly and that they be confirmed and signed. It was noted there was a minor error on the 22nd June 2022 minutes in that the meeting was not a Virtual Meeting.

B.1123 Vacancy in Membership

The Board welcomed Peter Keates Esq to the meeting. Mr Keates of Sentry Ltd has been nominated to the Area 2 vacancy by landowner Eternity Hall Farm by their land agent. Mr Keates introduced himself as new to the Fens being from Somerset. He outlined that a third of his farming interest is within the Board's district and he has a commitment to learn and invest. G P Bliss Esq proposed his appointment to the Board and this was seconded by T R West Esq. P Keates was issued with a key to enable access and maintenance of Conington Pumping Station.

R Elmore Esq made it known his intention to step down from the Board at the next Election in 2025.

RESOLVED

Appoint P Keates Esq to the Board (Area 2) and recognise there is a vacancy within Area 1.

B.1124 Election of Board Members

The Clerk reported that as the number of candidates for membership did not exceed the number of persons to be elected (8), the following candidates were elected as Members of the Board for a period of three years from 1st November 2022, viz:-

Area 1:

Gregory Bliss Esq   Ralph Elmore Esq   Timothy West Esq   Ms Amelia Glanville

Area 2:

David Elmore Esq   John Racey Esq (C & DO)   Toby Simpson Esq

The Chairman referred to his notification at the Board's previous meeting of his intention to step down as Chairman after this year's meeting but remain on the Board as member. The Clerk asked whether there was a member stepping forward into the role of Chairman.

No Member came forward and after a long period of silence the Clerk reaffirmed that the Board needed a Chairman to function. T P West Esq said that no one wants to do it. The Clerk outlined that to his knowledge there was no precedent to an IDB functioning without a Chairman, especially given the financial viability of the Board that will be discussed later in the meeting. G P Bliss Esq said that he was not local any longer however a Chairman was needed so the Board could raise its rates.

The Clerk summarised the financial situation as he saw it. That particularly within the pumped Area 2, the Board has been raising insufficient rate to cover reasonable revenue expenditure and has accrued little reserves. Given increasing energy costs and inefficiencies of the pumping station and its district, the Board is now facing a significant rate increase and within this hoping for an average rainfall year which is what they budget for. Conington Pumping Station is now at end of life and no capital reserves have been accrued over the years. The Board has no funding to pay for the Technical Services at the Middle Level Commissioners to advise them and develop suitable evidence to inform choices and even if they did, the team does not have immediate capacity at hand.

The district feeding the pumping station is unlikely to be eligible for a significant portion of grant for improvement or refurbishment works and there is a high possibility that a replacement pumping station may not be an economic option with costs potentially greater than benefits. He outlined that in this scenario no public authority should be promoting that option and eligibility for grant and/or public works loan would be highly unlikely. He referred to the Treasurer's initial documentation on the repayment costs of a loan. The Board noted that the rate for loan repayment would be beyond what is reasonably affordable to them.

The Clerk outlined that he would need to escalate the Board's governance weaknesses and financial viability to Defra for them to consider options moving forward. Board Members supported this course of action. The Board discussed potential amalgamation choices and noted that whilst these may assist with governance and leadership to keep the Board functioning, amalgamation would not resolve the financial viability of the Board.

After much further thought, the Chairman offered to stand for a further year but definitely no longer, giving 12-months for whatever action results from escalation to Defra. Board members thanked the Chairman and P Keates Esq offered to stand as Vice Chairman given that between he and the Chairman they have greatest stake within the pumped area.

RESOLVED

J Racey Esq appointed as Chairman for a further year and P Keates Esq appointed as Vice Chairman.

Clerk to urgently escalate the governance weaknesses of the Board, financial viability and pumping station concerns to Defra and within this highlighting the 12-month timescale and high likelihood of having no Chairman beyond the June 2024 meeting.

B.1125 Bank Mandate and National Savings & Investments

i) The Clerk requested authorisation to add the new Chief Executive to the Barclays bank signatories if necessary.

ii) The Clerk also reported that it is necessary to update the signatories on National Savings & Investments.

