

Warboys, Somersham & Pidley IDB

At an Inspection and Meeting of the Warboys, Somersham & Pidley IDB
hosted at Lakeside Lodge, Pidley at 2.00pm on Thursday 28th November 2024

PRESENT

D Brown (Chairman)	D Fabb	Ms C Lowe
T Noble (Vice-Chair)	J German	S Whittome
J Carney	I Johnson	
D Cornwell	S Johnson	
D England	C Leadbetter	

Mr Robert Hill (representing the Clerk), Mr Andrew Wool (Head of Finance) and Mr Alwyn Sweeney (District Officer) were also in attendance.

Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Ms A Costello (HDC), S Edgley, D Edwards, M England, Ms L Munns, J Short, H Whittome.

B.1920 Inspection

Prior to the meeting, members undertook an inspection of the District.

Members that attended the inspection are as above with the exception of J Carney, D Cornwell & S Whittome.

i) Womb Farm Development (Abbot's Walk, Chatteris)

Members met Mr Ben Purdy and Mr Mark Mellers from Persimmon Homes. Mr Purdy confirmed that the site design had been changed to allow the Board the requested 9m byelaw distance along the Washways pumping station discharge channel, apart from one point to the south of the development where the current distance was nearer 6m. He confirmed that Persimmon Homes would be levelling this area to allow the full 9m. Members considered that this could give a slope from the development towards the watercourse, which could make the operation of machinery on this section unstable. Following discussions, it was agreed that Persimmon Homes would create a level section for the boards machinery to operate on when they reinstated the 9mm byelaw distance along this section.

In response to Mr Purdy, Mr I Johnson confirmed that the Boards requirements were a maximum slope across the byelaw distance of 1 in 60. Mr Purdy confirmed that Persimmon Homes had removed all pipes, drains and services from the 9m distance.

In response to Mr Hill, Mr Purdy confirmed that the right to deposit spoil within the 9m byelaw distance formed part of the agreement which had been approved by the local authority planning committee.

Mr Purdy confirmed that the maintenance of the balancing ponds and byelaw distance would be handed over to a management company following the completion of the development.

ii) Washways Pumping Station

The Chairman informed members of the pumping arrangements and importance of the station. He referred to the syphon arrangement which had been installed and Mr I Johnson confirmed that although the cost had been around £2,800, he considered that this would have already been saved with the reduction of summer pumping circulating water around the district.

The Chairman referred to the previously approved work to allow a shallow clean cycle on the weed-screen cleaning equipment, but, following a full assessment it was not possible to easily alter the arrangements, and it would cost in the region of £6,800 to make the necessary alterations. He considered, that with other works required in the district, funding could currently be better utilised elsewhere.

In response to the Chairman, Mr Hill confirmed that although funding for the second phase of the Storm Recovery Tranche 2 funding had been confirmed, there were currently no details of what might be eligible for inclusion. He agreed to pass these works onto the Engineer for inclusion in any claim expressions to be submitted if these types of works could be eligible.

The Chairman referred to the sheet piling within the discharge channel and the need for this to be inspected to ascertain its condition. In response, Mr Hill referred to the possible inclusion of an inspection as part of a district wide study, but informed members that funding for such studies in the next financial year was uncertain. Member queried if an inspection might be included within subsequent Storm Recovery T2 applications. Mr Hill referred to the uncertainty currently surrounding these claim applications but agreed to pass this to the Engineer.

iii) High Fen Pumping Station

The Chairman confirmed that there was also no shallow clean function in the weed-screen cleaning equipment, but for this installation the cost to provide this function was likely to be around £800. The District Officer informed members that when operating in windy conditions, the weed-screen cleaning equipment tended to catch on the upright support columns and could therefore not be operated to the full extent of the grab.

iv) Pidley Pumping Station

The Chairman reported that the District Officer had spent time during the summer in spraying/cleaning all the pumping station compound and had done an excellent job.

The District Officer confirmed that there was still work to be done in removing scrap from some sites, which he intended to do during the spring.

Mr I Johnson reported that he had contacted a local groundworks contractor to quote for concreting around/under the building base, which had started to become exposed due to ground shrinkage. He considered this option would provide the best value for money as there did not appear to be any cracks within the building structure, members approved this course of action.

The District Officer referred to a slip at the right-hand corner of the pump drain/pumping station on existing piling works. He confirmed that he would continue to monitor this and suggested the best value future option would be to install gabions at this point. He also referred to the previously approved works to alter the access gates on the compound fencing, which would be attended to during the spring.

Meeting:

Members attended the meeting as above, and apologies received as above.

The Chairman thanked members for attending today's meeting and the inspection earlier in the day. On behalf of the Board, he thanked the District Officer for all his work during the year and reported that he had flail mowed and slubbed out the Pidley District this year, completing the works to a high standard.

The Chairman introduced Mr Andrew Wool, who had been appointed as Head of Finance for the Middle Level Commissioners to succeed Mr Robert Hill, who would be leaving the employment of the Commissioners at the end of January 2025.

B.1921 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.

Mr S Whittome declared interests relating to the payments made to and any matters concerning Middle Level Commissioners (as member of the Middle Level Board).

B.1922 Confirmation of MinutesRESOLVED

That the Minutes of the Board held on 6th June 2024 are recorded correctly and that they be confirmed and signed.

B.1923 Matters arising from the minutes.

Further to minute B.1908,

Puddock Bungalow

That the Lead Clerk liaise with the Chairman concerning the rental agreement.

Review of Easements (A Barlett & Sons Ltd)

That the Lead Clerk liaise with the Chairman to update agreements as may be necessary.

Further to minute B.1919, the Chairman referred to the section of watercourse 23-22-9a and that the District Officer had carried out drain maintenance works along these sections and had taken photographs following the completion of the works. He reminded members of access difficulties in this area and the limited function of this section.

In response to the District Officer concerning the Pocket Park at Chatteris, Cllr J Carney confirmed it is owed by Chatteris Town Council and to allow access to the Anglian Water facility, it was prohibited to put any structures on the site. The District Officer confirmed that the issue was not access to the site but access across the park and the line of trees which then restricted access to the watercourse.

Mr S Whittome considered that as the park was under the ownership of the town council, responsibility for these watercourses would therefore be with the Town Council.

Mr Hill reported that he had discussed this matter with the Middle Level Commissioners planning engineer who, due to current development proposals in this area, recommended that the Board retain these sections as district watercourses. He further referred to the outfall into the district system, which would be via pipe/culvert under the old railway line. The District Officer confirmed that the outfall was under the old railway running line and that it was currently clean and in good order.

RESOLVED

That the Board relinquish sections 23-22-9a as district watercourses and that all relevant notices be served on all relevant parties concerning this.

B.1924 Constitution & Membership

The Board considered the report, Viz:

Provided by the Middle Level Commissioners		Item No:	4
Meeting:	WARBOYS, SOMERSHAM & PIDLEY INTERNAL DRAINAGE BOARD	Subject:	CONSTITUTION & MEMBERSHIP
Date:	Thursday 28th November 2024	Officer Responsible:	Polly Tombleson

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Board is asked to:

- A. Note the current status of its membership and the role they each play as members serving the interests of the Board.
- B. Review attendance records and identify any resolutions as necessary.
- C. Consider the **2** vacancies on the Board
- D. Determine whether there are composition changes and/or amalgamations it wishes to progress.
- E. Reenforce the need for members to view all five 'Good Governance' videos.
- F. Identify any topic areas for additional training, as well as any inspection/site visit requirements.

1. Current status

- 1.1 The table below outline the current composition of the Board and the quorum as detailed in the standing orders.

	Elected Members	Appointed Members	Total Members	Quorum
Composition	21	N/A	24	12
Actual	19	1 FDC, 2 HDC	22	
Vacancies	2			

- 1.2 The table below details the current elected members of the Board

No	Name	Status (one of four categories)	Commentary
1	Jacob Armstrong	Nominee of ratepayer (Mr C Armstrong)	
2	Daniel Brown	Ratepayer	Chairman
3	Stuart Cornwell	Nominee of ratepayer (Mr D Cornwell)	
4	Stephen Edgley	Nominee of Ratepayer (Mr A Edgley)	
5	Daniel Edwards	Ratepayer	
6	David England	Ratepayer	
7	Mark England	Ratepayer	
8	Daniel Fabb	Ratepayer	
9	James German	Ratepayer	
10	Marc Heading	Ratepayer	
11	Ian Johnson	Ratepayer	
12	Sam Johnson	Ratepayer	
13	Charles Leadbetter	Ratepayer	
14	Lucy Munns	Nominee of ratepayer (Mr G Munns)	
15	Thomas Noble	Ratepayer	Vice-Chair
16	Jonathan Short	Ratepayer	
17	Rupert Waters	Nominee of ratepayer (Abbots Ripton Farming)	
18	Hugh Whittome	Ratepayer	
19	Stephen Whittome	Ratepayer	
20			
21			

- 1.3 The table below details the current appointed members of the Board.

- 1.4 Special levy paying District Councils appoint members to Boards and their role is to be part of the Board representing all the non-agricultural interests within the Board's district. The Council must consider appointing members who have relevant knowledge or experience that is relevant to the Board and its district.
- 1.5 Appointed members do not need to be councillors or employees of the Council, therefore can represent wider relevant interests within the district, eg major infrastructure, commerce, community groups, environmental interests.

No	Name	Appointing Council	Commentary (one of three categories)
1	James Carney	FDC	Councillor
2	Adela Costello	HDC	Councillor
3	Charlotte Lowe	HDC	Councillor

- 1.6 All Members are reminded that have equal status to each-other around the Board table and are here to serve the interests of the Board.

2. Attendance

- 2.1 The table below outlines the attendance record for the last four meetings of the Board.

Elected Members

No	Name	06/06/2024	30/11/2023	8/6/2023	1/12/2022
1	Jacob Armstrong	Apologies	Present		attended
2	Daniel Brown	Present	Present	attended	attended
3	David Cornwell	Apologies	Present	N/A	N/A
	Lord de Ramsey	N/A		apologies	apologies
4	Stephen Edgley	Apologies	Present	attended	attended
5	Daniel Edwards	Apologies	Present		attended
6	David England	Present	Present	attended	attended
7	Mark England	Present	Present	attended	attended
8	Daniel Fabb	Present	Present		Apologies
9	James German	Present	Present	attended	attended
10	Marc Heading	Present		attended	
11	Ian Johnson	Present	Present	attended	attended
12	Sam Johnson	Present	Present	attended	attended
13	Charles Leadbetter	Apologies	Present	attended	attended
14	Lucy Munns	Present	Present	apologies	apologies
15	Thomas Noble	Present	Present	attended	attended
16	Jonathan Short	Present	Present	attended	attended
17	Rupert Waters		Present	attended	attended
18	Hugh Whittome	Present	Present	attended	attended
19	Stephen Whittome	Present	Present	apologies	attended
20					
21					

Attendance at Chairs Meetings

No	Name	6/10/2023	13/12/2022	12/4/2022	2/11/2021
1	Charles Leadbetter	apologies	attended		N/A

Appointed Members (current and previous)

No	Name (Council)	06/06/2024	30/11/2023	8/6/2023	1/12/2022
1	James Carney (FDC)	Apologies	Apologies		N/A

2	Adela Costello (HDC) substitute if C Lowe not available	N/A	N/A	apologies	attended
3	Charlotte Lowe (HDC)	Present	Present		attended

3. Elections, vacancies & appointments

- 3.1 There is currently **2** vacancies on the Board
- 3.2 To consider the appointments of the Chairman of the Board (present Chairman - Daniel Brown)
- 3.3 To consider the appointment of the Vice-Chairman of the board (present Vice-Chair – Thomas Noble)
- 3.4 To consider the appointment of Clerk to the Board (present Clerk – Middle Level Commissioners)
- 3.5 To appoint the Finance Committee – (present Finance Committee – Daniel Brown, David England, Daniel Fabb, James German, Ian Johnson, Sam Johnson, Charles Leadbetter, Thomas Noble & Hugh Whittome)

4. Composition and amalgamations

- 4.1 The Clerk to provide an update on the reconstitution of the Board.

5. Training

- 5.1 All Members are asked to digest the Good Governance Guide for Internal Drainage Boards published by the Association of Drainage Authorities and view the five accompanying videos intended to bring the guide to life. They are available via <https://middlelevel.gov.uk/about/idb-governance/>
- 5.2 To date 0 of 22 Board Members have reported viewing all five videos.
To date 13 of 22 Board Members have reported viewing 2 or the 5 videos.
- 5.3 Members are asked to identify any topics areas they would value further training on as well as any site inspections that would help them undertake their role on the Board more effectively.
- 5.4 Member training is reported to Defra as part of the annual IDB1 return.

Author Name: Polly Tombleson

Role: Senior Business Support Officer

Appointments

RESOLVED

That D Brown be re-appointed as Chairman of the Board.

That T Noble be re-appointed as Vice-Chair of the Board.

That Middle Level Commissioner be appointed as Clerk to the Board.

That the finance committee be re-appointed as:

D Brown, D England, D Fabb, J German, I Johnson, S Johnson, C Leadbetter, T Noble & H Whittome.

That I Johnson was appointed as Pump attendant.

Vacancies

RESOLVED

That no vacancies be filled at this time.

Reconstitution

Mr Hill reported that although Defra had recently reported that due to current workloads, they would not have the capacity to focus on amalgamations and reconstitutions at this time and these would be put on hold, the Environment Agency were in the process of advertising the draft scheme with a view to forwarding it to Defra for completion. In view of this, the Environment Agency had requested the details of the 15 members who would be appointed as the first elected members on the passing of the re-constitution.

The Chairman considered that the first Board should be made up of those members who regularly attend meetings and carried out work on behalf of the Board. Mr S Whittome confirmed that he did not intend to stand at the next election of the Board and, if confirmation to Defra was needed before this, he would stand down as a member of the Board at this point.

After discussions, the members approved to recommend the following 15 members to be appointed to the Board following the passing of the re-constitution.

