MANEA AND WELNEY DISTRICT DRAINAGE COMMISSIONERS

At a Meeting of the Manea and Welney District Drainage Commissioners
Held at The Lamb and Flag, Welney on Wednesday 28th January 2026.

PRESENT

J Heading (Chair)
R Sears (Vice Chair)
J Carney (FDC)
N Cook
C Crofts (BCKLWN)
M Fairey
R Gladwin
W Gladwin
K Goodger
M Heading
C Marks (FDC)
A Morris
N Walker

The Lead Clerk Mrs Ruth Martin representing the Clerk, and Mr Andrew Wool MLC Head of Finance were in attendance.

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from C Barnes, J Hawes, P Hawes and C Sears.

C.1065 Declarations of Interest

The Chairman 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 Commissioners.

Members agreed to declare any interests during the course of the meeting.

C.1066 Confirmation of Minutes

The Chair reported that although the Vice Chair was not present at the meeting, he had indicated that he would like to stand down as Vice Chair. The Chair asked the Commissioners to consider who would be suitable to stand for election to the role at the Summer Commissioners Meeting.

The minutes were confirmed as a true record, and no Matters Arising were identified.

RESOLVED

> That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Commissioners held on the 28th May 2025 are recorded correctly and that they be confirmed and signed.

Presentation by Gary Roberts

The Chair introduced Mr Gary Roberts to the Commissioners. He explained that Mr Roberts is working as a consultant to the EA and would be presenting a report on the Old Bedford and Associated Infrastructure.

Mr Roberts explained that the presentation revolved around the Cranbrook Counter Drain, also known as the Old Bedford and the associated strategy. He explained that the Cranbrook Counter Drain Strategy was last reviewed in 2018 and covers the management of water in the Old Bedford catchment area. The EA are now looking at creating water storage areas primarily in the sand and gravel extraction areas of Block Fen, looking at water resource and environmental benefits as well as water management. The EA have been undertaking modelling to establish if the water storage is needed, and if adequate storage is available. This work is being undertaken by Mott MacDonald. The work also includes looking at land use restoration following mineral extraction. This is not just looking at filling the holes with water, but as many of the areas will not be wet all of the time, considering other land uses. Enabling works will also be required, looking at how storage areas are connected to IDB systems and how the water will be moved between the two.

The work includes looking at the planning strategy, with consultation and engagement with the mineral extraction companies, particularly Tarmac, who are working on the Western Extension proposals at present. The Minerals and Waste Plan Update starts in July of this year and this work will inform this update. The Provisions and Principles document is being updated to feed into the Plan.

The Enabling Works are focussing around the Tarmac controlled areas, with restorations planned from 2030 to the early 2040's. These will be looking at how to get water in and out, and how to move water around. This will include connecting to Sutton & Mepal IDB drains. The intricacies of the planning process means that some enabling works may not fall within the minerals planning and could need planning permission, but they could also fall within Land Drainage permitted development.

A key question is can storage be provided in an area that equates to Welches Dam pumping at a 1 in 25-year event rate, and for resilience doubling that figure. Stored water will be held longer and there is a risk of multiple events. In 2008 it was calculated that 11 million cubic metres of storage would be required, and this was increased in 2018 to 16 million cubic metres. This was increased further in 2025 following further modelling.

With the restoration proposals in mind and more information around the restored land contours and more detail on the storage volumes, modelling suggests that Block Fen cannot provide all of the storage required. The best options gives around 10 million cubic metres of storage. This is still equivalent to the volume pumped through Welches Dam but does eat into the overall resilience. They are keen on identifying more storage within the catchment but are trying to avoid above ground storage. All storage will be clay lined.

The preferred option is to create storage to reduce the amount of pumping needed, as the 2018 strategy.
In 2008 Welches Dam Pumping Station was given a 25-year design life, but the current condition indicates it will not achieve this and 2035 is the next significant milestone for the pumping station. It will need new pumps, which will need to comply with fish and eel regulations and so they will be looking at complete pump replacements, which brings affordability challenges. The sand and gravel extraction is taking longer than originally planned, and the Fens Reservoir has introduced opportunities for the strategy and also brings the potential for partnership funding from the Fens Reservoir. The strategy is evolving from the 2018 version to look ahead to the 2040s, taking into account the Fens 2100+ strategy which sits above.