RESOLVED

The Board approved the changes to signatories.

B.1126 Member Training Update

The Clerk reported on the training undertaken by Members in the past year and encouraged all members to now view the full suite of five ADA videos that are now available on the Middle Level Commissioners website.

B.1127 East Coast Main Line Level Crossing Closure Programme

The access issues have now been resolved with Network Rail and the closure programme is no longer likely.

RESOLVED

Remove this item from future agendas

B.1128 Catchwater Drain, upstream of Cooks Lane

Further to minute B.1095, D Elmore Esq met on site with Jon Fenn, Operations Manager at the Middle Level Commissioners and the issue has now been resolved. The Board discussion the recent slippages on the Middle Level Commissioners' catchwater drain and the ongoing challenges faced to rectify them.

B.1129 Inspection – Conington Pumping Station

The Chairman reported that Speechleys were no longer supporting the electrics given the age and nature of the system and that he would need to find a new company to support and reconfigure within

the constraints of the current arrangement. He outlined the dilemma of investing in a new control panel when the whole asset is at the end of its life.
The Chairman reported that the newly installed telemetry is helping judge when best to operate the pump to manage its load. and that the Vice Chair now also needs telemetry access.

The Vice Chair said that he was wanting to maintain his drains within the pumped district at his expense to help improve the flow of water to the pump, thus reducing stress and reducing pumping costs. The Chairman suggested they walk the drains (in particular points 11-10 and 7-2) to plan this and mentioned that points 12-13 had previously been cleaned. The Chairman suggested this in combination with increasing the top-level ought to help but would need Dave Bantoft (Middle Level Commissioners' M&E Engineer) to advise.

G P Bliss reflected that the Board had a reasonable plan for managing what they've got but no plan for the future.

<u>RESOLVED</u>

Chairman and Vice Chair to assess the maintenance needs on Sentry Farms drains within the pumped system with a view to the Vice Chair undertaking as tenant to the riparian owner.

Chairman to contact Dave Bantoft regarding the top level.

Dave Bantoft to provide the Vice Chairman with telemetry access.

<u>B.1130 Clerk's Report</u>

i) <u>Middle Level Commissioners and Administered Boards Chairs Meeting</u>

That a ninth Chair's Meeting was held on the 13th December 2022.
The meeting covered a wide variety of matters likely to affect IDBs. A summary of the key points and resolutions follows;

David Thomas advised on the planned staffing changes being implemented due to his impending retirements. He stated that his post was being split back into Chief Executive/Clerk and Chief Engineer and that the appointments were:

Paul Burrows – to be the new CEO/Clerk - currently in post with the EA as a national Delivery Assurance Manager, and before that as Flood & Coastal Risk Manager for the East Anglia Area, then Flood Strategy Manager – Paul spearheaded Tactical Plans for the Fens which have secured the possibility of obtaining significant grant allocation on a Board by Board basis over a 15 year period, whilst at the same time defining a pathway to better understand the challenges faced and options worth considering for our lowland catchment as climate change and growth tests our current infrastructure arrangements.
Nicola Oldfield – to be the new Chief Engineer – currently in post with the EA as a Senior Project Manager. She most recently project managed the £30M Middle Level Barrier Bank scheme and had just taken over as project manager of the Cranbrook Counter Drain Strategy. She has, in the past, been employed by an IDB and has worked in close partnership with many IDBs including North Level IDB. Jonathan Brown stated how pleased the MLC Executive had been with these two candidates and how easy the choice had been given their knowledge of the area and experience to date.

An update was given on the role out of telemetry, which was receiving positive feedback from District Officers. A request was made for the login details to be provided to Chairmen as well as District Officers and it was confirmed that this would be arranged.
David Thomas confirmed that all but two Boards had stated their wish to move to the new planning and consenting charging and reporting arrangements and that the Assistant Treasurer was finalizing figures ready for the 2023 IDB/DDC meetings. A request was made for all correspondence which developers and their agents which is copied to Chairman should include the planning application references.