Daniel Brown
David Cornwell
Stephen Edgley
David England
Mark England
Daniel Fabb
James German
Marc Heading
Ian Johnson
Sam Johnson
Charles Leadbetter
Lucy Munns
Thomas Noble
Jonathan Short
Hugh Whittome.

B.1925 Clerks Report

The Board considered and approved the report and its content, Viz:

Provided by the Middle Level Commissioners		Item No:	5
Meeting:	WARBOYS, SOMERSHAM & PIDLEY INTERNAL DRAINAGE BOARD	Subject:	CLERK'S REPORT
Date:	Thursday 28th November 2024	Officer Responsible:	Paul Burrows

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Board is asked to:

- A. Note the content of the report and feedback on items as appropriate.

1. MLC Services to IDBs

We have made the business decision to focus our clerking and technical services offer to IDBs within the Middle Level where there is water management connectivity with the Middle Level Commissioners' catchment.

The continued service offer to IDBs is contingent on their open-mindedness, support and leadership within the reform/amalgamation agenda, as this is needed to create a more sustainable medium- long term business model between the MLC and IDBs. It also contingent on IDBs taking active decisions to manage their risks appropriately to sustain and/or improve their health.

Therefore, the following eight IDBs have been provided with notice that our service offer will be discontinued:

- Bluntisham IDB
- Over & Willingham IDB
- Haddenham Level Drainage Commissioners
- Swavesey IDB
- Hundred Foot Washes IDB
- Hundred of Wisbech IDB
- Waldersey IDB
- Feldale IDB (administered by the Whittlesey Consortium of IDBs)

This covers all the services offered by MLC, i.e. clerking (admin, governance and finance), environment, M&E, planning & consenting, operations, survey, GIS and capital works.

The 'consultancy agreement' for clerkship services between the MLC and each IDB requires no less than 6-months' notice by either party expiring on 31st March in any year. Therefore, notice must be given by the end of September in any year. To provide each IDB with sufficient time to source alternative suppliers and to enable us to work with those suppliers and the IDB on a transition plan, the termination of services will come into force on 1st April 2026 at the latest. We will however conclude the year-end accounts and annual returns for 2025/26 which happens after 1st April 2026.

It is likely that there will be certain activities or pieces of work that may need to be continued beyond this date until a suitable milestone is reached. This will be agreed as part of a transition plan and a bespoke fee arrangement will be agreed for each of these.

Our service offer to Sutton & Mepal IDB and Manea & Welney DDC will continue given:

- The Old Bedford River interrelationship and potential future amalgamation with Upwell IDB.
- The Fens Reservoir proposal and Cranbrook/Counterdrain strategy may change the water management connectivity between these districts and the Middle Level Commissioners' system.

We are in discussion with Ramsey IDB with a view to taking on their clerkship.

We are refocussing because:

- There has been significant incremental change over the last 10-20 years in terms of IDB governance standards, financial requirements, health & safety, and environmental legislation.
- The scale of M&E and capital works is increasing as a generation of assets deteriorate and come to the end of their reliable life.
- Development pressures and the squeeze on Byelaws have intensified over the last 15 years.
- There is now much more of a need than in the past to work in partnership with a wider range of bodies across an increasingly diversifying suite of agendas.
- The active member inputs around many IDBs have reduced given the changes in farming and age demographic and some Boards are now struggling for attendance.
- The scale of strategic issues facing the Middle Level catchment has and will continue to increase exponentially and will require more focussed working with a broader range of partners locally, regionally and nationally than ever before (e.g. scale and impact of development, pressure on water resources, Fens Reservoir, scale of MLC capital works, impact of climate change on our system, lowland peat, environmental enhancement).
- We are not exploiting the opportunity to maximise sources of income beyond the drainage rate and special levy funding base.

All of the above means that MLC staffing resource is currently spread far too thinly and has been for some time. We consider that the organisation broadly has the staff capacity to provide a good level of service for the Middle Level Commissioners' responsibilities alone. Many staff are working well beyond their contracted hours to provide as good a service as possible for the MLC and the IDBs we currently have a service provision relationship with.

This all means that our service provision to IDBs is now having a direct impact on the delivery of the Middle Level Commissioners' responsibilities, therefore increasing their risks, liabilities and costs. The quality of service provided to all IDBs is also not where we feel it needs to be, which affects all IDBs.

The shorter-term measures to mitigate this are:

- Focussing our service provision
- Creating a new MLC Service Catalogue, including a review of fee arrangements, targeted improvements in efficiency, effectiveness and productivity.
- Introducing Key Health Indicators to better enable IDBs to manage their risks and enable comparison across the Middle Level.
- Targeted increase of staff capacity and use of 'bought in service'.
- Developing a 'case for change' in terms of IDB reform/amalgamation across the Middle Level (this needs resourcing).
- Ongoing amalgamation of March East & Euximoor IDBs and reconstitutions of Conington & Holme IDB and Warboys, Somersham & Pidley IDB.

The medium-term measures to mitigate this are:

- IDB reform/amalgamation across the Middle Level, including a review of the business model between the MLC and IDBs.
- Increasing and diversifying income, including a review of our charges associated with planning and consenting.

In terms of developing a new catalogue and associated fee structure, this is underway but not yet as developed as hoped given workload challenges. New staff are also bringing a new perspective to this. There are a few significant gaps in service provision emerging that need to be explored with the IDBs and would require resourcing (finance and people) and training. These include:

- Consent compliance

- Enforcement (inc complex cases and legacy issues)
- Major development and sites of concern (inc, multi-agency working)
- Authorisations and powers of entry
- Proactively formalising land registry, easements and agreements
- Communications and engagement

To ensure no conflict of interests within our service provision to IDBs, we will not undertake private work for ratepayers, landowners, developers, or any prospective consent applicant. It is particularly important that ratepayers' and Board Members understand and respect this position within any works they plan or are involved in that may need consent from the IDB or MLC. This will support Board Members in managing their own conflict of interest and within their code of conduct. There may be exceptions to this that will need to be reviewed and agreed between the MLC Chief Executive/Clerk and IDB Chairman.

2. The IDB governance future within the Middle Level of the Fens

As previously reported to the MLC Board and IDBs, on 15th February 2024 the Chairs, Vice Chairs and Board Members who sit on more than one IDB within the Middle Level (and those outside the catchment that we administer) had been invited to an informal session in Ramsey to share thoughts about the future IDB governance landscape within the Middle Level and whether action was needed to ensure this was resilient for the future.

The consensus from those who attended was that we needed to act and a small working group was identified to draft an initial case for change. The working group met on 5th September 2024 and were joined by Innes Thomson, ADA Chief Executive. The group used the 'Geoff Beel' vision from 2009 as a starting point to discuss the primary drivers for change and the key concerns that any proposed new model would need to take account of.

A summary of the discussion:

- Change is not new within the Middle Level and there has been ongoing evolution of IDBs.
- We need to locally design and drive future change, proactively taking control of our own collective future. IDBs are the decision makers.
- We need to agree what we need to look like in 5-15 years to be sustainable and efficient for the subsequent 25 years.
- Do Nothing and Do Minimum (continued incremental change) are not considered as options as amongst other risks they increase the likelihood of reform being directed upon us.
- The scope is to develop options and then identify a preferred option for the future IDB model of IDBs within the Middle Level catchment ie where we have two tiers of land drainage.
- Similar discussions are happening elsewhere and currently the new government is in supportive and listening mode. We need to develop our approach very much with the Minister (plus Defra and Environment Agency) not for the Minister.
- We risk becoming more of an anomaly if other IDB landscapes drive reform and we do not.
- Amalgamating IDBs into the Middle Level Commissioners or becoming one very large two tier IDB has been ruled out and will not be recommended to the MLC Board (see below for rationale).
- We think options for one, two, three, four and maybe five IDBs need to be developed to an outline design stage. The management and operational delivery model may change for each of these.
- Any preferred option would need to ensure and ideally enhance value for money and make sense from a business point of view.
- Private Districts are an added complexity that ought to be considered within a detailed design phase, once a core IDB preferred option has been determined.
- There is a recognition that additional resources are needed to develop and deliver a case for change. IDBs will need to make a provision/contribution for this and in doing so increase the likelihood of

securing funding from others. Seed funding to get us moving is needed ahead of asking 24 IDBs for funds.

- There is a recognition that implementation of a preferred option would need to be resourced, managed and led as a change programme.

The Middle Level Commissioners, whilst having the responsibilities and functions of an Internal Drainage Board under the Land Drainage Act 1991 and Floods & Water Management Act 2010, have functions and responsibilities beyond a 'normal' IDB that are specified and catered for within a suite of primary legislation, predominantly the Middle Level Acts.

Amalgamating 24 IDBs into the Middle Level Commissioners would likely need new primary legislation and similarly becoming one large two tier Middle Level IDB (solely acting under the Land Drainage Act) would mean repealing a suite of primary legislation. Both approaches would be significantly more complex, costly time-consuming and controversial than recent experience with the Middle Level Act (2018) that introduced navigation licensing.

Repealing the Middle Level Acts and becoming a Middle Level IDB would mean new legislation and a new body would be needed to take over the MLC's navigation authority role (or the Environment Agency subsume these) and potentially our water transfer role. This would add unwelcomed additional complexity to water level management within the Middle Level given how the system and infrastructure serves and balances a variety of interests and is likely to be largely unsupported by many of beneficiaries of our system.

The next steps identified:

- Paul Burrows and Innes Thomson to pitch for seed funding from the Environment Agency's Fens2100+ programme. Paul Burrows to ask the MLC Board to consider a financial contribution at their meeting on 7th November 2024.
- MLC to then act as lead client bringing in local knowledgeable extra hands to develop the scoping and outline design. A scope for this will need to be developed.
- The ambition would be to present outline design options via IDB 2025 meetings. This ambition is subject to funding, resources and not having an exceptionally wet winter to contend with again.
- Working Group to meet again in January 2025 (dependent upon the above).

3. Electricity

3.1 Electricity Service

In terms of standing charge policy, our appearance on BBC Countryfile has contributed to ofgem consulting on a revised approach. They have no definite timescales as yet unfortunately but have reiterated that IDBs remain an important case study for them and one they will continue to raise with decision-makers within government.

A group made up of nominated IDB Chairs along with the MLC Chairman and Vice Chair reviewed the electricity contract. Having reviewed options, it was agreed by all to enter into a 12 month fully fixed, 100% renewable power electricity contract with EDF Energy, together with a service level agreement with Green Energy Advice Bureau (GEAB), who will manage the contract and validate invoices.

New Unit Rates are within the range of 21-29p. Following the last TCR in 2023/2024 the annual standing charges amounted to £155,662.32, these now stand at £130,467.61 before adding St. Germans, which at present equates to £49,122.50, being a total of £179,590.11, an annual increase of £23,927.79 across the portfolio. The St. Germans quote does not include the Targeted Charging Review (TCR) charges, which is not down to GEAB nor EDF, but a supplier wide decision due to the EH1V type of meter, which means suppliers will charge the TCR as they are charged from the Distribution Network Operator (DNO).

We have been advised that the standing charges will continue to increase due to the TCR charges as these are going up year on year. The DUoS (Distribution) and TNUoS (Transmission) charges are set each year, and this is the distribution and transportations costs and will be affected by such things as oil prices and demand for dealing with Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) shipments.

4. Charging for Planning & Consenting

As previously reported, we have for a long time been reactive and had insufficient resources to cater for the amount and range of planning and consenting workload for the Commissioners and IDBs with an inability to step back and identify and implement improvements. Our reputation has suffered, and we receive regular complaints.

With new leadership capacity and capability within Technical Services, we are now in a healthier position to identify and drive improvements. A key foundation of improvement is a review and implementation of our charging approach for developers and consent applicants. We have identified that we are significantly out of sync with neighbours and have likely been missing out on substantial income over many years. This is income that could in part be reinvested into developing our capacity and capability to improve our service, as well as contributing to asset improvement budgets.

The Board is asked to support the need to review our charging model to maximise income. The intent is to present a proposal to the MLC Board for approval in April 2025 with subsequent approval being sought by the IDBs thereafter.

5. Highland Water & IDB Precept.

On 18th October 2024 we were informed that the Environment Agency has insufficient sufficient budget to cover all the IDB Highland Water Claims. Their intent is to make payment capped to their budget and then bring IDBs from within the Anglian (Great Ouse) Regional Flood & Coastal Committee (RFCC) area together in November 2024 to review options. The Anglian (Northern) Regional Flood & Coastal Committee has provided Lincolnshire IDBs with reassurance that the shortfall will be met, even if from the RFCC's local levy funding. At their meeting on 17th October 2024, the Anglian (Great Ouse) RFCC also voted on a 2% increase in IDB Precept for the year 2025/26.

If relevant to the specific IDB, the Board is asked to delegate the decision to the Clerk in conjunction with the Chairman on whether to appeal under (s57 (4) of the Land Drainage Act) any reduced or non-payment of its Highland Water Claims. The Board is asked to support the packaging any such appeal with similar appeals from MLC administered IDBs and potentially IDBs from the wider Gt Ouse catchment. Any appeal must be lodged within 6-weeks of formal notification.

The Board is asked to delegate the decision on whether to appeal the IDB Precept (under s40 of the Water Resources Act) to the Clerk in conjunction with the Chairman. Any appeal must be lodged within 6-weeks of formal notification.

6. Rating

As previously reported the Water Management Alliance's (WMA) support for their rating software (DRS2005) which we use to manage and issue circa 4000 drainage rates on behalf of the Commissioners and administered IDBs will be discontinued on 31 March 2025. ADA subsequently decided not to lead on the redevelopment of DRS.

The WMA have re-written DRS for their members IDBs in Access 365, which will be made available for other IDBs to use under licence. This software is known as DRS365 and runs on their Terminal Server, which will be securely operated, maintained and supported remotely.

Upgrading to DRS 365 (the software licence, training and transitioning work) will cost circa £10k per site (ie covering MLC and our administered IDBs) and the annual support charge will be circa £5k per site. This covers their costs and provides a more robust, sustainable and better supported system than we currently have, reducing risk to MLC and our administered IDBs. These costs will be reviewed next on 1 April 2025 and annually thereafter. The existing DRS2005 maintenance fee is £1k per annum.