The timings were discussed, with four phases being identified. Phase 1, the restorations of the Tarmac sites, is planned for the early 2030's, and the Phase 2 planning application is currently being worked on. Hanson and Mick George are still looking at the mid to late 2040's before they will be in the restoration phase. It is assumed that Phase 4 will follow on. They are looking at creating the storage areas over the next 25 years and so considering how to manage the system as storage areas come on stream.

It is looking like the EA will need to continue to pump and so they are looking at ways to manage the system with and without Welches Dam. Options being considered include keeping Welches Dam and discharging into the Ouse Washes as at present, not pumping at Welches Dam and more pumping elsewhere, such as the Old Bedford end of the system and pumping into the tidal River, but the Old Beford Sluice needs major refurbishment. Combining two projects into one could give efficiencies. The Sluice is a gravity discharge but also a navigation structure. The structure also allows water abstraction into the counter drain. A like for like replacement for Welches Dam would provide a 10 cubic metre capacity replacement. Modelling is being carried out, and the initial results are showing a change in pumping location is looking possible.

The Cranbrook Counter Drain needs maintenance with essential desilting. This may also include the regrading of the Old Beford section.

The Old Bedford Counter Drain is part of the Ouse Washes Environment Designation and a Special Area of Conservation. The river has been identified as Spine Loach Habitat, a species thar prefer managed watercourses. Habitat restoration will also be needed. The Old Bedford is also a navigable watercourse, giving another reason for the works. In the longer term, water management of the resource within the Old Bedford Counter Drain is needed as water only comes in through the Old Bedford Sluice.

The plan for 2026 and beyond was outlined. The strategy work is still primarily around water storage, updating the masterplan and the EA Water Storage ‘Principles’ document. Consultation with Tarmac around their restorations continues. There are two projects looking at system changes, one is moving the Pumping Station location on the Old Bedford, the other looking at the restoration of the Old Bedford.

There will be an increase in the level of consultation with IDBs. The leading option is still the removal of Welches Dam Pumping Station. Consultation in a planning context will increase.

The Chair thanked Mr Roberts for the informative presentation and invited the Commissioners to ask questions. He added that the Old Bedford was cut in 1630, and the Manea & Welney District was formed about 100 years later. This Board along with the Sutton & Mepal and Upwell Boards are totally reliant on the Old Bedford and have been for the last 300 years. Like the EA, the Commissioners have elderly pumps in their pumping station, and any works need to be completed and paid for. They believe that the capacity of the Old Bedford is one third of its original design. To return it to its original state would give an increase in capacity. Since Christmas, Welches Dam Pumping Station has been running continuously despite the dry summer and a not very wet winter so far. He added that he could not believe that the storage this project provides would negate all of that. Manea & Welney are totally dependent on the Old Bedford to enable them to maintain their summer and winter levels, and he does not believe that the right proposal has been developed yet, finding some of the proposals already identified strange. He pointed out the water flowing through the Ouse Washes at present and hopes that by talking to Boards the EA would develop a better resolution to the problem.

Mr M Heading asked when there would be a plan developed, observing that the EA have been talking about the proposals for nearly 20 years. Mr Roberts replied that the strategy will need to be reviewed and the current 2 projects will allow this within the next 12-18 months. This will confirm the preferred option, which is likely to be one that had been identified in 2018. He thought that this would still require some element of pumping. There are two business cases with a similar timescale, with the Old Bedford Sluice project deciding where the right place to pump out the system might be, although this may not be for another 12-18 months. The Chair added that he had been expecting a resolution for the last 5 years. Mr Roberts added that the project is on programme to deal with seepage at the Sluice.

Mr Marks observed that no pumping had been mentioned. With the construction of the new reservoir, locally there is some concern that residents may not be able to get home insurance due to water being stored at a higher level than the surrounding land. Mr Roberts said that this would be considered as part of the works. The objective is to manage the system as at present, allowing for climate change. It is not intended to make things worse and will most likely require pumping. Whatever is pumped out at present is lost to the sea, and so large areas of storage capacity are needed for water management. The solution needs to be the most efficient solution, especially as presently the water is pumped twice. This needs to be looked at closely as pumping is more expensive than storing water and using the water more productively would give a cost benefit. Mr Marks commented that on Boxing Day the water level was so high it was almost overtopping, which is concerning. Mr Roberts added that Anglian Water are looking at reinstating Horseway Lock as part of the reservoir works.