The protection and control of Bylaw strips was discussed at length and it was agreed that a policy document outlining the red-lines Boards should be applying to ensure that their ratepayers do not suffer as a result of development will be prepared for the Boards to consider. It was noted at the meeting that the refusal to issue any consent is subject to a reasonableness test, hence the document cannot preclude consenting everything within the 9m strip and the policy will be for guidance purposes only. It was felt that it should help developers, planning authorities and the Boards by providing some additional clarity. It was also felt that some case history examples to be circulated to members might help them understand the issues which have to be addressed.

Climate Change was discussed and it was noted that the MLC had completed its carbon audit and would now start work on carbon reduction and mitigation initiatives. It was also noted that the M&E engineer was looking at base levels of energy consumption at pumping stations, for example to see if panel heaters are left on permanently. He will be making recommendations to Boards if he identifies scope for reducing power without risking the apparatus.

WRE were mentioned and the Chief Executive stated that he was pleased that the draft water resource plan for the East included extensive reference to agriculture and its need for water to support the growing of food to feed the nation and also of the key role played by IDBs in transferring water to the point needed by abstractors. He also commented upon the newly proposed Cambridgeshire fens reservoir, north of Chatteris and advised that the MLC were responding on the need to get fill supply and draw-down arrangements right, but also that we need to seek to gain capital from the opportunities that the new reservoir will present in terms of bringing money into the area and potentially helping reduce flood risk and assist with water need balancing.

The Chief Executive advised that a decision had been made to move the MLC and IDB's electricity supply contracts from Anglian Farmers to the Green Energy Advice Bureau. This followed several years of extended poor service levels and lack of timely information coming from Anglian Farmers.

The future of IDBs and the value of potential amalgamations was once discussed and this gave rise to questions over small boards being able to secure a quorate for which this had been a particularly poor year. It was agreed that this item should remain on the agenda and that any Chairs who felt that the time was right for their Boards to look again and the advantages/disadvantages of amalgamation would contract the Clerk. It was also agreed that it may be useful to undertake an exercise around updating the original Geoff Beal report which had recommended that the number of Boards within the area administered by the MLC could reasonably be reduced to three or four.

The Clerk finally noted that the ADA Great Ouse branch AGM would be held on the 7th March at Prickwillow Hall and would be in the format of workshops in the morning and an AGM in the afternoon. The workshops theme this year would be; water resources, the new reservoir and climate change.

ii) Association of Drainage Authorities

a) Annual Conference

That the 85th Annual Conference of the Association was held on Wednesday 9th November 2022 at The Hive, Nocton, Lincolnshire.

This year marked another change in the arrangements for the National Conference and AGM, with the AGM being held virtually on 28th September 2022 followed by the national conference held as a hybrid meeting at the Dyson Farming complex in Lincolnshire on 9th November. The choice of venue was to avoid the risk of being impacted by rail strikes and it also represented significant cost savings. The event had limited numbers and was fully subscribed.

Following an introduction by the President of ADA Robert Caudwell who noted the good work being done by ADA but also noted that with COP27 ahead climate change was the single biggest challenge facing everybody and that IDBs would need to play their part in delivering carbon reduction.

The opening address was given by Councillor Matthew Riddle, Chairperson, Lower Severn Internal Drainage Board and Councillor, South Gloucestershire Council who spoke on options which could be pursued to change the way Special Levy is reported and dealt with by the Councils. The challenge at the moment was perceived as the lack of transparency with Special Levy payments not being itemised on rate bills in the same way that police and ambulance services are. There is also the issue that by not disaggregating the Special Levy payments, increases in them can currently (for Councils who pay large Special Levys) trigger a local election under the current rules.