The only other options we have would be to create our own software (which is impractical) or revert to a paper-based system (which would be a retrograde and resource intensive step). In these circumstances the WMA would offer a year extension to the DRS2005, hosted on their server, but at our risk should Microsoft decide to turn off the Access 2003 platform upon which the existing DRS is dependent.

7. Debt Management

Having had limited success with previous bailiffs, we are trialling a new approach to debt management. We have issued a suite of legacy drainage rate and developer charges debt held by the Commissioners and some IDBs to Glenwood debt management company. They operate on a no win no fee basis, and if they prove successful there is opportunity to issue them cases much earlier on in the process, at non-payment stage. This could be significantly more efficient in terms of staff time and hopefully more effective.

Author Name: Paul Burrows

Role: Clerk

Highland Water

Mr Hill reported on the current position concerning Highland Water and that currently we were waiting for the Environment Agency to confirm the likely shortfall in payment for the year and that it was currently anticipated that any formal decision not to meet claims in full would be made at the RFCC meeting in January 2025. Mr S Whittome raised concerns over this and for potential precedents it may set for future years payments.

The meeting supported these concerns and requested that the Clerk write to the Chief Executive of the Middle Level Commissioners explaining their concerns and that full representation should be made to the Environment Agency over the seriousness of this situation and that the Board fully support any appeal that may become necessary.

RESOLVED

That the Board support the appeals regarding Highland Water & Precept.

Charges for Planning & Consenting

RESOLVED

The Board considered and approved the proposals for the charging for planning and consenting.

B.1926 Environment Report

Mr Hill reported that no update had been received from the Environmental Department and that matters would be updated at the next scheduled meeting of the Board.

The District Officer reported that he had last met the Environment Officer approx. 3 weeks ago and everything was alright at that point.

B.1927 Engineers Reports

The Board considered and approved the reports, Viz:

Provided by the Middle Level Commissioners		Item No:	7
Meeting:	WARBOYS SOMERSHAM & PIDLEY IDB (Hereafter referred to as the Board)	Subject:	CONSULTING ENGINEERS REPORT: CHIEF ENGINEER'S SUMMARY & CAPITAL PROGRAMME
Date:	Thursday 28 th November 2024	Officer Responsible:	Nicola Oldfield
RECOMMENDATIONS The Board is asked to: A. Acknowledge the proposed approach to introduce interim charges for responding to applicant's questions. B. Confirm whether the Board wishes to create, adopt and issue standing advice notes for its district and instruct the Consulting Engineer accordingly. C. Decide how to proceed in light of GiA funding uncertainty.			

1. Technical Services

1.1 Since Chris Bailey started as our new Head of Technical Services, we have been updating the catalogue of services which the MLC could provide. Given the increasing frequency of complex cases where Boards consider there may be a need for regulation and enforcement dependent on the costs and benefits, we are reviewing and updating training, policies, and capacity to undertake enforcement and compliance regulation on behalf of the Boards we represent.

1.2 We are receiving an increased number of questions from developers ahead of planning applications/ consent applications, with an expectation that we can provide the information freely. Until we have completed the review of our charging model, we will be introducing interim charges for answering these questions if applicants do not enter into a pre-app agreement. There is already a provision for this within our existing charging structure.

The Board is asked to acknowledge this approach.

1.3 A list of the planning, consent and infiltration device applications responded to since the last report is provided as Appendix 2.

1.4 Summary of key planning issues

We will, when possible, seek the Board's input, rather than wait for Board meetings. This will be done via correspondence with the Chair, Vice Chair, District Officer and any appropriate sub-committees.

1.4.1 ***Proposed reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework and other changes to the planning system - Open consultation***

Following the change of government in July an open consultation was held between 30th July and 24th September on proposed reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and other changes to the planning system.

As the NPPF sets out government's planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied, it is therefore a significant driver and influence on development related planning policy, and it was essential that a suitable response be made.

During August the Boards' Chairs were given the opportunity to comment on the issues raised within the consultation and any other related items of unease that the Boards had.

A response, which was primarily providing answers to specific questions, was submitted before the deadline.

One of the big issues related to development of the "green belt" and the introduction of the "grey belt" but the consultation also included decision making, climate change, flood risk, and environmental related issues. Responses to specific questions contained within the consultation included:

1. The advantages and disadvantages of restoring the 5-Year Housing Land Supply (5YHLS).
2. Further supporting effective co-operation on cross boundary and strategic planning matters.
3. The LPAs need to understand, consider and acknowledge the impact of new development on their special levy and future funding requests under Defra's Partnership Funding Policy. Under this policy housing built or converted after January 2012 is not included in FCERM government Grant in Aid (GiA) calculations.
4. The need to consider the adoption of appropriate measures that consider the whole water cycle process such as rainwater harvesting and the re-use of as much water as possible.
5. The need for bodies involved in the planning process but which are not LPAs to be provided with suitable compensation, benefit and other incentives for contributing to and enabling the aspirational growth and local economy.

The opportunity was also taken to raise some issues of concern outside of the reform consultation, including the issues about SuDS and nationally accepted design procedures which have been raised as a concern by many Boards, in the hope that these points are heard and acted upon.

Some comments which it was considered appropriate to raise but were not covered by the consultation questions included:

- A. The Fenland Situation – special requirements due to the low-lying topography, the managed flood risk and land drainage systems, the provision of enabling infrastructure to allow life to continue and also accommodate current growth aspirations.
- B. The flawed methodology used by LPAs and poor decisions made by the LPAs when considering and allocating sites often caused by the need to meet government targets.
- C. The impacts of growth and climate change and the need to revise nationally accepted design standards.

It is understood that several thousand responses to the consultation were submitted and, therefore, the implementation of the reforms may be delayed accordingly.

1.4.2 ***New developments and the use of SuDS***

Analysis of the responses from the last round of meetings revealed that the Boards and their members had overwhelming concerns about the uses of SuDS devices from the design, construction, ownership, management and maintenance phases.

Despite the new government growth agenda, as partly discussed above, it appears unlikely that the previously announced implementation of Schedule 3 of the Flood and Water Management Act and the introduction of the SuDS Approval Board (SAB) will occur in the near future.

1.4.3 ***The Board's System Flood & Drainage Infrastructure Capacity***

At the last Board Meeting it was suggested that the Board “may choose to create, adopt and issue similar standing advice notes for their districts”, see previous report for further details.

The Board is asked to confirm whether it wishes to create, adopt and issue standing advice notes for its district and instruct the Consulting Engineer accordingly.

NB – The following entries provide an update since the November 2023 Meeting Report.

1.4.4 **Gravity Drained areas**

Chatteris

Downstream of Washways Pumping Station

Development at Womb Farm to the south west of Doddington Road (Fillenham Way and Vermuyden Close), Chatteris - Colliers CRE (MLC Ref No 524), Triman Developments (UK) Ltd (MLC Ref No 528), Client of Haskoning DHV UK Ltd (MLC Ref No 1036), Barmach Ltd (MLC Ref No 1040), Triman Developments (UK) Ltd & Robertson Strategic Asset Management Ltd (MLC Ref No 1066) & Persimmon Homes East Midlands (MLC Ref Nos 1177, 1246, 1249 & 1301)

Further to the November 2023 report, Persimmon Homes provided environmental survey and enhancement reports, copies of which were forwarded to the Ecology & Environmental Services Manager for comment/acceptance.

In the absence of the Planning Engineer due to sick leave, the Board's Chair assisted in progressing the consent document associated with the berm formation which was issued subject to conditions in late May. One of these is a pre-commencement condition which requires the provision of certain items including a Works Programme/Project Schedule; Risk Assessment & Method statement for the Works; Maintenance responsibilities and associated plan/schedules; and Public Safety Risk Assessments.

Other conditions include the following:

- All spoils from the drain can and will be placed on the 9m access strip. If any person other than the Authority wishes to remove it, they will do so at their own expense.
- Any subsidence to any adjoining property will be the responsibility of the Applicant.

An application for the Variation of Condition 11 (list of approved plans) (FDC Ref No F/YR24/0196/VOC, MLC Ref No 1301) with specific reference to “widen internal drainage board easement strip at Fillenhams Drain from 6.0m to 9.0m, and further amendments” was submitted to the District Council in February and is currently pending a decision. The last documents on the relevant Public Access web page date from June. Upon his return to work the Planning Engineer has tried to contact the Case Officer to discuss this and other issues relevant to the site but despite some initial optimism the meeting has not yet occurred.

Concern has been expressed by members about the timing and delay of the berm formation which it is feared may coincide with the completion/habitation of the adjacent properties. It is considered that no works will commence until the Variation of Condition (VOC) application is granted and the weather conditions improve. Whilst this concern is understood it is really a matter for Persimmon Homes and not the Board to resolve.

The Planning Engineer is currently:

- A. Pursuing a meeting with the Case Officer and/or Persimmon Homes in order to establish and resolve any problems and ask when the VOC will be issued.
- B. In discussion with the:
 - 1. Ecology & Environmental Services Manager concerning an enhanced and focussed maintenance programme, as the housing is constructed and residents move in to set expectations as to the role of the channel, the berm and the Board. The involvement of Persimmon Homes and the Board's Chair, Vice Chair and District Officer may also be required.
 - 2. Commissioners' Community Liaison Consultants about the supply of information/engagement leaflets to Persimmon Homes for the new residents, informing them of the Board's role and responsibilities for waterways.

Upstream of Washways Pumping Station

Mixed Use Development on land at Tithe Barn Farm and south east of London Road, Chatteris - Hallam Land Management Ltd (MLC Ref Nos 160, 184, 606, 630 & 1252)

An enquiry has been received from BDW Northampton (a trading name of Barratt Developments PLC) concerning this large development which is primarily within the neighbouring Sutton & Mepal IDB but abuts London Road, Chatteris.

Residential development on land to the south of 8 - 59 Fairbairn Way, Chatteris - A Bartlett & Sons (MLC Ref Nos 281 & 284); Persimmon Homes (East Midlands) Ltd (MLC Ref Nos 508 & 514); Client of Rossin Associates (MLC Ref No 553); Mr T Bartlett (MLC Ref No 890); Alan Barlett & Sons Ltd (Chatteris) (MLC Ref No 1020) & Accent Homemade Ltd (MLC Ref No 1248)

The applicant initially proposed an attenuated discharge from this development, slightly above the greenfield rate. As per the comments above regarding Washways pumping station, the applicant was advised that the Board would prefer a larger discharge, as soon as possible after a rainfall event. This proposal was forwarded to the LLFA by the applicant, but unfortunately the LLFA would not accept this proposal, as they were of the opinion that it will be impossible to fully establish whether the downstream network has sufficient capacity to allow for a higher discharge rate from site without increased flood risk. The Board therefore agreed to accept the attenuated discharge on this occasion. The consent documents are currently being processed.

Little Acre Fen Gravity Outfall

The Board's members advised that during a rainfall event water levels do not generally rise at Washways Pumping Station in the first five hours and that water from the highland area takes about twelve hours to reach the pump. After this time flows are extreme for about five days before water levels return to normal.

The Board noted that an attenuated discharge had been proposed by the developer but suggested that in view of the site's close proximity to Washways it would be preferable for any flows to discharge into the downstream section of Fenton Lode within the first five hours of a storm commencing.

Puddock

Puddock Road Safety Scheme - Cambridgeshire County Council (MLC Ref No 1286)

Members will be aware of the hazards associated with the 2.5km single-track stretch of Puddock Road heading south from the Forty Foot Bank which had 4 fatal incidents between 2016 and 2020 where a vehicle left the road and entered the adjacent watercourse.

Initial contact was received from the County Council, in its role as the Highway Authority, in October 2023 concerning the undertaking of Ground Investigation Works alongside the road to support any future structural design. It is understood that a trial section of the deep rutting may be treated with a gabion mattress solution.

A response to the County Council highlighted the Board's concerns and potential issues including any adverse impacts on the Board's system due to the stability of the channel profile and potential environmental damage during the works.

Discussion recommenced in early April and a copy of the relevant documents, including a report and supporting Safety Scheme Options Matrix, was presented to the County Council's Highways and Transport Committee for the meeting held on the 5th March 2024, this was copied to the Board's Chair. Options included the installation of a Vehicle Restraint System (VRS), the reduction in speed limit to 30mph, using enforcement cameras to restrict access to only those users with rights of access.

These documents were discussed at a Sub-Committee Meeting which generally considered that the use of speed cameras would be the most appropriate improvement for the Board but queried how a coded access, if utilised, would operate. Who would it be distributed to? etc. The response to the specific question concerning reed cutting was that this was not possible due to the adverse impacts on ecology and biodiversity. It was noted that Swans often nest in the verge. It was agreed that the solution employed should protect the Board's interests and not restrict access to the District Officer, Board Members, other Board's employees and/or contractors.

An application for works within the Board's 9m wide maintenance access strip including twelve number trial holes in the verge and nineteen carriageway cores was submitted in May. In the absence of the Planning Engineer, who was on sick leave, the issuing of the consent was dealt with by a colleague.

Pidley

Developments at Fen Road, Pidley

A request from the Board's Chair to investigate surface water disposal in the area is currently being undertaken.

Somersham

Change of use of land from agriculture to caravan/mobile home travellers' site on land at Legacy Park (to the north of The Paddock), Chatteris Road, Somersham - Mr & Mrs F Adams (MLC Ref Nos 521, 532, 544, 562, 563 & 573) & Fenland Leisure Ltd (MLC Ref No 1287)

A planning application for the Use of Land for Gypsy and Traveller Residential Use creating 7 pitches comprising the siting of 1 mobile home, 1 touring caravan, a Day Room and associated parking and a new Children's Play Area at Legacy Park was submitted to and subsequently granted by Huntingdonshire District Council (HDC).

The Decision Notice includes conditions related to both surface and foul water disposal.

No correspondence has yet been received from either the applicant or its agents.