Ms Morris asked about the filling of the reservoir, with one option being publicised as taking water from the Ouse Washes at Welches Dam. She asked if there had been any joined-up thinking. Mr Roberts advised that the EA have been heavily engaged with Anglian Water and are consulting on the reservoir proposals. There are lots of opportunities that could benefit this strategy, especially here. This gives a good opportunity for the extraction structure to be built at Welches Dam, with overlapping benefits. There are water quality concerns which is presenting another positive reason of moving discharging water on the Ouse Washes. However the designations of the Ouse Washes is impacting this, and the pumping regime at Welches Dam needs to consider this legislation. Significant investment is needed here – at least 20% of the asset cost – and this is likely to be the point at which pumps will need replacing which will have to comply with current legislation around fish and eel. Water quality is also likely to trigger this requirement.

Ms Morris asked if Anglian Water are aware they will need to do some kind of water treatment before discharging into the reservoir. Mr Roberts responded that the other issue here is costs. The way the EA fund projects is changing, and they will need to look to partnership contributions other than Grant in Aid. Anglian Water could represent a significant contribution. Creating an alternative to Welches Dam would save the EA some cost. The Forty Foot Drain has been mentioned, and part of the Strategy has included the restoration of the Forty Foot. The EA are the Navigation Authority from Horseway Lock to the Counter Drain. To reinstate the navigation but with the restoration of the channel as a water conveyor is a preferred option. If this is combined with the Fens Reservoir proposals this could bring further investment from Anglian Water.

The Chair asked if they were looking at creating an alternative to water storage as water quality has always been an issue. Mr Roberts responded that the majority of the Ouse Washes water supply is from the Upper Bedford Catchment. The Chair had always understood that the water quality in the Old Bedford had been good, but that the Delph had poor water quality. Mr Roberts understood that the issue was the other way around, with the Delph at Earith having poor water quality. Anglian Water have suggested that there are high concentrations of sulphates in the Old Bedford/Cranbrook Counter Drain and this creates significant challenges in terms of treatment costs. The removal of that contribution brings the dial down in terms of water treatment. Anglian Water would be keen to see that removal, but this has an impact on water yield. The catchment contributes 10% of what could be stored on the Ouse Washes in a wet year. Other than rainfall, the only water flowing is abstracted at the Old Bedford Sluice via backflow. They will still need to pump but this makes better use of the pumping. They are looking at gravity to fill the storage areas, for example by diverting flow from the Sutton & Mepal IDB catchment. This Board and Upwell IDB operate in the high-level system and so cannot connect in the same way – it would not be possible to link all 3 Boards together. Although the storage areas would be gravity filled, they would need to utilise pumping to empty out. The Chair advised that due to the difference in the 3 Boards' locations, Manea & Welney have needed to pump every day since Christmas but Upwell had hardly pumped at all. Mr Walker asked if the Old Bedford refurbishment plan would see the channel being restored to its original capacity and raised a concern over the landside bank being porous. Mr Roberts responded that they felt that the main issue was seepage around the structure. The Old Bedford Sluice has closed to navigation, and the situation could not increase capacity. The tidal river levels rarely allow the Sluice to gravity discharge, and the Old Bedford Sluice project is focused purely on the Sluice. The remainder of the channel would be included in the Cranbrook Counter Drain programme. There is a plan to survey the whole river imminently, but they know they will be looking at removing a large volume of material in order to reinstate its conveyance and storage capacity.

The Chair observed that the Old Bedford is 30km long, and restoring this would be relatively cheap compared to the other proposals. Mr Roberts disagreed with this statement, but this work would be undertaken for flood risk storage conveyance and also for environmental condition. The Spine Loach habitat in the channel is the primary driver as they regularly suffer from oxygen level issues in the channel. The Chair had been told that the water quality in the Old Bedford is good, and fish stocks are high, but Mr Roberts said to maintain this they would need to improve the channel. Mr M Heading said the same argument had been used the previous year for not doing the works, but Mr Roberts said that restoring 30km of watercourse is not a cheap option.