Key note speakers were Hazel Durant Waterway & Flood Water Management Policy Team, Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs and Luzette Kroon Board member: Innovation & International, Dutch Water Authorities, Dykgraaf (chairperson), Wetterskip Fryslân. Hazel spoke of the challenges ahead and noted that it would be foolhardy to expect revenue expenditure to be increased by treasury given the current economic climate. The best we could hope for would be last years' figures to be matched. She praised the work of IDBs and noted the important role they play in delivering flood risk benefits through their direct works and also through PSCAs. Luzette spoke of the similarities and differences between IDBs and their Dutch equivalents and went on to describe the challenges faced arising from climate change.

A panel discussion followed and the MLC Chief Executive was invited to sit on this panel. He took the opportunity to outline the work of WRE but also to express his concerns that currently Land Drainage Act legislation was holding back the full potential of IDBs in terms of water resource management and investment. A review is urgently required and the support of the EA and DEFRA is needed. Hazel agreed that there was a need but hope a way forward could be found that didn't require primary legislation.

The day concluded with a field visit to showcase the Dunston Beck Improvement Project. The improvement project, completed by Dyson Farming with the Environment Agency, Wild Trout Trust and other partners, seeks to improve the biodiversity and water quality of the beck with a sensitive mosaic of wetland habitats delivered through excavations recreating a meandering river system with the retention of water providing ecological and also some modest flood risk benefits.

b) Annual Flood & Water Conference 2023

Invitation to ADA Flood & Water Conference 2023
Tuesday 21 November 2023 | 11:00 – 17:00 | One Great George Street, London, SW1P 3AA

ADA is delighted to invite you to join them for the ADA Flood & Water Conference on Tuesday 21 November 2023, as the conference returns to the magnificent venue of One Great George Street, Westminster, London. ADA will bring together a leading line-up of prominent political, policy, and technical speakers from across the United Kingdom to discuss key policy topics of the moment during the main conference session.

Following feedback from members, the format of this year's Conference has been developed to:
• maximise the time available for networking between delegates and suppliers to the sector,
• invite a greater variety of guest speakers, and
• provide more convenient timing for those travelling to and from London.

The Conference will open at 11.00 for networking with delegates and an expanded Exhibition of ADA's Associate Members in the Great Hall. A buffet lunch will be served from 12.00 before the conference presentations commence at 13.20 in the Thomas Telford Theatre. The Conference will close at 17.00.
Discussion forum
A discussion forum will form part of the day where delegates will be able to pose topical questions to the speakers/panellists via the conference chair. ADA wish to receive delegates questions in advance, which can be submitted as part of the ticket booking process on Eventbrite. Their aim is to consolidating key subjects for discussion and questioning and to maximise the value of this session.

Book your place
ADA has launched bookings for this year’s conference early to give everyone plenty of advance notice of the revised date of Tuesday 21 November 2023 to make travel arrangements. They invite you to secure your place now via Eventbrite, via the link below. Tickets are non-refundable but can be transferred.

ADA Flood & Water Conference 2023 Tickets, Tue 21 Nov 2023 at 11:00 | Eventbrite

c) Meeting of the River Great Ouse Branch

The Annual Conference of the River Great Ouse ADA Branch was held on Tuesday 7th March 2023

Morning workshops were re-introduced for the first time since the COVID-19 outbreak and members who attended took part in an excellent discussion focussed on three topic areas; Fens2100; Water Resources East and Climate Change. Steven Trewhella (consultant to the EA on Fens2100) and Daniel Johns (Chief Exec, WRE) took away a wide range of ideas centred around how the two topics were connected by the work of IDBs.

Within the AGM, Marc Heading was re-appointed as Chairman and Doug McMurdo as Vice Chair with approval that the secretariat of the branch be transitioned from the Middle Level Commissioners to the Bedford Group of IDBs over the coming months. Ian Moodie

(Technical Manager, ADA) gave an overview of ADA's activities, including their important inputs on behalf of IDBs into the long-awaited implementation of schedule 3 of the Floods & Water Management Act. Tom Pickover introduced himself ahead of starting as Operations Manager at the Environment Agency (covering the lower Great Ouse catchment) and was joined by Darren Trumper who between them gave an overview of Environment Agency flood management activities and budgets.

iii) Water Resources East (WRE)