Application for outline planning permission for up to 145 dwellings and associated access, all other matters reserved on land north of the bank at land north of 16 The Bank, Somersham – Client of Waldeck Consulting (MLC Ref No 1045) and Larkfleet Homes (MLC Ref Nos 1058, 1084, 1259, 1292 & 1302)

Applications for the Discharge of Conditions including Condition 14 (surface water run off during construction) (HDC Ref No 24/80138/COND, MLC Ref No 1292) and Condition 23 (Surface Water Drainage Management and Maintenance) (HDC Ref No 24/80279/COND, MLC Ref No 1302) have been submitted to and subsequently discharged by HDC.

In the Decision Notice for the Discharge of Condition 14 dated 15th August the Case Officer states that:

“Officer assessment: The Local Lead Flood Authority (CCC) have recommended the discharge of the condition. The documents demonstrate that surface water can be managed suitably during construction to mitigate the risk of pollution or increased discharge into the receiving watercourses. It is considered the information submitted is sufficient to demonstrate surface water will be managed appropriately during the construction phase of the development, in accordance with Policy LP15 of the Local Plan. Condition 14 is discharged.”

However, no assessment appears to have been made to the design of the downstream watercourse network, which was established to accommodate agricultural run off, and may have inadequate freeboard and capacity or if this will increase the risk of flooding.

With the exception of an enquiry in early July concerning the disposal of surface water and the associated consent no further correspondence has been received.

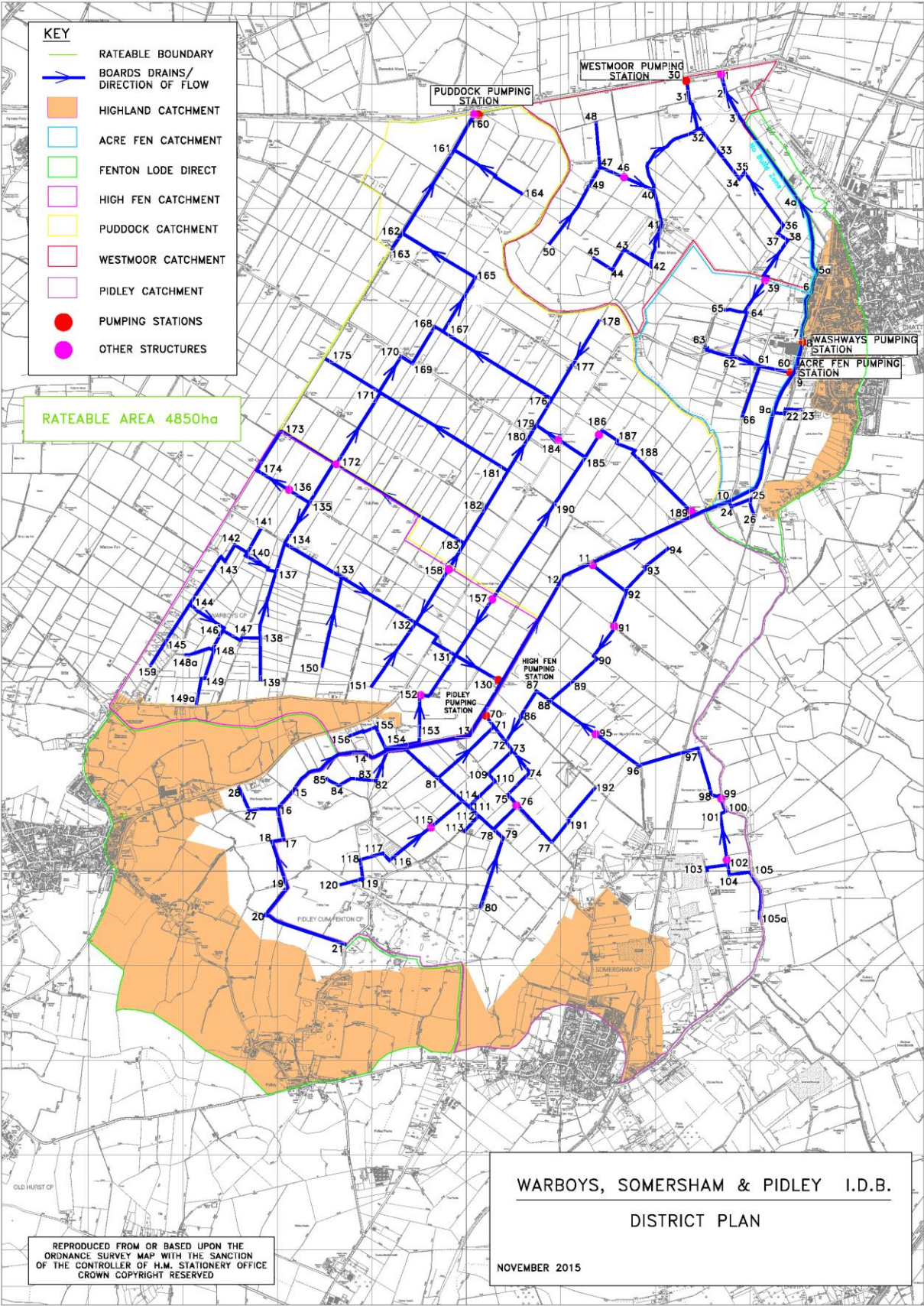
2 Capital Programme

- 2.1 In terms of FCRM Grant-in-Aid (FCRM GiA) the current indication is that there will be no funding allocation within the current spending review period.

The Board is asked to decide how to proceed.

Author Name: Nicola Oldfield
Role: Chief Engineer

Appendix 1: District Plan
Appendix 2: List of planning applications since last report
Appendix 3: M&E Report



Appendix 2

MLC Ref.	Council Ref	Applicant	Type of development	Location
1286	Scheme	Cambridgeshire County Council	Highway Safety Scheme	Puddock Road, Warboys
1287	H/24/00511/FUL	Fenside Leisure Ltd	Leisure (change of use to touring and caravan park)	Puddock Road, Warboys
1288	F/YR24/0237/F	Executors of L Allpress	Residential (5 dwellings)	London Road, Chatteris
1289	F/YR24/0242/F	Mr F Simpson	Residence (Garage)	The Hawthorns, Chatteris
1290	H/24/00426/FUL	Parkhall Nurseries & Garden Centre	Horticultural (Storage building)	Parkhall Road, Somersham
1291	H/24/00641/AGDET	G W England & Son	Agricultural (Storage building)	Heath Road, Warboys
1292	H/24/80138/COND	Allison Homes East	Residential (Up to 145 dwellings)	The Bank, Somersham
1293	H/24/00683/HHFUL	Mr S Clark	Residence (Extension)	Parkhall Road, Somersham
1294	F/YR24/0340/O	Mr J Shy	Residence	London Road, Chatteris
1295	H/24/00693/FUL	Mr & Mrs Robinson	Residence (Retrospective)	Puddock Road, Warboys
1296	H/24/00903/HHFUL	Mrs R Moor	Residence (Extension)	New Road, Tick Fen, Warboys
1297	H/24/00653/FUL	Mr R Johnson	Residence	High Street, Pidley
1298	H/24/80213/COND	Qualitec Construction Ltd	Residential (6 dwellings)	Warboys Road, Pidley
1299	H/24/01167/AGDET	T E A & R L Noble & Son	Agricultural (Grain Store)	Puddock Road, Warboys
1300	H/24/01276/PMBPA	Mr & Mrs Robinson	Change of Use (Agricultural to Residential)	Puddock Road, Warboys
1301	F/YR24/0196/VOC	Persimmon Homes East Midlands	Residential (248 dwellings)	Doddington Road, Chatteris
1302	F/YR24/80279/COND	Allison Homes East	Residential (Up to 145 dwellings)	The Bank, Somersham
1303	H/24/00425/FUL	Mr D Hopkins	Agricultural (Barn)	Fen Road, Pidley
1304	F/YR24/0767/F	Mr & Mrs B Morley	Equine (Manege)	Doddington Road, Chatteris

The following applications for Byelaw Consent (to undertake works in and around watercourses) have been granted since the last meeting:

MLC Ref	Council Ref	Consent No	Applicant	Description of Works	Location	Date consent granted
524, 528, 1036, 1040, 1066, 1177, 1246 & 1249	F/YR21/1224/RM	WSP/BC/84	Persimmon Homes	Earthworks within 9 metres of a Board's drain between Points 4a and 5a,	Doddington Road, Chatteris	21/5/2024
1286	2024/028	WSP/BC/85	Cambridgeshire County Council	12 trial holes in the Highway verge and 19 carriageway cores	Puddock Road between Forty Foot and Warboys	1/7/2024
N/A	N/A	WSP/BC/86	Whittome Farms	10 field underdrain outfalls between Points 171 & 175 3 field underdrain outfalls between Points 171 & 172 5 field underdrain outfalls between Points 172 & 173 and provision of "dyketector" headwalls and marker posts	Tick Fen, Warboys	30/7/2024

The following infiltration device application has been acknowledged since the last meeting:

MLC Ref	Council Ref	Option 1 (Self-certification) or Option 2 (Checking Form)	Location	Date acknowledged
1296	24/00903/HHFUL	Option 1	New Road, Tick Fen, Warboys	24/6/2024

No Byelaw Consent (to discharge to a watercourse) applications have been processed since the last meeting.

Appendix 3

Provided by the Middle Level Commissioners		Item No:	7
Meeting:	WARBOYS SOMERSHAM & PIDLEY IDB (Hereafter referred to as the Board)	Subject:	CONSULTING ENGINEERS REPORT: MECHANICAL & ELECTRICAL
Date:	Thursday 28th November 2024	Officer Responsible:	Dave Bantoft

1. M&E key messages and advice

- 1.1 Other than the matters previously reported or described below, only routine maintenance has been carried out since the last meeting and the pumping plant at each of the stations is mechanically and electrically in a satisfactory condition. The stations and pumps are at an age where reliability is a concern and a plan should be put in place to overhaul or replace items as necessary to ensure ongoing reliability.

In light of the uncertainty of GiA funding the Board is strongly advised to consider the development of an investment plan for asset refurbishment/replacement. The Board is asked to instruct the Consulting Engineer accordingly.

2. Minor Works**2.1 Puddock**

The pumps have run well through this period but as previously reported they are at an age to consider overhaul or replacement. The inlet slacker is leaking which needs to be addressed and the outlet doors are not seating correctly which needs to be investigated.

2.2 Westmoor

Pump 2 was vibrating and noisy during the last pumping season. The pump thrust bearing has been replaced by the MLC M&E team with the pump in situ and the pump is now running well. The pump was last fully overhauled in 2008.

The weedscreen hoist drums are starting to corrode.

2.3 Acre Fen

The Pump Cabinet is heavily corroded, and replacement should be considered. The control panel is from 1984 and the oldest of the WS&P control panels so should be replaced.

2.4 High Fen

Pump 2 insulation resistance has started to drop which may be an indication of water ingress into the motor. Pump 2 has been set to duty and will continue to be monitored. If pump 2 requires replacement the support frame will also need replacing as it is heavily corroded. Pump 2 discharge pipe is weeping which needs to be investigated to determine repair required.

The weedscreen is noisy when traversing which will be investigated to determine cause.

2.5 Washways

Pump 4 newbrook gearbox was removed for overhaul by OEM in June 2024 and refitted in July 2024.

The power factor correction capacitor and contactor on pump 2 need replacing and parts are being sourced.

The battery on the backup generator was found to have failed on a routine inspection and was replaced.

2.6 Pidley

The weedscreen hydraulic pack failed and has been replaced.

3. Inspections

3.1 HSB Engineering's annual inspections for insurance were carried out on 5th September 2024 at Westmoor and 6th September 2024 at High Fen, Pidley and Washways. All weedscreen cleaners passed Inspections with the following advisories:

- High Fen – Noisy in Operation when traversing Left & Right – to be investigated and repaired.
- Washways – Bump Stop Damaged/Missing - Trolley bump stops have been replaced and grab bump stops now also need replacing.

3.2 The mandatory site Electrical Installation Condition Reports (due every 5 years) were completed successfully in December 2023.

Station	EICR Date	EICR Due
Acre Fen	6-Dec-2023	6-Dec-2028
High Fen	6-Dec-2023	6-Dec-2028
Pidley	13-Dec-2023	13-Dec-2028
Puddock	13-Dec-2023	13-Dec-2028
Washways	6-Dec-2023	6-Dec-2028
Westmoor	13-Dec-2023	13-Dec-2028

4. Pumping Station Key Dates

4.1 Please review the pumping station key dates below, if there are any discrepancies or you can add any details, please let me know. The key dates are an important reference and will feed into the upcoming Key Health Indicators and District Studies.

Station	Built	Pump	Pump Overhaul	Control Panel	Weedscreen			
					Weedscreen Bars	WSC	WSC O/H	WSC Controls
Acre Fen	1984	1984	2006	1984	1984	N/A	N/A	N/A
High Fen	1976	2021 (1) 2009 (2)	2021 (1) 2009 (2)	2020	2020	2020	2020	2020
Pidley	1940s	1979	2005 (1) 2007 (2)	2016	2003	2003	2003	2003
Puddock	1992	1992	2004 (1)	1992	1992	N/A	N/A	N/A
Washways	1975	1975	2016	2016	1998	1998	2016	2016
Westmoor	1962	1962	2007 (1) 2008 (2)	2011	2000	2016	2016	2016

Author Name: Dave Bantoft

Role: M&E Engineer

Technical ServicesRESOLVED

The Board acknowledged and approved the interim charges approach.

Standing Advice notesRESOLVED

That the Board acknowledged the comments concerning the issue of standing advice notes and that the planning engineer liaise with the Board on this matter.

Persimmon Homes – Womb Farm

The Board support the supply of information/engagement leaflets which can be provided to the developer for inclusion within their 'welcome pack'.

Cllr C Lowe confirmed that she would be prepared to 'knock on doors' to inform new residents on matters concerning the Board and its works.

The Planning Engineers to engage with all relevant parties to resolve any outstanding matters.

Trees on Bank of District Watercourse

The District Officer reported on trees planted on the brink of a district watercourse in the vicinity of the old 'Whistling Pig' public house and members discussed the implications of this on access and water flows in the surrounding area.

RESOLVED

The Middle Level Commissioners Lead Clerk write to the landowners informing them of the requirements of the Boards byelaws and that the tress should be removed.