With no further questions or discussion, the Chair thanked Mr Roberts for attending the meeting and advised that the Commissioners would like to contribute further to the proposals in the future. Mr Roberts was invited to stay for the remainder of the meeting.

C.1067 Constitution & Membership

The Chair thanked the Commissioners for their continuing good attendance at meetings. He added that the attendance of the elected members who were from the Districts agricultural community was much better than that of the appointed members from the local authority, and urged the appointed members present to encourage their colleagues to attend all meetings. It was noted that 3 of the 4 appointed members were present at this meeting, and Mr Carney gave apologies at this point on behalf of Mr Imafidon.

Election of Chair, Vice Chair and Finance Committee

The Commissioners agreed that Mr J Heading be appointed as Chairman of the Board. This was proposed by Ms Morris and seconded by Mr Crofts. Mr Heading accepted the nomination and asked the Commissioners if they thought it was time to consider someone else taking the Chair, but he is in the fortunate position to be able to continue to do this. However, he urged the Commissioners to consider the future of the Commissioners and who may step up in the future.

As previously reported, Mr R Sears has decided to step down as Vice Chair, and the Commissioners thanked Mr R Sears in his absence for all of the work he has put into the role. The Chair suggested that the Commissioners consider the election of the Vice Chair at the next meeting of the Commissioners, to allow members to consider the position. This was agreed by the Commissioners.

The Commissioners considered the composition of the Finance Committee. The Chair reported that Mr R Sears had indicated that he wished to continue as a member of the Finance Committee. The Chair proposed that the Finance Committee membership remain as at present, and this was seconded by Mr Walker.

RESOLVED

That Mr J Heading be appointed as Chair of the Board.

That the appointment of the Vice Chair of the Board be deferred to the next meeting.

That Mr J Heading, Mr C Crofts, Mr R Sears, Mr M Fairey, Mr R Gladwin and Ms A Morris be members of the Finance Committee.

Amalgamation

The Chair reported on the issued of amalgamation, adding that he thought it would happen at some point. He has discussed the possibility with the Chair of Upwell IDB and thinks that this Board is unlikely to amalgamate with Sutton & Mepal IDB but he can see scope for a future amalgamation with Upwell IDB,

Commissioners were asked to complete the training matrix circulated and were reminded that Board training is now reported on the IDB1 form and asked to advise the Clerk of any training completed or required.

C.1068 Clerk's Report

Mrs Martin gave a verbal report on behalf of the Clerk.

IDB Fund

2025/26 has begun how 2024/25 ended with delivery being the primary focus. We were successful in securing approximately £4.5m of grant for a number of IDB Fund (Tranche 2b) submissions and the administration and delivery of these commitments has been a primary focus particular for staff in M&E, Operations, Environment & Ecology and Finance, meaning some 'business as usual' activity has been impacted:

- Mobile Pumps – Phase 2 - £1.2m
- St Germans Pumping Station Resilience Phase 2 - £1m
- Bevill's Pond Resilience - £0.3m (MLC and Sawtry IDB)
- Asset Resilience – Pumps and Channels - £2m (MLC and IDBs)

This fund, coming with less constraints than FCRM grant-in-aid, is enabling us to think and invest differently. In my view we need to change gear in terms of our business model and philosophy to become more commercially minded within the boundaries of a not-for-profit public authority. Whilst there remains work to do within our improvement and modernisation journey, our organisational foundations are now in a much healthier position to build from, albeit our base capacity and capability are a constraint to what needs to be, and could be, achieved. We will need to identify and nurture partnerships not only with traditional partners but with the innovators within our local agricultural and the development sectors.

The Commissioners discussed differing ways in which they could source funding and will continue to consider this in the future.

The Chair asked Mrs Martin to investigate the progress of works previously requested by the Commissioners.

Data Provision

We are receiving an increasing number of data requests from a variety of sources. These can be complex and time consuming to service, sometimes for projects or purposes with little to no direct benefit to the Commissioners and our administered IDBs (where we act as their data controller).
To better protect our interests, we have developed and are now using a formal data sharing agreement with third parties. We will introduce a cost recovery approach to servicing such requests.

