



**middle level
commissioners**

Proudly managing water levels in the Fens since 1862

Middle Level Commissioners and Administered / Associated Boards Glossary

Please also see the 'Initial Information' and other documents on the Consent page of our website, which go into further details on planning and consent matters.

Applicant - The person applying for consent / planning permission

Attenuation – The slowing down of a water flow

The Board(s) - An umbrella term relating to the legal body (e.g. MLC or relevant IDB) in any matter.

Boards drains - Watercourses maintained by a Board. Sometimes also called 'District drains'

Byelaw - Byelaws are government approved local laws made by the Boards under the provisions of the Land Drainage Act 1991, defining your responsibilities and controlling what you are able to do or not do around Board Drains. You can see the Byelaws of each Board on their individual page on our Website.

Consent - Consent is permission sought from the Board under its byelaws of the Land Drainage Act 1991 for something to happen that might affect the watercourses or any area of byelaw control in a district (or even sometimes beyond the district). It is a legal requirement that anyone who intends to carry out works in, over or under or near a watercourse, or who wishes to increase the rate or volume of water flowing into a watercourse, contacts the Board to obtain any necessary consents before the work starts.

Culvert - A culvert is an underground structure that water can flow through (often a pipe)

Defended floodplain - A floodplain that no longer functions as a natural floodplain due to defences being put in place. A defended floodplain can still flood and if it does the consequences can sometimes be more severe than those in a natural floodplain.

District - A legally defined area within which the Board operate and can collect rates on.

District drains – Watercourses maintained by a Board, but not always owned by them. Consent must be sought from the Board to do any work in or around a District Drain. Sometimes called 'Board's drains'.

Drainage system – the system of piped and open watercourses within the catchment area of a Board.

Environment Agency (EA) - The body that is responsible for managing the risk of flooding from main rivers Bury Brook, the River Nene and the River Great Ouse. They also have other duties relating to matters such as water resources, navigation, waste, and pollution, and you should check with them if you wish to know more.

Highland Area – an area in a District of slightly higher land, which does not benefit from the operations of the Board but may drain into their rateable area.

Infiltration device – A device that collects rain water and discharges it into the ground rather than an open watercourse or piped system. Infiltration devices include soakaways.

Internal Drainage Boards (IDBs) – IDBs have powers in relation to the land drainage, flood risk and the environment in their respective districts. Many in this area have pumping stations and some discharge their run-off into the MLC watercourses. Each IDB only maintains the more major watercourses in its area, where there is a general shared interest for the ratepayers in its area. These are known as ‘District Drains’. Each IDB managed by the MLC has its own page on the MLC website, which includes a map showing the area it covers, and its District Drains. The majority of drains in any district are ‘private drains’ (see definition below).

LLFA – The Local Lead Flood Authority is a body that manages and oversees the management of local flood risk, i.e. flooding from anything other than rivers, the sea and reservoirs. In this area, the LLFA’s are Peterborough City Council and Cambridgeshire and Norfolk County Councils. Outside of the IDB rateable areas they are the body who should be approached where consent is being sought to install a culvert.

LPA – The Local Planning Authority is usually the Council who will grant planning permission. This can be a Borough/District/County Council or Unitary Authority depending on location or planning type.

Maintained River - A river maintained by the MLC. Consent must be sought from the MLC to do any work in or around a main river.

Maintenance strip/protected strip – to allow for the MLC and IDB systems to be maintained, they include a maintenance strip either side of each district watercourse. This is defined in the byelaws and allows machinery to safely access the bank for maintenance,-repair or improvement.

Method statement - a sequence of steps taken to complete a work task in a safe manner.

Middle Level Commissioners (MLC) – MLC is a statutory corporation and an IDB, providing flood defence and water level management to the Middle Level area. It is also a navigation authority for the navigable waters of the Middle Level area. See the map on the home page of our website for details of the area covered by the MLC. The MLC also administer many other IDBs around its district, a full list of these can be found on the website.

Planning permission – permission that must be sought from local councils for works such as new developments or improvements.

Post-application – A consultation with the Board regarding discharge and consent matters when planning permission has already been issued. As the planning application will have already been discussed, and comments made by various parties, it will be more difficult to adjust the application to incorporate the Boards comments and a pre-application is preferable, and cheaper.

Pre-application – A consultation with the Board regarding discharge and consent matters before planning permission has been applied for. This would help you prepare an application which met the Board’s requirements before a formal planning application was submitted.

Private drains – Watercourses owned by a landowner rather than a public body, which is the case for the majority of drains in the MLC area. They are generally small, and often feed into the Board's Drains. The owner of the watercourse, or the land adjoining it, (see Riparian ownership definition below) is responsible for its maintenance, but is also subject to additional constraining rules where it is a district drain.

Protected watercourses – This term covers maintained rivers and district drains, described above.

Rateable area – the low-lying area of land in a District which benefits from the drainage operations provided by the Board.

Riparian ownership – Unless a private drain is shown on title deeds, a riparian owner is deemed to be the person, or people, with a watercourse on, next to or under their property. Riparian owners have a responsibility for the maintenance of these watercourses. See <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/owning-a-watercourse> for further details.

Soakaway - See infiltration device

SFRA – a Strategic Flood Risk Assessment is made by the local Planning Authority to assist in guiding planning matters.

Structure – any construction, including headwall, outfall pipe, weir, dam, culvert, bridge, underground structure, road, fence, bridge, tree or shrub that might affect the flow of a watercourse, or be in the protection strip.

SuDs – (Sustainable drainage Systems) are designed to more closely mimic the natural ways in which rainfall would be accommodated by a greenfield site. They can include source control methods (such as rainwater harvesting and green roofs), conveyance methods (such as swales and filter drains) and storage methods (such as attenuation ponds and tanks) or a combination of methods to improve water quantity and quality. They should also provide amenity and biodiversity benefits.

Watercourse - A watercourse can be a river, brook, beck, ditch (whether dry or not), stream, drain, culvert, or any other passage through which water may flow.

WWTW – Waste water treatment works are where a water authority treats foul water (sewage) before discharging it into a watercourse, which in many cases in this area are District drains. Also known as Water Recycling Centre

Apr 2025