Capital Programme

The Board to review this matter at the next scheduled meeting of the Board when hopefully more information will be available.

Pumping Stations

The Chairman reported that the Middle Level Mechanical & Electrical Engineer had hoped to attend today's inspection and meeting but unfortunately, he was unable. He reported on works carried out by the engineers at pumping stations and Mr Hill reported on works that had been successfully included in the Storm Recovery (Tranche 1) grant funding.

In response to Mr I Johnson, Mr Hill detailed the current position regarding the Storm Recovery Grant funding.

B.1928 Health & Safety

The Chairman reported that all matters previously raised had been attended to. He confirmed that the District Officers' wife had his mobile telephone number to contact in the event of the District Officer being late or missing a scheduled contact.

In response to Mr Hill, the District Officer confirmed he had the 'What3Words' app and that all main points within the district had their location marked.

The District Officer reported that he had now completed training for working near or under overhead power lines. He confirmed that the charge for UK Power Networks to attend to measure wires was between £50 - £90 per visit. He considered he could source a suitable unit for around £300, with a set of ranging poles costing in the region of £50 - £60.

In response to the Chairman, the District Officer confirmed that the unit would require calibrating annually.

In response Mr D Fabb, the District Officer confirmed there was a height limiter on the Doosan excavator, but it was manual.

RESOLVED

That the District Officer is authorised to purchase a suitable overhead wire measuring unit together with a set of ranging poles.

B.1929 District Officer's Report

The District Officer reported on works carried out during the year on district watercourses, the main area for this year being Pidley District. He confirmed that he had carried out 300hrs of flail mowing and 190hrs slubbing. He thanked Mr C Leadbetter for the use of his yard and workshop while carrying out these works and to Ollie Owens for agreeing to take the majority of spoil to enable the contractor to carry on with slubbing. He reported that the works had cleaned areas which had previously been 'backed up' and Mr D Cornwell reported that the works had been very successful.

The District Officer reported on several slips around the district which he would initially monitor and on a number of water control structures on which the bottom boards appear to be rotting.

He reported on repairs to the works vehicle and Doosan Excavator, which may require additional works before next seasons works programme.

He informed members of a leaking slacker at Puddock Pumping Station and Mr I Johnson considered the installation of a separate control away from the river may provide better value for money.

RESOLVED

Members approved to get quotations for the proposed works to the slacker at Puddock Pumping Station and if under £4,500, the Chairman, Vice-Chair and Mr I Johnson be authorised to take any actions as they consider appropriate.

That thanks be recorded in the minutes for Mr I Johnson who managed the all the pumps, and oversaw the works whilst the Board were without a District Officer and the help and support he provided to enable the new District Officer to get started.

B.1930 Governance

Viz:

Provided by the Middle Level Commissioners		Item No:	10
Meeting:	WARBYS, SOMERSHAM & PIDLEY INTERNAL DRAINAGE BOARD	Subject:	GOVERNANCE
Date:	Thursday 28th November 2024	Officer Responsible:	Paul Burrows

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Board is asked to:

- A. Consider and approve the Annual Return 2023/2024
- B. Consider and approve the Auditors Report for 2023/2024
- C. Note the continued appointment of Whitings as Internal Auditor.
- D. Consider and approve of authorised officers for operational/regulatory roles
- E. Consider and approve resolutions regarding new Responsible Finance Officer
- F. Consider the pumping station valuation proposal
- G. Review and approve the updated Policy included as appendix.
- H. Consider and approve the Data Protection Officer
- I. Highlight if there are any specific risks or issues not covered within its Risk Management Strategy that may need review ahead of the next formal update.
- J. Note the system of financial Internal Controls that are in place and consider whether additional controls are required within the running and decision making of the Board.
- K. Exercise of Public Rights
- L. Consideration of potential litigation, liabilities, commitments

1. Annual Return & Auditors Report 2023/2024

- 1.1 The AGAR provides the framework by which the governance of the Board is assessed. The Board's last AGAR is available on its page via www.middlelevel.gov.uk
- 1.2 The Board/Commissioners to consider:
 - the comments of the auditors on the Annual Return for the year ended 31st March 2024. (Appendix 1)
 - the Audit Report of the Internal Auditor for the year ended 31st March 2024. (Appendix 2)
- 1.3 The Board are reminded that Whitings LLP were appointed as internal auditor for a five-year period commencing 1st April 2023 (financial years 2023/24 to 2027/28).
- 1.4 The Board is asked to act on the advice of the Auditor within its decision making.

2. Internal Controls

- 2.1 Within the financial operations at the Middle Level offices there are a series of controls in place to ensure the segregation of duties, so as far as practical within a small workforce, that no one person has control of a single operation from start to finish. The [Internal Controls](#) are available via the website within the 'Governance' section on the Board's page.

- 2.2 The Board needs to ensure there is adequate separation of duties within its running and decision making. Members are asked to refresh themselves as to the Member Code of Conduct (available within the Governance Documents on the Board's webpage) and ensure their declarations of interests are clear and up-to-date.
- 2.3 If a Board Member (or their business) undertakes contracted work (or bids for such work) for the Board it is recommended that they be excluded from any decision making as a matter of course and that appropriate contractual arrangements are in place.
- 2.4 If the Member also has a lead role for the Board (eg Chairman/Vice Chairman) then it is important that the Board puts in place safeguards to ensure a separation of duties, particularly being clear on who is acting as lead client for the contractor.

3. Authorisations

We have undertaken a review of how we enact our powers of entry and are introducing new identification badges for all MLC employees alongside training in conflict resolution and creation of a violence and aggression at work policy. Contractors working on our behalf are issued with a letter of authorisation. This is an approach that administered IDBs would also benefit from.

The Board are asked to confirm the stance that all employees and contractors of the Middle Level Commissioners are considered as duly authorised officers and therefore able to use the Board's powers and IDB Byelaws for their operational and regulatory roles on behalf of the Board.

The Board are asked to confirm the stance that their Chairman, Vice Chairman, District Officer(s), pump attendants and employees (if applicable) are considered as duly authorised officers and therefore able to use the Board's powers and IDB Byelaws for their operational and regulatory roles on behalf of the Board.

4. Responsible Finance Officer

Robert Hill the MLC Treasurer leaves at the end of January 2025 and Andrew Wool has been appointed as MLC Head of Finance. There are a number of resolutions recommended to the Board to manage the transition and improve resilience, thus reducing risk to the Board.

The Board are requested to approve, that while there is a Service Level Agreement for the provision of clerking services in place between the Board and the Middle Level Commissioners:

- i) That the role of the position of Head of Finance to the Middle Level Commissioners is to include the appointment as Responsible Financial Officer to the Board.**
- ii) That the person appointed as Head of Finance for the Middle Level Commissioners be added to the Barclays Bank PLC mandate and authorised to sign cheques and authorised to make payments on behalf of the Board.**
- iii) That the person appointed as clerk to the Middle Level Commissioners be added to the Barclays Bank PLC mandate and be authorised to sign cheques and to authorise payments on behalf of the Board.**

- iv) That the person appointed as Head of Finance to the Middle Level Commissioners will be appointed as the administrator on behalf of the Middle Level Commissioners to the Barclays Bank PLC internet banking platform as used by the Middle Level Commissioners.
- v) That following Mr Robert Hill leaving the employment of the Commissioners that the Head of Finance of the Middle Level Commissioners be delegated the authority to appoint a member of the finance team to be an additional administrator on the Barclays Bank PLC internet banking platform as used by the Board.

5. Risk Assessment and Insured Values

- 5.1 Our insurance has been arranged using Towergate insurance brokers for the year to 31st March 2025. AXA offered a 2 year extension of the tri-partite agreement we had previously signed and this was accepted as they offered to keep our business combined policy premium at the same rate for 2025-2026, subject to there being any changes to the existing cover, i.e. increase in valuations.

Having professional valuations of ours and IDB pumping stations for insurance purposes is an action identified by our internal auditors. We have received a proposal from a company called Kroll and they have offered two options:

- Sample site visits to a representative set of 15 pumping stations followed by a desk top assessment covering the remainder - £30k + VAT and expenses.
- Site visits to all pumping stations - £55k + VAT and expenses.

This is clearly a sizable project that we would need to oversee as client and facilitate a seamless programme of visits with relevant IDB officers to keep expenses reasonable. Within their terms and conditions there is also client liability for the quality and completeness of data and information they request in order to fulfil their valuations. We will need to review the proposal with IDB Chairs and establish how costs would be apportioned.

The Board's is asked for their opinion on the pumping station valuation proposal.

- 5.2 The insured values for the Board's assets are detailed below:

WARBOYS SOMERSHAM & PIDLEY IDB **INSURED VALUE OF FIXED ASSETS**

PUMPING STATIONS & BUNGALOW

	As at 1st April 2025
Puddock Pumping Station	1,001,000.00
Pidley Pumping Station	1,170,000.00
High Fen Pumping Station	954,200.00

Acre Fen Pumping Station	598,000.00	
Washways Pumping Station	2,210,000.00	
Westmoor Pumping Station	1,007,500.00	
	6,940,700.00	Index linked
Puddock Bungalow	150,000.00	
	<u>7,090,700.00</u>	

6. Policy Reviews

We have an ongoing review and update of policies. Within this we are also improving our management of Freedom of Information requests. The update to the Privacy Policy has identified some area of Data Protection that require further attention. It is timely to schedule a Data Audit, which will help to identify any further areas that require updating. Additional staff and Board/IDB training will be a likely result, along with some other strengthening of procedures across the business.

The Board are asked to note the update and re-publication of their [Complaints Procedure](#) and [Privacy Policy](#).

The Board are asked to review and approve the publication of an Anti-Bribery policy (Appendix 3) which includes the need to log offers of gifts and hospitality.

The Board are asked to approve that the MLC Lead Clerk, currently Ruth Martin, acts as their Data Protection Officer and acknowledge that this role will be associated within the incumbent employee role of MLC Lead Clerk.

7. IDB1

7.1 Defra Reporting

All IDBs are required to report annually to Defra via an Annual Report called an IDB1 form. These reports are copied to the Environment Agency and to the relevant District Councils. In September 2024 an updated form has been issued to cover the 2023/24 returns and is due for submission by 28 February 2025.

There are new or enhanced questions within the form which indicate increasing expectations on IDBs of government.

In summary:

- Breakdown with financial reporting of electricity and fuel cost
- Reporting on biodiversity enhancement expenditure alongside conservation
- Value of drainage rate debt
- Detail of any Public Sector Cooperation Agreements
- Whether a specific Board Member is focussed on ensuring that health and safety is considered within board decision making.

- Significant new reporting expectations in terms of public engagement, including media engagement, public meetings and public events.

8. Exercise of Public Rights

- 8.1 For completion of the Annual Governance Statement the Board is required to confirm that they provided proper opportunity during the year for the exercise of electors' rights in accordance with the requirements of the Accounts and Audit Regulations.
- 8.2 In order to warrant a positive response to this assertion the authority needs to have taken the following actions in respect of the previous annual return:

Exercise of Public Rights: The authority provided for the exercise of public rights set out in Sections 26 and 27 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014. Part 5 of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 requires the RFO to have published including on the authority's website or other website:

- Sections 1 and 2 of the annual return
 - A declaration that the status of the statement of accounts is 'unaudited;' and
 - A statement that sets out details of how public rights can be exercised, as set out in Regulation 15(2)(b), which includes the period for the exercise of public rights.
- 8.3 In addition, a notice of the conclusion of the external auditor's limited assurance review of the annual return, together with relevant accompanying information, has been published in accordance with the requirements of Regulation 16 of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015. We also display the ['Local Authority Accounts – A Summary of Your Rights'](#) with the notice.
- 8.4 The Clerk to refer 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.

9. Consideration of potential litigation, liabilities, commitments:

- 9.1 The clerk to report.

Author Name: Paul Burrows

Role: Clerk

Appendix 1 Annual Return 2023/2024

Appendix 2 Audit Report 2023/2024

Appendix 3 Anti-Bribery Policy

Appendix 1

Warboys Somersham & Pidley Internal Drainage Board**Notice of conclusion of the audit****Annual Governance & Accountability Return for the year ended 31st March 2024**

Sections 20(2) and 25 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014
Section 16 of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 (SI 2015 /234)

1 The Audit of accounts for the Warboys Somersham & Pidley Internal Drainage Board for the year ended 31st March 2024 has been completed and the accounts have been published.

2 The Annual Governance & Accountability Return including the auditor's certificate and opinion is available for inspection and copying by any local government elector of the area of Warboys Somersham & Pidley Internal Drainage Board

The Clerk
Warboys Somersham & Pidley Internal Drainage Board
85 Whittlesey Road
March
Cambridgeshire
PE15 0AH

between the hours of 9.00am and 4.00pm on Mondays to Fridays
(excluding public holidays), when any local elector may make copies
of the Annual Return.

3 Copies will be provided to any local elector on payment of £2.40 for each copy
of the Annual Return

Announcement made by: P Burrows - Clerk to the Board

Date of Announcement: 30th August 2024

Annual Internal Audit Report 2023/24

WARBOYS SOMERSHAM & PIDLEY IDB

WWW.MIDDLELEVEL.GOV.UK

During the financial year ended 31 March 2024, this authority's internal auditor acting independently and on the basis of an assessment of risk, carried out a selective assessment of compliance with the relevant procedures and controls in operation and obtained appropriate evidence from the authority.

The internal audit for 2023/24 has been carried out in accordance with this authority's needs and planned coverage. On the basis of the findings in the areas examined, the internal audit conclusions are summarised in this table. Set out below are the objectives of internal control and alongside are the internal audit conclusions on whether, in all significant respects, the control objectives were being achieved throughout the financial year to a standard adequate to meet the needs of this authority.