Electricity Service

The 12-month group (MLC and IDBs) contract with EDF Energy ceased on 30th September 2025. This contract was facilitated by brokers GEAB.

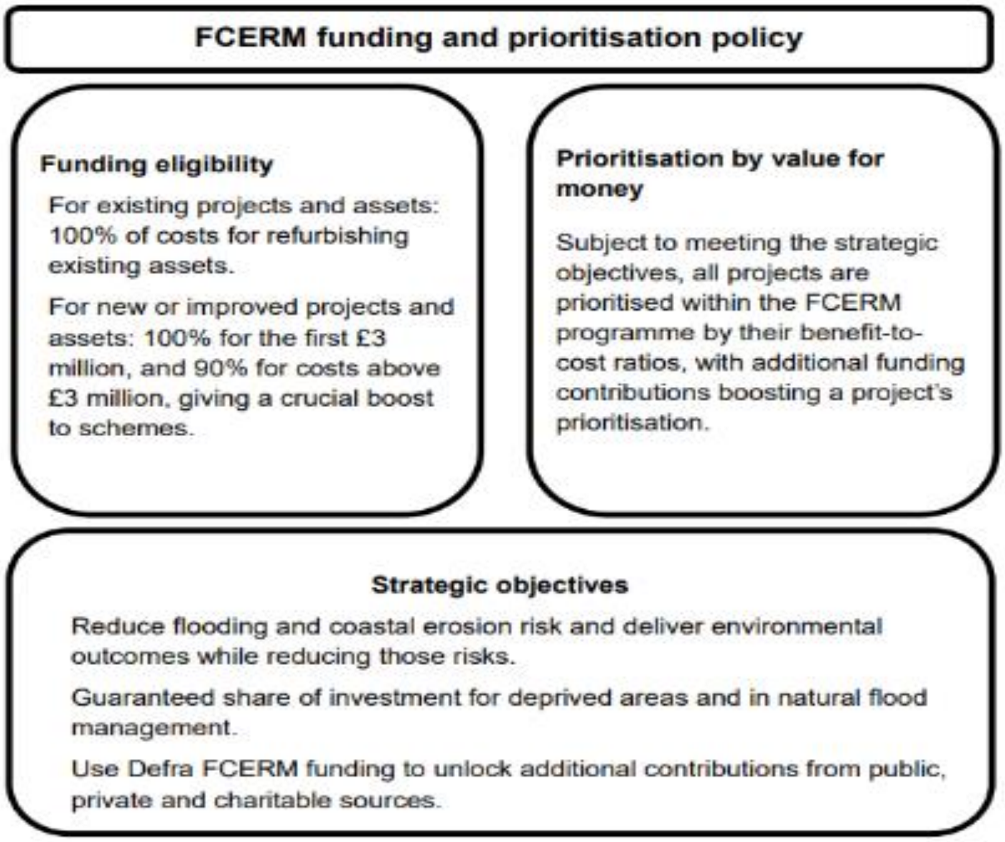
A sub-committee of MLC Board Members and IDB Chairmen reviewed options alongside MLC staff. We are now in contract with British Gas and are self-managing this within the Finance team for the 12-months to 30th September 2026.

Mr Walker raised a concern that when some brokers have gone into liquidation, it has become clear that contracts have no longer been valid. The Chair reported that the electricity bills are very complex.

Defra Flood Funding Policy

Following consultation earlier in the year, Defra has finalised its new funding policy and responded to the consultation. We provided and published a comprehensive response.

This policy is for capital flood grant and goes live from 1st April 2026.



Key points for MLC and IDBs:

a) Refurbishment is a significant fix on an asset that can't be addressed by routine maintenance alone. Further guidance is expected on this aspect.
b) When applying for Defra FCERM funding for refurbishment of existing assets, asset owners will need to demonstrate that they have undertaken whole life asset management and routine maintenance.
c) As partnership contributions increase, the amount of Defra FCERM funding needed decreases, leading to higher project prioritisation. The more significant the partnership contribution, the larger the likelihood of boosting prioritisation.
d) The '2012' rule has been removed meaning new development can be included within benefit assessments. We will commission an economic and benefits refresh across the Middle Level to update our base information.
e) The need to demonstrate a reduction in flood risk band as a result of works has been removed.
f) Defra acknowledge concerns from other risk management authorities that they are at a disadvantage compared to the Environment Agency. The policy states that all risk management authorities should have equal access to FCERM funding.