Further to minute B.1097 (x), the Clerk reported that the requested contribution from this Board for 2023/2024 financial year is expected to once again be £125. Contributions from drainage boards within the East of England secure a direct stake in WRE and help to ensure their needs and opinions are taken into account.

iv) National Drainage Show & Floodex 2023

That the National Drainage Show & Floodex 2023 will be held at ExCel, London on the 22nd and 23rd November 2023.

v) Changes to Electricity Supply Contracts

The Clerk reported that Boards have encountered problems with the operation of the electricity contract by Anglia Farmers over the years. Following various meetings with them it appeared some of these problems were being addressed and the service appeared to be improving this, however, was short lived. Over the past 2 years there has again been a significant deterioration in both the quality of service and lack of account management received from Anglia Farmers.

During the summer the Middle Level Commissioners were approached by Green Energy Advice Bureau (GEAB), one of the UK's leading energy companies and buying group, whose portfolio includes numerous companies with over 200 million kwh tendered per annum. They have experience working with an estimated 60 Internal Drainage Boards, which include locally the Ely Group of Internal Drainage Boards and Downham Market Group of Internal Drainage Boards. We accordingly contacted Jean Heading of the Ely Group of Internal Drainage to enquire of the service provided by GEAB and she has confirmed she is far happier with the service received from them compared to that from Anglia Farmers and since has signed a 5-year fixed rate contract with GEAB from 1st April 2022.

A report was presented to the Middle Level Commissioners at their Board meeting on 3rd November 2022 and due to the ongoing poor performance of Anglia Farmers, together with the positive feedback given by Jean Heading of the Ely Group, the Commissioners' resolved to consider moving to alternative arrangements. The Executive Committee were delegated the final decision and having considered a report on the options and subsequently confirmed their agreement that a move would be appropriate in the circumstances.

The Clerk reported this was considered a positive move and recommended the Board also move to this alternative arrangement.

The Clerk reported that this Board's Chairman had subsequently agreed for the Board to serve notice to Anglia Farmers and for Green Energy Advice Bureau to handle the energy procurement process and management of the electricity contract.

The Clerk advised that the Middle Level Commissioners and its administered Boards have entered into a fixed rate energy supply with Corona Energy for an 18-month period from1st April 2023.

vi) Insurance

Historically the number of insurance companies willing to quote for the insurance requirements of the Middle Level Commissioners and administered Boards is limited.

Our insurance portfolio is complex and includes a range of policies that includes Commercial Combined (largest component), Motor Fleet, Engineering & Construction, Terrorism, Management Liability, Marine Craft and Professional Indemnity.

The overall cost of our insurance portfolio for 2023/24 will be £192,275 (£152,373 in 2022/23) a 26% increase, although increases will differ Board by Board depending on their individual insurance needs.

Key factors and changes are highlighted below:

- For Commercial Combined insurance, 2022/23 was the last year in our previous five-year agreement with AXA which included a 7% price reduction woven into the deal. For 2023/24 Towergate, our brokers, approached several companies and all bar AXA were not willing to quote given the size and complexity of our portfolio. Independently we also approached the NFU who declined to quote for the same reason.
- There has been an increase in fleet, property and marine assets included within our cover.
- In view of rising inflation most Boards agreed to index link their insured sums from 1st April 2023. AXA have increased insured sums by 15%, which has resulted in an increase within the overall premium.
- AXA have offered a 2-year stability deal, where any premium increases, subject to claims not exceeding 50% of the written premium, will be capped for 2024/25 at 2.5%. This excludes any increases in sums insured.
- AXA will not extend the stability deal as they plan a review of their whole IDB scheme in 2025.
- Commercial combined policy excess has increased from £350 to £2,500. None of our four 2022/23 claim values were above this new excess.
- Excesses are dictated by AXA's overall scheme for all IDBs and this is apparently now standard and has been imposed due to the number of lower value claims across the whole IDB industry. As other IDB/IDB Groups come out of their previous agreement with AXA the above will apply.