Internal control objective	Yes	No*	Not covered**
A. Appropriate accounting records have been properly kept throughout the financial year.	☒	☐	☐
B. This authority complied with its financial regulations, payments were supported by invoices, all expenditure was approved and VAT was appropriately accounted for.	☒	☐	☐
C. This authority assessed the significant risks to achieving its objectives and reviewed the adequacy of arrangements to manage these.	☒	☐	☐
D. The precept or rates requirement resulted from an adequate budgetary process; progress against the budget was regularly monitored; and reserves were appropriate.	☒	☐	☐
E. Expected income was fully received, based on correct prices, properly recorded and promptly banked; and VAT was appropriately accounted for.	☒	☐	☐
F. Petty cash payments were properly supported by receipts, all petty cash expenditure was approved and VAT appropriately accounted for.	☒	☐	☐
G. Salaries to employees and allowances to members were paid in accordance with this authority's approvals, and PAYE and NI requirements were properly applied.	☒	☐	☐
H. Asset and investments registers were complete and accurate and properly maintained.	☒	☐	☐
I. Periodic bank account reconciliations were properly carried out during the year.	☒	☐	☐
J. Accounting statements prepared during the year were prepared on the correct accounting basis (receipts and payments or income and expenditure), agreed to the cash book, supported by an adequate audit trail from underlying records and where appropriate debtors and creditors were properly recorded.	☒	☐	☐
K. If the authority certified itself as exempt from a limited assurance review in 2022/23, it met the exemption criteria and correctly declared itself exempt. (If the authority had a limited assurance review of its 2022/23 AGAR tick 'not covered')	☐	☐	☒
L. The authority published the required information on a website/webpage up to date at the time of the internal audit in accordance with the relevant legislation.	☒	☐	☐
M. In the year covered by this AGAR, the authority correctly provided for a period for the exercise of public rights as required by the Accounts and Audit Regulations (during the 2023-24 AGAR period, were public rights in relation to the 2022-23 AGAR evidenced by a notice on the website and/or authority approved minutes confirming the dates set).	☒	☐	☐
N. The authority has complied with the publication requirements for 2022/23 AGAR (see AGAR Page 1 Guidance Notes).	☒	☐	☐
O. (For local councils only) Trust funds (including charitable) – The council met its responsibilities as a trustee.	☐	☐	☒

For any other risk areas identified by this authority adequate controls existed (list any other risk areas on separate sheets if needed).

Date(s) internal audit undertaken

Name of person who carried out the internal audit

11/06/2024 13/06/2024 18/06/2024

WITTINGTONS LLP

Signature of person who carried out the internal audit

E. BEVILY - WITTINGTONS LLP

Date

18/06/2024

*If the response is 'no' please state the implications and action being taken to address any weakness in control identified (add separate sheets if needed).

**Note: If the response is 'not covered' please state when the most recent internal audit work was done in this area and when it is next planned; or, if coverage is not required, the annual internal audit report must explain why not (add separate sheets if needed).

Section 1 – Annual Governance Statement 2023/24

We acknowledge as the members of:

WARBOYS SOMERSHAM & PIDLEY IDB

our responsibility for ensuring that there is a sound system of internal control, including arrangements for the preparation of the Accounting Statements. We confirm, to the best of our knowledge and belief, with respect to the Accounting Statements for the year ended 31 March 2024, that:

	Agreed		"Yes" means that the authority:
	Yes	No	
1. We have put in place arrangements for effective financial management during the year, and for the preparation of the accounting statements.	✓		prepared its accounting statements in accordance with the Accounts and Audit Regulations.
2. We maintained an adequate system of internal control including measures designed to prevent and detect fraud and corruption and reviewed its effectiveness.	✓		made proper arrangements and accepted responsibility for safeguarding the public money and resources in its charge.
3. We took all reasonable steps to assure ourselves that there are no matters of actual or potential non-compliance with laws, regulations and Proper Practices that could have a significant financial effect on the ability of this authority to conduct its business or manage its finances.	✓		has only done what it has the legal power to do and has complied with Proper Practices in doing so.
4. We provided proper opportunity during the year for the exercise of electors' rights in accordance with the requirements of the Accounts and Audit Regulations.	✓		during the year gave all persons interested the opportunity to inspect and ask questions about this authority's accounts.
5. We carried out an assessment of the risks facing this authority and took appropriate steps to manage those risks, including the introduction of internal controls and/or external insurance cover where required.	✓		considered and documented the financial and other risks it faces and dealt with them properly.
6. We maintained throughout the year an adequate and effective system of internal audit of the accounting records and control systems.	✓		arranged for a competent person, independent of the financial controls and procedures, to give an objective view on whether internal controls meet the needs of this smaller authority.
7. We took appropriate action on all matters raised in reports from internal and external audit.	✓		responded to matters brought to its attention by internal and external audit.
8. We considered whether any litigation, liabilities or commitments, events or transactions, occurring either during or after the year-end, have a financial impact on this authority and, where appropriate, have included them in the accounting statements.	✓		disclosed everything it should have about its business activity during the year including events taking place after the year end if relevant.
9. (For local councils only) Trust funds including charitable. In our capacity as the sole managing trustee we discharged our accountability responsibilities for the fund(s)/assets, including financial reporting and, if required, independent examination or audit.	Yes	No	N/A
			has met all of its responsibilities where, as a body corporate, it is a sole managing trustee of a local trust or trusts.

*Please provide explanations to the external auditor on a separate sheet for each 'No' response and describe how the authority will address the weaknesses identified. These sheets must be published with the Annual Governance Statement.

This Annual Governance Statement was approved at a meeting of the authority on:

06/06/2024

and recorded as minute reference:

B.1914

Signed by the Chair and Clerk of the meeting where approval was given:

Chair

Clerk



WWW.MIDDLELEVEL.GOV.UK

Section 2 – Accounting Statements 2023/24 for

WARBOYS SOMERSHAM & PIDLEY IDB

	Year ending		Notes and guidance
	31 March 2023 £	31 March 2024 £	
1. Balances brought forward	707,687	684,194	Total balances and reserves at the beginning of the year as recorded in the financial records. Value must agree to Box 7 of previous year.
2. (+) Precept or Rates and Levies	182,784	223,877	Total amount of precept (or for IDBs rates and levies) received or receivable in the year. Exclude any grants received.
3. (+) Total other receipts	40,961	44,671	Total income or receipts as recorded in the cashbook less the precept or rates/levies received (line 2). Include any grants received.
4. (-) Staff costs	65,746	37,145	Total expenditure or payments made to and on behalf of all employees. Include gross salaries and wages, employers NI contributions, employers pension contributions, gratuities and severance payments.
5. (-) Loan interest/capital repayments	0	0	Total expenditure or payments of capital and interest made during the year on the authority's borrowings (if any).
6. (-) All other payments	181,492	306,707	Total expenditure or payments as recorded in the cashbook less staff costs (line 4) and loan interest/capital repayments (line 5).
7. (=) Balances carried forward	684,194	684,194	Total balances and reserves at the end of the year. Must equal (1+2+3) - (4+5+6).
8. Total value of cash and short term investments	861,353	937,142	The sum of all current and deposit bank accounts, cash holdings and short term investments held as at 31 March – To agree with bank reconciliation.
9. Total fixed assets plus long term investments and assets	5,226,826	5,227,309	The value of all the property the authority owns – it is made up of all its fixed assets and long term investments as at 31 March.
10. Total borrowings	0	0	The outstanding capital balance as at 31 March of all loans from third parties (including PWLB).

For Local Councils Only	Yes	No	N/A	
11a. Disclosure note re Trust funds (including charitable)				The Council, as a body corporate, acts as sole trustee and is responsible for managing Trust funds or assets.
11b. Disclosure note re Trust funds (including charitable)				The figures in the accounting statements above exclude any Trust transactions.

I certify that for the year ended 31 March 2024 the Accounting Statements in this Annual Governance and Accountability Return have been prepared on either a receipts and payments or income and expenditure basis following the guidance in Governance and Accountability for Smaller Authorities – a Practitioners' Guide to Proper Practices and present fairly the financial position of this authority.

Signed by Responsible Financial Officer before being presented to the authority for approval

Date

21/05/2024

I confirm that these Accounting Statements were approved by this authority on this date:

06/06/2024

as recorded in minute reference:

B.1915

Signed by Chair of the meeting where the Accounting Statements were approved

Section 3 – External Auditor's Report and Certificate 2023/24

In respect of **Warboys Somersham & Pidley Internal Drainage Board – DB0119**

1 Respective responsibilities of the auditor and the authority

Our responsibility as auditors to complete a **limited assurance review** is set out by the National Audit Office (NAO). A limited assurance review is **not a full statutory audit**, it does not constitute an audit carried out in accordance with International Standards on Auditing (UK & Ireland) and hence it **does not** provide the same level of assurance that such an audit would. The UK Government has determined that a lower level of assurance than that provided by a full statutory audit is appropriate for those local public bodies with the lowest levels of spending.

Under a limited assurance review, the auditor is responsible for reviewing Sections 1 and 2 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return in accordance with NAO Auditor Guidance Note 02 (AGN 02) as issued by the NAO on behalf of the Comptroller and Auditor General. AGN 02 is available from the NAO website – <https://www.nao.org.uk/code-audit-practice/guidance-and-information-for-auditors/>

This authority is responsible for ensuring that its financial management is adequate and effective and that it has a sound system of internal control. The authority prepares an Annual Governance and Accountability Return in accordance with Proper Practices which:

- summarises the accounting records for the year ended 31 March 2024; and
- confirms and provides assurance on those matters that are relevant to our duties and responsibilities as external auditors.

2 External auditor's limited assurance opinion 2023/24

On the basis of our review of Sections 1 and 2 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR), in our opinion the information in Sections 1 and 2 of the AGAR is in accordance with Proper Practices and no other matters have come to our attention giving cause for concern that relevant legislation and regulatory requirements have not been met.

Other matters not affecting our opinion which we draw to the attention of the authority:

1. The AGAR was not accurately completed before submission for review. The AGAR has been amended.

3 External auditor certificate 2023/24

We certify that we have completed our review of Sections 1 and 2 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return, and discharged our responsibilities under the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014, for the year ended 31 March 2024.

External Auditor Name

PKF LITTLEJOHN LLP

External Auditor Signature

Mark Littlejohn

Date

26/08/2024

Annual Governance and Accountability Return 2023/24 Form 3
Local Councils, Internal Drainage Boards and other Smaller Authorities*

Page 6 of 6

Appendix 2



Fenland House, 35B Hexton Road Avenue
March, Cambridgeshire, PE15 0AX

t: 01354 652304

e: merch@whitingsllp.co.uk

w: whitingsllp.co.uk

BB/MM053

30 June 2024

Messrs. P Burrows, R Hill and S Ablett
Middle Level Offices
85 Whittlesey Road
March
Cambs.
PE15 0AH

Dear Messrs. P Burrows, R. Hill, and S Ablett,

MLC administered Internal Drainage Boards - Internal Audit 2023-2024

Having completed the internal audit work for the various Internal Drainage Boards administered by the Middle Level Commissioners officers for the year ended 31 March 2024, we are pleased to provide you with the following recommendations to be considered for implementation. We have included some general points and some points which are related to specific boards.

General points

1. Asset Valuations and Insurances – mainly for residential properties.

It is noted that, whilst a large proportion of boards took the option to revalue for insurance purposes their pumping station and residential assets during recent years, there are still some boards that have not followed suit. We have seen elsewhere that such revaluations have sometimes resulted in significant uplifts in value, and as such we would suggest that any remaining boards that have yet to carry out such an exercise do so at the earliest convenience. It should be noted that this is largely in relation to residential property. Should a complete rebuild following an unforeseen catastrophic event be required, current valuations may no longer be appropriate given today's prices which may lead to a shortfall in funds which would have to be drawn out of surplus funds if other financial arrangements were not available.

We would recommend that in the absence of specific information to the contrary suggesting need for earlier review, that a revaluation exercise be performed for insurance purposes at least every 5 years on all major board assets. This is especially important given the significant increase in material and labour costs seen in recent times as a result of rising inflation and global material shortages. However, we are pleased to note that boards are being asked whether they wish for insurance to be index linked going forward and would strong suggest that all boards agree to this proposal.

PARTNERS

Christopher D Rogers FCA
An U.C. Edgar FCA
Andrew R. Reed FCA

Tim J. Hux FCA
Evelyn J. Day FCA
Anthony G. Newman FCA

Paul H. Johnson FCA
Jonathan P. Harris FCA
Tulinder J. Singh FCA

Stephen D. Parker ACA
Benjamin Webb ACA

ASSOCIATES

Richard A. Alcock AIT
Scott B. Bishop FCA
Harriet R. Waley ACA

Michael Broadbridge CTA
James King ACA
Robert Deane CTA, TCF

PRACTICE MANAGER

Joan S. Peckitt

Whitings LLP is a limited liability partnership registered in England and Wales, number 13141698. The client for the firm and Whitings Capital Ltd are the members of Whitings LLP. This requires effect to be given to the Court of Appeal's decision in *Whitings LLP v. The Members of Whitings LLP* [2014] 1 W.L.R. 1000. The firm is regulated for a range of investment services by the Financial Conduct Authority and the Prudential Regulation Authority. The firm is also a member of the Financial Ombudsman Service. The firm is a member of the Chartered Accountants' Association and the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales.

BURY ST EDMUNDS | ELY | KING'S LYNN | MARCH | HILDENHALL | PETERBOROUGH | RAMEY | ST IVES | ST HELOES | WISBECH

Client comment:

While we have put it to Boards to review pumping station valuations for insurance purposes, as separate statutory authorities it is up to each Board to review and approve what they consider to be an appropriate valuation and your point concerning possible under-insured amounts having to be funded directly by the Board following an event has been highlighted previously. We are recommending that Boards should look to index link valuations and we will continue in asking all Boards again to consider this at subsequent meetings, along with consideration of current valuations. Valuation of residential property is an area we have and will continue to focus on for future meetings.

A number of Boards have recognised the potential impact of increased costs on valuations and have taken steps to re-value, however, the consulting engineer is currently reviewing the methodology for valuation of pumping stations, to ensure there is a robust process, which will be then used going forward.

This is an area already programmed to be reviewed every five years and hopefully with indexing we may not require such individual valuations going forward.

2. Employee Benefits

Following HMRC's announcement that double cab pickups would be treated as cars rather than vans for benefit in kind purchases from 1st July 2024 this was swiftly reigned in following a backlash from affected parties, largely from the construction and agricultural sectors. Given the new Labour governments need to increase the tax receipts into the Treasury this could be a measure that is revisited and we would advise that you be mindful of any changes that arise in the forthcoming Autumn Budget, although nothing has been confirmed at this stage.

With regards to other employee benefits, we note that where applicable these are being recognised as benefits in kind and disclosed on the form P11d, we would encourage the value of these benefits to be reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that these are reflective of what the employee receives, especially where some boards providing the living accommodation to their employees.

Client comment:

We are aware of the case and potential implications to employees of classification of vehicles, and for this and other areas will be following the autumn budget closely. Generally, we do not make changes concerning additional passenger/load capabilities to that of the original manufacturer's specification, which are relied upon alongside the HMRC guidance when designating vehicles for taxation/benefits in kind.

The benefit charge for living accommodation is calculated in accordance with HMRC recommended valuations. We have started payrolling any standard benefits but are currently unable to do this for accommodation and use of vehicles.

It is not policy to update budgets depending on levels of expenditure as there is no ability to increase revenue through rates and special levy once they have been set. The original budget is therefore used as comparative to analyse variances of actual expenditure against.

We have started to use a 5-year average for pumping volumes, calculating these against actual/anticipated electricity unit rates. For the 2024/2025 rate setting process we started to build in a 'climate change factor' into the 5-year average calculation, which will be refined for future years. While aware of the need to hold sufficient balances, this was highlighted during the 2023/2024 storm events and as well as having climate change awareness in the budget setting process Boards also were required to take steps concerning the reinstatement of balances depleted during the year.

It is intended to introduce a range of Key Health Indicators for all boards, part of which will be taking into account the impact of climate change on budgets and relevant level of balances required.

5. Surplus Funds

In previous years we have communicated the importance of investing cash assets that are not required to fund operational needs, to combat the erosion of these liquid assets through inflation. We are pleased to see that the organisation have taken heed of this advice and made a number of deposits with Barclays, in addition to discussing the potential pooling of cash resources with IDB's under their administration to gain access to higher rates of interest. Whilst inflation has now fallen back to 2%, the lowest level in nearly three years, it is important to continue to reinvest and "sweat" these assets going forward.

Client comment:

We are currently making treasury deposits for individual Boards within the mandated authority given by each authority but need to manage this with specific cash flow requirements while also making consideration to having balances available for potential event situations requiring immediate cash. We will be monitoring additional staff time required to manage this while discussing matters further with our bankers.

6. Rental of Land

It was previously noted that some IDB's were renting out land to tenants at lower than market rate and that this should be reviewed to ensure value for money principles were being applied.

We are happy to note that some IDB's have increased the rental values of land to market rates, although there are still some IDB's where the rental value is significantly below market value and we advise that the market values are increased for these boards to ensure value for money principles are applied going forwards.

Client comment:

Boards which have land holding for rent generally review rents in accordance with tenancy agreements and use local land agents for guidance. A number of Boards have small holdings of land which are let at reasonable rates with a view to keep the land tidy and in good order as they are not necessarily commercially viable. A number of Boards have stamp land, which cannot be considered the same as general agricultural land for rental purposes. All Boards look to get the best rents available, but these are relevant to the size and type of land being let.

7. Financial Regulations

Last year we noted that the Financial Regulations were due to be updated by the end of the year, following a delay due to the retirement of the Chief Executive and appointing of the new Chief Executive/Clerk in February 2023. We are pleased to see that during 2024 the boards are reviewing and approving the updated Financial Regulations and Financial Code and look forward to considering this area during the course of the 2024/25 internal audit.

Client comments:

There will be a full review of the provision of clerking services and will be, as has been mentioned reviewing these regulations for presentation to boards for the 2025 meeting season.

8. Bank Transfers

We are satisfied with the accuracy of bank and cash balances and have successfully reconciled these to the underlying accounting records. We note that transfers between bank accounts are being recorded as movement per-month in the accounting records, on enquiry this was due to time constraints experienced within the finance department during the financial year. Whilst we are satisfied that reconciliations have been carried out manually correctly, we would recommend that all bank movements are fully reflected in the postings to the accounting software of the board.

Client comment:

Concerning audit point 5 – surplus funds, to maximise returns within the mandated authority with Barclays we are required to operate linked accounts, with receipts/payments being made from the standard current account. This account has a fixed balance which is adjusted following receipts/payments to it – surplus balances above the fixed limit transferred to the Business Premium account, deficit balances below the fixed amount transferred from the Business Premium account to the current account. These transfers are adjusted through the accounting software in relation to the statement frequency, with both accounts being fully reconciled – a credit in one account being matched with a debit in the other. Current staff resources do not allow for additional time to be spent transferring individual values, the net transfer for the statement being made – as we are doing this for around 28 accounts this currently provides the best value for money to the boards.

9. National Saving & Investment bank accounts

We understand that a formal complaint has been lodged with National Savings & Investments. Firstly in relation to the organisation and its administered entities desire to change the signatories on the investment accounts held with this organisation and secondly due to the fact that bank statements for the period to 31 March 2024 have not been received for the majority of boards. As a result interest receivable has had to be estimated, we have considered the estimations and are happy that these are reasonable by reference to the last received statement and the applicable interest rate. We look forward to reviewing the position in the 2024/25 financial year.

Client comment:

This was an unfortunate situation but to recognise the interest in the correct accounting period estimates were made. Differences between estimates and actuals will be adjusted through the 2024/2025 accounting statements.

10. Website Publication

We note that there has been, for a number of years, significant information available to the public. We note that for some boards the latest information does not appear to have been updated, for example the JPAG practitioner guide on the website across all the boards has not been updated since the 2018/19. An updated version of JPAG guide is made available each year.

The same situation related to the Annual Return Form (DEF-IDB1), which appeared have not been updated since year ended 31 March 2022.

We would recommend that all items are updated on the website for applicable boards as soon as practicable, or remove if regulations do not require such information to be published on the website.

Client comment:

Every effort is made to update the relevant pages of all authorities in an efficient and timely manner and in accordance with the regulations.

Your comment is noted and procedures are being amended concerning this for the future.

11. Outstanding old cheques and unreconciled transactions

We are pleased to note that the majority of old outstanding cheques and unreconciled transactions are being written off across all Board in the timely manner. However, there was the isolated cases where this has not occurred. We would suggest that concerted effort is made to ensure all old and unreconciled transactions are written off as soon as it is clear that such transactions will not be paid in or received.

Client comment:

Bank reconciliations should be looked at and cleared for older unrepresented transactions, however, these will initially be transferred to debtor/creditor until their statutory standard life has expired. For 'house-keeping' these will be looked at as part of the year-end processes.

12. Fees for the service of District Officers and Pump Attendants

We have noted that not all boards are approving payment rates for the services rendered by District Officers and/or Pumping Attendant during the board meetings, instead approval is confirmed as a percentage increase, generally being in line with the Middle Level Commissioners award.

We appreciate that the board is approving the payment lists, where the amount is specified. However, we would suggest to include the amount to the discussion during the meeting and confirm the approved sum in the minutes as per prior years.

Client comment:

District Officer/pump attendants are contracted services and the boards are approving an amount for the provision of these services, however, the point is noted and the actual amount payable discussed at the meeting should be recorded in the minutes.

Specific Points**Nightlayers IDB**

During our review it was noted that land sold during the year was not recorded on the fixed asset register. Our subsequent enquiries found that as the land was considered of minimal value individually this was included within the adjoining pumping station's valuation and was within the footprint of the old pumping station site. The consideration achieved is higher than would generally be expected due to its importance to a local developer.

We would suggest that you consider whether any other parcels of land held by administered boards could be sold in similar circumstances and if so, whether the valuation individually or as part of the overall pumping station valuation is appropriate.

Client comment:

While we are aware of these circumstances the Nightlayers position was rare. We will monitor sites which could have areas with potential for re-sale, substantial value can only be attached after developers make applications and this proves to be the only access. Unless these circumstances arise an uplift in valuation will not be possible.

Waldersey IDB and Hundred of Wisbech IDB – Joint Pumping Arrangement

As in previous years it is noted that there is a discrepancy between debtor held in Waldersey IDB and the creditor held in Hundred of Wisbech IDB.

Waldersey IDB – Debtor	£92,912.67
Hundred of Wisbech IDB - Creditor	£93,919.96
Difference	£1,007.29

We are pleased to note that this difference is insignificant for the current year. The difference arises due to the accounts of Hundred of Wisbech IDB being completed before Waldersey IDB, leading to a provision being required in the former's books in the absence of more accurate information being available. The difference is adjusted in the following year's Accounts for Hundred of Wisbech.

We note that there have been discussions to potentially amalgamate the two boards, this would eradicate the anomaly. However, in the absence of this, we suggest that meetings and account preparation periods be brought into line, if possible, to eradicate this issue.

Client comment:

These costs relate to the contribution for the costs of the shared pumping facility and at the time of production of the year end accounting statements discussions were taking place concerning potential changes to the contribution as a result of changes in land use. A new proposal had been put forward which was broadly approved by both Boards.

There are no current plans to change meeting dates so as one set of accounts is finalised before the other there is likely to remain creditor/debtor position in both sets of accounts although now that all older balances have been cleared, any in-year balance should be cleared, generally a year in arrears.

At the 2024 meetings for both Boards amalgamation was discussed and both Boards have approved to enter into discussions concerning a potential amalgamation between the Boards.

March East IDB

During our review it was noted that the pumping station attendants' payments were not all authorised during the year. This included an additional payment to the Binnimoor pumping station's attendant following him taking over from the previous attendant. We understand following discussion with the board that this was the result of an error in the minutes as the fees' amount was not specified, but the payments were clearly approved by the board. We would suggest that the board considers their internal processes for ensuring the accuracy of minutes.

Client comment:

The services of pump attendant are carried out by contractors and the Board approves the payment for these services. Procedures have been looked at to ensure proper recording in the minutes.

Hundred of Wisbech

We noted that a parcel of land has been transferred to the board during the 2023-24 year with the attenuation pond, sized at approximately 1 acre. This land was estimated by the Chairman and District Officer to have a value totalling £5,000, a value approved by the Board. We have not been provided with any professional valuation or justification with regards to this valuation. We understand that the land cannot be used for development or agriculture, making it difficult to value due to the lack of specific use.

We understand that the consideration of land valuation has conducted after the year end and details should be included in the next published minutes related to June 2024 meeting.

We look forward to reviewing this in due course.

Client comment:

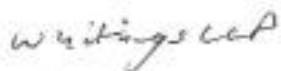
This area is designated as an attenuation pond, holding surface water to discharge at a controlled rate into the District System. The valuation takes into account its use and therefore limited value. In view of this and to maintain value for money for the Board it was agreed by the officers of the Board not to engage professional valuers.

Manea & Welney

During our review, it was noticed that the Debtors Report showed a significant unallocated amount of £1,456,606.99. Following discussion with the client, we understand that this is an isolated incident related to software issue and not down to the human error. We are satisfied that balance showing on the Debtors Report is correct and no difference was identified.

We take this opportunity to thank your staff involved in our audit for their assistance and cooperation in achieving substantial completion by the stated target deadlines. We trust that the engagement team have not caused significant disruption during the execution of their procedures.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Whiting LLP", written in a cursive style.

Whitings LLP



**middle level
commissioners**

And administered IDBs

Governance

Anti Bribery Policy

(includes gifts, hospitality & donations)

2024 - 2029

The [Bribery Act 2010](#) is the legislation relating to bribery. Very generally, this is defined as giving someone a financial or other advantage to encourage that person to perform their functions or activities improperly or to reward that person for having already done so. This could cover seeking to influence a decision-maker by giving some kind of extra benefit to that decision maker rather than what can legitimately be offered as part of a tender process.

Government [guidance](#) summarises that it is illegal to offer, promise, give, request, agree, receive or accept bribes – and highlights that organisations should have an anti-bribery policy if there is a risk that someone who works for you or on your behalf might be exposed to bribery.

An anti-bribery policy should be appropriate to the level of risk the organisation faces and should include:

- your approach to reducing and controlling the risks of bribery
- rules about accepting gifts, hospitality or donations
- guidance on how to conduct your business, eg negotiating contracts
- rules on avoiding or stopping conflicts of interest

Risk Assessment

The Middle Level Commissioners and administered Internal Drainage Boards are considered as at minimal risk of bribery given that business is undertaken almost entirely within the UK.

As there is very little risk of bribery being committed on behalf of the organisation it is considered that there is no need for extensive written documentation or policies.

The most likely area of MLC or IDB business with a bribery risk are outlined below and these already have adequate controls:

- Bribery by others to secure business from the MLC/IDB
- Bribery by others to secure regulatory decisions from MLC/IDBs
- Bribery by others to secure operational benefits from MLC/IDBs

- Bribery by MLC/IDB employees or MLC Board/IDB members or others to influence an advantage

Control Measures

- MLC/IDB Board Member declarations of interest and the application by the clerk of these within meetings and decision making.
- Boards, their delegated Committees and/or MLC employees as service providers making key procurement and regulatory decisions rather than individuals.
- Application and review of Internal Controls
- Within the MLC staff structure there are no procurement/regulatory decisions made without more than one employee being involved
- Application of Member Code of Conduct and employee performance and disciplinary procedures
- Offers of gifts, hospitality and donations to be reported to the Chief Executive/Clerk.

Gifts, Hospitality and/or Donations

Employees and members should treat with extreme caution any offer of a gift, favour or hospitality that is made to them personally. The person or organisation making the offer may be doing or seeking to do business with the MLC/Board or may be applying to the MLC/Board for some decision to be taken in his favour or someone with whom he is connected.

There are no hard and fast rules about the acceptance or refusal of hospitality or tokens of goodwill. For example, working lunches may be an appropriate way of doing business provided they are approved by the Chief Executive/Clerk and provided no extravagance is involved. In the same way it may be reasonable for staff/members to represent the MLC/Board at a social function or sporting event organised by outside persons or bodies. Persons attending such functions or events as part of an official MLC/Board delegation are exempt from the above registration requirement, providing their attendance has been approved by the Chief Executive.