For future years Boards ought to consider index linking their valuations of properties and pumping stations every 3-5 years rather than annually, to mitigate annual premium increases and balancing having suitable cover without being over-insured.

It should also be noted that personal accident and sickness cover only covers employees or members up to 80 years of age. Boards may need to consider the implications of this.

vii) Delegation of signatory on consents

The Board was asked to note that under the Board's scheme of delegation, the Chief Executive has delegated the authority to sign consent on behalf of the Board to the Chief

Engineer. As well as the Chief Engineer being better placed to technically assure individual consents, this will enable the them to effectively take ownership over the whole planning and consenting service. This also creates a mechanism for escalation in case of any issues or complaints.

vii) Service Delivery Frameworks

The Board were asked to resolve that the Clerk, on their behalf, be authorised to enter into user and/or access agreements for public sector delivery frameworks (For example, Environment Agency Delivery Frameworks and SCAPE). This will open up access to the fees, terms and conditions of these Frameworks so our Consulting Engineers can compare and choose the most suitable procurement route for delivery of the Boards future needs. This does not tie the Board to using any Framework they then have a user/access agreement with, and Frameworks are not the only procurement route for delivery that will be considered. Having this resolution from all the Boards we administer is key if we are to package work across Boards to exploit economies of scale and become more efficient and effective in the delivery of services.

ix) Local Government Support - Special Levies

Thanks to lobbying by the Association of Drainage Authorities and Local Authorities, the Department of Levelling Up, Housing & Communities announced an additional financial support package totalling £3m for 2023/24 to support the 15 Local Authorities most impacted by increases in special levies from Internal Drainage Boards driven by unprecedented increases in energy costs. We provided ADA with information to support this case and Fenland District Council have secured £177,281 and King's Lynn & West Norfolk Borough Council £205,451. The Ministerial Statement is available here. Disappointingly it is explicit that this is a one-off exceptional payment and clear that the government will not provide additional grant to Local Authorities to cover special levies on an ongoing basis.

RESOLVED

WRE – that the fee for this year to be paid

Electricity Contracts – that the Chairmans action be approved

Delegation of signatory on consent – was noted and approved

Service Delivery Frameworks – that the Clerk be authorised to enter into user and/or access agreements on behalf of the Board.

B.1131 Consulting Engineers' Report, including planning and consenting matters

The Board considered the Report of the Consulting Engineers.

RESOLVED

The Board agreed in principle to the sediment testing at point 70 to then support discussions with Highways England with regards to potential contaminants entering their system from the A1. They asked that Jon Fenn, Operations Manager at the Middle Level Commissioners secure a price and then authorise the Chairman to approve if the cost is considered reasonable. They resolved to fund this from the Discharge (A1M) Account. They resolved that further maintenance downstream of point 70 be authorised by the Chairman dependent upon the results of the sampling.

Focusing on the pumping station, the clerk highlighted the summary from the consulting engineer

"Ultimately this station has now exceeded its reliable life. Its reliability is now a major concern. A plan needs to be put in place for its overhaul or replacement"

The Clerk then reiterated key points articulated earlier within the meeting in that a replacement pumping station may not be an economic option and the Board had no funds to engage the Middle Level Commissioners Technical Services Team to assess the risk, feasibility, outline options and develop a contingency plan.

G P Bliss Esq enquired what would happen if the pump failed or was turned off and what is at risk. Members suggested the district would fill up with water potentially evacuating via the Boards' gravity outfall and/or into Sawtry IDB. The clerk asked whether to anyone's knowledge a siphon under Monk's Lode and into Woodwalton IDB has ever been considered. G P Bliss Esq did not know but stated that Woodwalton IDB has one pump and would need upgrade if that were to be viable option. The Board also discussed what impact there may be on the East Coast Main Line and how aware Network Rail may be to their potential risks.

RESOLVED

That the Chairman and Vice Chairman be delegated the responsibility on behalf of the Board to liaise with the Consulting Engineers, Defra and/or others in any capital project or contingency plan decision making.