Each member or employee is personally responsible for all decisions connected with the acceptance or offer of gifts or hospitality and for avoiding risk of damage to public confidence. The receipt and detail of gifts and hospitality should always be reported to the Chief Executive/Clerk.

When gifts and/or hospitality have to be declined, those making the offer should be courteously but firmly informed of the procedures and standards operated by the MLC/Board and told why hospitality cannot be accepted. This should be logged within the register in order to track any patterns.

Members and employees should not accept significant personal gifts from contractors and outside suppliers, although the Board will allow members and employees to keep insignificant items of token value such as pens, calendars and diaries of an estimated value below £20. These insignificant items do not require recording in the Gifts and Hospitality Register.

Acceptance by members and employees of hospitality through attendance at relevant conferences and courses is acceptable where it is clear the hospitality is corporate rather than personal and where the member or employee is satisfied that any purchasing decisions will not be compromised. Where visits to inspect equipment, supplies or services are required,

employees and members should ensure that the MLC/Board meets the cost of such visits to avoid jeopardising the integrity of subsequent purchasing decisions.

Procedure

MLC/IDB Board Members and Employees are required to log the offer and acceptance/rejection of a gift, hospitality or donation within the Gifts and Hospitality Register by emailing details of the offer to chiefofficers@middlelevel.gov.uk

Dealing with Bribery

Bribery committed by an employee will be considered a disciplinary issue and likely to be treated as gross misconduct.

Bribery or attempted bribery committed by a third party may lead to the termination of the business relationship.

Bribery committed by an MLC or IDB Member will be considered as a breach of the Member Code of Conduct.

a) Annual Accounts and Annual Return of the Board – 2023/2024

RESOLVED

- i. The Board considered and approved the comments of the Auditors on the Annual Return for the year that ended on the 31st March 2024.
- ii. The Board considered and approved the Audit Report of the Internal Auditor for the year that ended on the 31st March 2024.

b) Review of Internal Controls

The Board considered and expressed satisfaction with the current system of internal controls.

c) Risk Management Assessment

The Board considered and approved the Boards Risk Management policy.

d) Authorisations

The Board considered the review of authorisations.

RESOLVED

- i) The Board considered and authorised that all employees and contractors of the Middle Level Commissioners are considered as duly authorised officers and are therefore able

to use the Boards powers and IDB byelaws for their operational and regulatory roles on behalf of the Board.

- ii) The Board confirmed their stance that their Chairman, Vice-Chair and District Officers, Pump Attendants and employees are considered as duly authorised officers and therefore able to use the Boards powers and IDB byelaws for their operational and regulatory roles on behalf of the Board.

e) Responsible Finance Officer

RESOLVED

The Board considered and approved the recommendations that:

- vi) That the role of the position of Head of Finance to the Middle Level Commissioners is to include the appointment as Responsible Financial Officer to the Board.
- vii) That the person appointed as Head of Finance for the Middle Level Commissioners be added to the Barclays Bank PLC mandate and authorised to sign cheques and authorised to make payments on behalf of the Board.
- viii) That the Chairman and Vice-Chair be approved to be added to the Barclays Bank PLC mandate.
- ix) That the person appointed as clerk to the Middle Level Commissioners be added to the Barclays Bank PLC mandate and be authorised to sign cheques and to authorise payments on behalf of the Board.
- x) That the person appointed as Head of Finance to the Middle Level Commissioners will be appointed as the administrator on behalf of the Middle Level Commissioners to the Barclays Bank PLC internet banking platform as used by the Middle Level Commissioners.
- xi) That following Mr Robert Hill leaving the employment of the Middle Level Commissioners that the Head of Finance of the Middle Level Commissioners be delegated the authority to appoint a member of the finance team to be an additional administrator on the Barclays Bank PLC internet banking platform as used by the Board.

f) Insurance Valuations

RESOLVED

The Chairman be authorised to take any actions he considers appropriate following the review at the next scheduled 'Chairmans meeting'.

g) Policy Reviews & DPO

The Board considered the review of the policies.

RESOLVED

- i) The Board considered and approved the policy reviews for the Complaints Procedure, Privacy policy and the Anti-Bribery policy.
- ii) That the Board approve that while there is a service level agreement for provision of clerking services in place between the Board and the Middle Level Commissioners, the Middle Level Commissioner's Lead Clerk acts as their Data Protection Officer.

B.1930 Finance Report

Viz:

Provided by the Middle Level Commissioners		Item No:	11
Meeting:	WARBOYS, SOMERSHAM & PIDLEY INTERNAL DRAINAGE BOARD	Subject:	FINANCE REPORT
Date:	Thursday 28 th November 2024	Officer Responsible:	Robert Hill/Sam Ablett

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Board is asked to:

- A. Consider the Finance Officer's summary
- B. Note the Budgeting review within Appendix 1.
- C. Fees, remuneration and subscriptions
- D. Note the Highland Water contributions
- E. Review & approve Determination of land for rating purposes & Rate arrears (Confidential papers)
- F. Note the Precept to the Environment Agency

Finance Officer's review and key messagesStorm Recovery Grant

Following the setting of the rates for 2024/2025 we were advised of the criteria for submissions of claims against the Government announced Storm Recovery Grant and a claim for the first phase of funding (T1) was submitted for £108,959.07, which has now been received

Although claims have been submitted for combined IDB works against the Storm Recovery resilience works (T2) there has been no indication from the Environment Agency concerning the progress of claims submitted or possible eventual payment of claims.

1. Budget Monitoring

- 1.1 The current forecast for income/expenditure to 31st March 2025 shows that expenditure could be in-line with the budget against which rates were set. Appendix 1

However, members are advised that these figures are estimating pumping costs to be in-line with the budget proposal against which the rates have been set and should therefore

also take into account the significant financial implications major storm events can have on drainage Board budgets.

The full highland water claims have been included but while payment remains outstanding it is the recommendation that the balance of the Storm recovery Grant (T1) is held in reserve.

To balance the budget the reinstatement of balances provision has been reduced by £8,910 from the budgeted amount to £18,156.

There will be a full reconciliation of balances at the financial year end.

2. Highland Water Contributions

2.1 Under Section 57 of Land Drainage Act 1991 the Board can make a claim for funding to the Environment Agency for the additional costs of the onward management of water from the district's highland. It is at the Environment Agency's discretion if they pay the contribution and it is accounted for within the local team's annual maintenance budget.

2.2 When completing the budget proposal claims were estimated against the likely out-turn for 2023/2024 and the budgeted expenditure for 2024/2025. The winter storm events gave claims significantly in excess of previous claims but following an understanding that the Environment Agency were able to switch funding within their revenue/capital programmes the full estimated claims were included in the rating proposals. The highland water claim included within the rating estimates was £44,880. Following an earlier Government announcement, details were eventually released concerning the Storm Recovery Grant and a claim excess pumping costs for the first tranche (T1) was submitted in the sum of £98,959.06.

To adjust for this additional funding the relevant elements of the Storm Recovery Grant (T1) need to be adjusted against the highland water claims. The highland water calculation for these additional receipts amounts to £15,502.41, which will be adjusted from the Storm Recovery Grant.

Payment of these adjusted highland water claims remains outstanding and the current position has been noted in the clerks report.

3. Determination of land for rating purposes and rate arrears – Confidential papers

4. Precept to the Environment Agency

Internal Drainage Boards are required to pay a Precept (IDB Precept) to the Environment Agency for their expenses managing water passing into main rivers. Predominantly, the Precept funds additional maintenance downstream of and/or benefitting IDB districts.

The precept for 2023/2024 was £23,674.

Author Name: Robert Hill/Sam Ablett

Role: Treasurer/Assistant Treasurer

**Enclosure 1 Determination of Land Values for Rating (CONFIDENTIAL PAPERS)
Rate Arrears (CONFIDENTIAL PAPERS)**

Appendix 1 Budget Monitoring

Appendix 1

WARBOYS SOMERSHAM AND PIDLEY INTERNAL DRAINAGE BOARD
BUDGET MONITORING 2024/2025

	<u>Approved budget</u> <u>2024/2025</u> £	<u>Expenditure to</u> <u>30.09.2024</u> £	<u>Est. Expenditure</u> <u>01.10.24 to 31.03.25</u>	<u>Estimated out-turn</u> <u>at 31.03.2025</u> £	<u>Variance</u> <u>to budget</u> £	<u>Actual</u> <u>2023/2024</u> £
1 District labour (including District Officer's salary)	42,500	24,969	17,781	42,750 ^A	250	37,145
2 Rates, insurances and telephones	6,300	6,367	383	6,750 ^B	450	5,614
3 Repairs and renewals	37,000 ^C	27,558 ^C	22,442	50,000 ^C	13,000	29,494
4 Drainworks	25,000 ^D	18,668 ^D	6,332	25,000 ^D	0	12,354
Piling works						
5 Fuel (oil and electricity)-including District Officer's travelling	141,750 ^E	31,800 ^F	109,950 ^F	141,750 ^F	0	210,247
6 Administration charge, Audit fee, printing, stationery, advertising, Association of Drainage Authorities subscriptions etc	26,500	12,712	15,038	27,750	1,250	25,531
7 Environment Agency - Precept	23,673	11,837	11,837	23,673	0	22,984
8 Reinstatement of balances	27,066 ^G	0	18,156 ^G	18,156 ^G	-8,910	
9 Capital Reserve Fund	0 ^H	0 ^H	0 ^H	0 ^H	0	0
	329,789	133,911	201,919	335,829	6,040	343,369
Improvement works	0	0	0	0	0	483
Bad debt provision	0	0	0	0	0	0
<u>Less income</u>						
Budgeted income	64,062 ^F	9,191 ^F	60,911	70,102 ^F	6,039	39,276
	265,727	124,719	141,008	265,727	1	304,576
<i>Rate Requirement</i>						
<i>Rate set</i>						
<u>General Fund</u>						
Opening balance	72,549	72,549	105,418	72,549		153,248
Rate income	265,727	157,588	107,729	265,317		223,877
Write back of provisions						0
Net expenditure	265,727	124,719	141,008	265,727		304,576
Use of balances	0	0	18,156	18,156		0
Closing balance	72,549	105,418	90,295	90,295		72,549

Mr Hill reported on the budget monitoring and forecast for income/expenditure. He referred to the possible implications of an underpayment of Highland Water claims and possible future Storm Recovery applications.

He reported that the Storm Recovery (tranche 1) grant already received would be utilised to reinstate balances, but this might only take General Fund balances to around 60% of a 'year in hand' and, should this be the case, the future reinstatement of balances would need considering as part of next year's rate setting process.

RESOLVED

That the budget monitoring be approved.

Determinations of Annual Values and Rate Arrears

RESOLVED

- i) That the determination of Annual Values for rating be approved.
- ii) That the Rate Arrears of £156.06 be written off.

B.1931 Date & Time of next Meeting

Thursday 29th May 2025 at 17:30 at Lakeside Lodge, Pidley

B.1932 Any Other Business

Illegal Access

Mr D Cornwell referred to illegal access along sections of the Fenton Lode in the vicinity of his farm and queried if the Board should look to restrict access by placing gates along the bankside. Mr I Johnson queried if this should be the drainage Boards responsibility or for the landowners.

In response to Mr Hill, The District Officer confirmed that there were no public rights of way along this section. Mr T Noble agreed with Mr I Johnson and considered this to be an issue for the landowner.

RESOLVED

That if the landowner was to provide suitable materials to provide a gate, the drainage board would be prepared to assist in its installation to ensure proper access for the Boards plant and machinery and for the Board to be provided with a key to any lock fitted.

Board's Excavator

The Chairman referred to the condition of the Board's Doosan excavator and attempts to source a suitable second-hand replacement as had been previously approved by the Board.

He referred to the last second-hand machine that had been for sale by auction and reported that this machine had sold for around £70,000, significantly more than the £50,000 budget approved by the Board.

He informed the meeting that the Board had been able to complete the majority of flail mowing and slubbing this year with the Doosan excavator, which could also be used to clear flailers from the pumping stations.

In view of not being able to source a suitable second-hand machine, he had investigated the cost of a new machine and informed the meeting that he had received the following guide prices for new machines:

Atlas	£180,000.00
JCB 175	£157,000.00
JCB 145	£146,000.00

In response to Mr D Cornwell, the Chairman confirmed that the main difference between the JCB machines was weight and engine size. Mr I Johnson considered that the smaller JCB was comparable to the Boards Doosan excavator.

The Chairman reported that JCB would fit a flail head to a machine to ensure compatibility and operation. Members discussed the relative merits of new or second-hand machines and between tracked or wheeled.

In response to Mr S Whittome, Mr Hill gave indicative costs for repayment of a public works loan. He informed the meeting that actual repayments would be fixed on the day the loan was drawn down and that he considered such a loan should be repaid over a maximum of 10 years.

Mr D Fabb considered that if the Board were going to continue to use a machine for flail mowing and slubbing then only a new factory fitted machine would provide the correct operational requirements for a flail head.

In response to Mr I Johnson, the Chairman confirmed that new machines came with a one-year warranty, and that an extended service plan could be purchased for around £15,000.

In response to Mr S Whittome, Mr Hill estimated that the indicative repayments on a £150,000 public works loan would currently equate to an additional 2.50p rate.

Mr C Leadbetter considered that for the volume of works the Board carried out, a decent second-hand machine would be more appropriate, and he considered that it should be possible to find one to meet the Board's needs.

Members considered that this matter should be delegated to a sub-committee, to fully investigate all options and to then report back to the Board.

RESOLVED

That a sub-committee, consisting of:

Chairman
Vice-Chair
James German
Ian Johnson
Sam Johnson
Charles Leadbetter

Fully review all options for the replacement of the Boards Doosan excavator and be empowered to call a special meeting of the Board for the matter to be discussed further following the submission of their recommendation.

Mr R Hill

Mr D Brown expressed his and the Boards appreciation to Mr Robert Hill, who would be leaving Middle Level Commissioners at the end of January 2025. Mr D Brown thanked Mr Hill for all his help and support over the years and wished him all the very best for the future.

.....
Chairman

.....
Date