The Consulting Engineers and clerk develop an outline project initial form so the problem statement is captured to aid the viability escalation with Defra.

The Clerk write on his and the Chairman's behalf outlining the position the Board finds itself in, to i) the two landowners within the pumped district ii) Network Rail and iii) Huntingdonshire District Council.

B.1132 Capital Improvement Programme and Loan Funding

The Clerk reflected back to the conversation earlier in the meeting. Members recognised the immediate funding needs associated with Conington Pumping Station that is reflected within the Capital Improvement Programme and the affordability challenge associated with any loan arrangement they may be eligible for.

B.1133 Environment Officer's Report

Members noted the content of the report.

B.1134 Report on maintenance work in the District

The Board gave consideration to their maintenance works for 2023/24.

a) Gravity Area

The Chairman reported that permission had been granted to access the drain from point 72 in Glatton to undertake sympathetic maintenance. G P Bliss questioned the value for money and suggested a written quote and clear scope be secured before the Chairman authorised the work. He suggested the works needs to then enable routine annual flailing that the Board then need to include within future plans.

D Elmore Esq also reaffirmed that maintenance downstream of point 70 should only be undertaken if the sampling resolved earlier confirms no contaminants as the current state of the channel would be reducing the spread of these downstream.

The Board discussed other needs within the gravity district, focussing on Conington Brook through the village and from Cubik's bridge to the railway noting that both areas will become a problem. It was agreed that the Chairman should evaluate the needs and then if there is sufficient budget to arrange for maintenance to be undertaken.

R Elmore Esq aired his frustrations at what he described as the Board's neglect over the years and that a "little and often" approach to maintenance was more appropriate that letting problems build and then tackling reactively.

b) Pumped Area

No additional works were highlighted over and above the report and resolution under the earlier item (Inspection – Conington Pumping Station).

RESOLVED

The Chairman be authorised to instruct the maintenance d/s of point 72 once a written quotation and clear scope of works have been received.

Maintenance d/s of point 70 be undertaken at the approval of the Chairman depending upon the results of the sampling.

The Chairman to evaluate the maintenance needs on Conington Brook and instruct delivery within the budget.

B.1135 State-aided Schemes

Item covered within the capital programme discussion.

B.1136 Environment Agency – Precepts

The Clerk reported that at the Anglian (Great Ouse) Regional Flood & Coastal Committee (RFCC) determined that there were exceptional circumstances to consider on the agreed 2% increase on the precepts on Internal Drainage Boards. The Committee voted for an additional 1% increase (reflecting exceptional circumstances) above the agreed 2% for the year ending 31st March 2024 – total of a 3% increase on the level of precept on Internal Drainage Boards for the year ending 31st March 2024.

The precept for 2022/2023 was £2,142.

B.1137 Claims for Highland Water Contributions – Section 57 Land Drainage Act 1991

The Clerk reported that following his submission of claims for contributions the gross sum of £664.38 (£1,436.84 less £772.46 received on account) (inclusive of supervision) has been received from the Environment Agency for the financial year 2021/2022 based on the Board's actual expenditure on maintenance work for that financial year and the sum of £2,674.64 in respect of 80% of the Board's estimated expenditure for the financial year 2022/2023.

B.1138 Association of Drainage Authorities - Subscriptions

The Clerk reported that ADA has increased subscriptions by 4.5% for 2023, from £571 to £597.

RESOLVED

That the ADA subscription fee for 2023 be paid.

B.1139 Contravention of Byelaws – 1 Brookside Cottage, Pingle Bank

The clerk referred to the update provided on page 23 of the consulting engineer's report where it was reported that a number of letters had been sent to the homeowner who has inherited a range of unconsented works. The Board are awaiting a response from the homeowner's solicitor. The Board agreed that Middle Level Commissioners team should continue to seek resolution but it was a low risk for the Board in the context of other issues facing it.

B.1140 Health and Safety

The Chairman reported that he was a waiting a date for the next COPE inspection.

B.1141 Completion of the Annual Accounts and Annual Return of the Board – 2021/2022

a) The Board considered and approved the comments of the Auditors on the Annual Return for the year ended on the 31st March 2022.

b) The Board considered and approved the Audit Report of the Internal Auditor for the year ended on the 31st March 2022.

B.1142 Defra IDB1 Returns

The clerk referred to the completed IDB1 form for 2021/2022 which Members noted and approved.

B.1143 Budgeting

The Clerk referred to the budget comparison of the forecast out-turn and the actual out-turn for the financial year ending 31st March 2023.

B.1144 Review of Internal Controls and appointment of Internal Auditor

The Board considered and expressed satisfaction with the current system of Internal Controls.

The clerk reported that following the conclusion of tendering Whitings LLP have been appointed as internal auditor for a five-year period commencing 1st April 2023 (financial years 2023/24 to 2027/28).

B.1145 Risk Management Assessment

a) The Board considered and expressed satisfaction with their current Risk Management Policy.

b) The Board reviewed and approved the current insured value of their building and for this to be index-linked from next renewal in April 2024.

B.1146 Transparency Code for Smaller Authorities

The Clerk reported that, as resolved at its last meeting, the Board will continue with a limited assurance review and not take advantage of the audit exemption available for smaller public bodies with income and expenditure less than £25,000.

RESOLVED

To continue with a limited assurance review as has been carried out in previous years.

B.1147 Exercise of Public Rights

The clerk referred to the publishing of the Notice of Public Rights and publication of unaudited Annual Return, Statement of Accounts, Annual Governance Statement and the Notice of Conclusion of the Audit and right to inspect the Annual Return.

B.1148 Payments

The Board considered and approved payments amounting to £37,480.39 which had been made during the financial year 2022/2023.

B.1149 Expenditure estimates and special levy and drainage rate requirements 2023/2024

G P Bliss Esq reflected on the estimates and the concerns raised earlier by R Elmore Esq about past decisions not to make investment to increase maintenance. He proposed a rate for the gravity area of 13p compared to the estimate of 11.9p. T R West Esq seconded the proposal and the rate was carried.

The Chairman reflect on the scale of rate increase needed for the pumped area. The estimate equated to an increase of 13.5p to 48.50p (+38%). He proposed they stretch to 50p with the product of 1.5p being positioned within the Board’s future works account to act as a contribution towards the next steps with the pumping station.

The Board considered estimates of expenditure and proposals for special levy and drainage rates in respect of the financial year 2023/2024 and were informed by the Clerk that under the Land Drainage Act 1991 the proportions of their net expenditure to be met by drainage rates on agricultural hereditaments and by special levy on local billing authorities would be:-

	Area 1 (Gravity Area)	Area 2 (Pumped Area)
Drainage rates	54.10%	97.56%
Special levy	45.90%	2.44%

RESOLVED

i) That the estimates be approved.

ii) That a total sum of £40,751 be raised by drainage rates and special levy (Area 1 - £15,970; Area 2 -£24,781).

iii) That the amounts comprised in the sum referred to in ii) above to be raised by drainage rates and to be met by special levy are:-

	Area 1	Area 2
Drainage rates	£8,640	£24,175
Special levy	£7,330	£ 606

iv) That drainage rates be laid and assessed on Agricultural hereditaments in the District as follows:-

Area 1	Area 2
13.00p in the £	50.00p in the £

v) That a Special levy of £7,936 be made and issued to Huntingdonshire District Council for the purpose of meeting such expenditure.

vi) That the seal of the Board be affixed to the record of drainage rates and special levies and to the special levy referred to in resolution (v).

vii) That the Clerk be authorised to recover all unpaid rates and levy by such statutory powers as may be available.

viii) That the product of 1.5p from the pumped area be invested in the Future Works Account and made available for the next steps with the pumping station.

B.1150 Date of next Meeting

RESOLVED

That the next Meeting of the Board be held on Tuesday 4th June 2024 at Admiral Wells Inn, Holme at 7.00pm, with tea and coffee to be provided.