The Chair raised his concerns regarding the need for Highland Water. A good proportion of this District is below sea level. The Commissioners do a lot of work for little return, and the move to abolish Highland Water continues.

IDB Funding & Costs Research

A joint Defra and MHCLG (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government) IDB funding and costs research project is now underway. It is being led by ICF, a consultancy with expertise in economic and financial analysis, particularly in evaluating the costs and benefits of environmental and regulatory policies in the water and land use sector. Supporting ICF is Logika, a consultancy specialising in flood risk management, drainage, and sustainable development and valuable experience from the water sector. The project is scheduled to conclude by July 2026.

The overarching goal of the project is to conduct a comprehensive review of IDBs' operations, focusing on financial efficiency and value for money, with the aim of assessing whether changes are needed to ensure the long-term sustainability of IDBs. The research is structured around three core objectives:

1. Funding and Financial Review: To analyse IDB funding mechanisms, operational costs and financial pressures over the past decade and explore future funding options.
2. Benefit Evaluation: To assess the economic and social value of IDBs' work, both locally and nationally.
3. Data Modernisation: To explore how the annual IDB1 Form can be improved and modernised for better data collection and reporting.

The project will include:

- an evidence review,
- analysis of financial information and IDB1 reports,
- interviews with selected IDBs and stakeholders,
- an IDB survey to identify any gaps in the data, and
- case studies.

We have been in touch with the consultants leading the work and provided them with information to get them started. Given we collectively represent 25% of the IDB sector nationally, we will, in one way shape or form, inform their results and associated recommendations for change. Whilst this research is an opportunity to highlight and influence much needed policy change for collective benefit, there is equally the likelihood that it will draw out some uncomfortable truths.

One of the key issues the research will be assessing is the impact that special levies to IDBs is having on Local Authorities. This issue is being promoted by a Local Government Association 'IDB Levey Special Interest Group'.

Around 40 councils across England are working together to lobby the Government for reform to the funding system that supports the vital work of Internal Drainage Boards. IDBs are primarily funded through drainage rates charged directly on the occupiers of agricultural land within each drainage district and a special levy on district and unitary councils on behalf of the non-agricultural land within each district. Each council primarily funds the cost of the special levy through a combination of central government grants, their share of business rates and revenue from council tax levied on local properties. Due to rising costs in such things as electricity that power the pumping stations at times of flooding and sustained heavy rain, the special levy amount has been increasingly significantly in recent years.

On the evening of Tuesday 2nd September 2025 there was a parliamentary meeting of the LGA's IDB Levy Special Interest Group. The meeting was attended by the leaders and portfolio holders from a number of special levy paying local authorities at the House of Commons alongside several members of parliament. ADA and IDBs were also represented by Robert Caudwell, Michael Sly, Daniel Withnall (Black Sluice IDB), and Paul Burrows (Middle Level Commissioners).

Reflecting on the meeting within the ADA Gazette, Paul Burrows said:

"It's pleasing that Local Authorities and MPs appreciate the criticality of the work the Internal Drainage Board sector play in enabling prosperous local communities. After all, every other Council service relies on keeping homes, business, land and infrastructure dry. We need to be mindful of potential unintended consequences within any call for funding reform, particularly the special levies that Councils raise on our behalf. It is

important that the IDB Costs & Funding Research commissioned by Defra gets under the skin of the issues and makes considered and well-evaluated recommendations."

IDB1

There is another step-change in reporting expectations on us all both in terms of financial and non-financial information we provide annually to Defra within the 2024/25 IDB1. This will take additional time to pull together and is an indication as to the increased expectations Government have on us in terms of governance and responsibilities.

Whilst we can derive the majority of the financial and non-financial information on behalf of our administered IDBs, there are questions where we require information from the Boards directly. To assist Sam Ablett in preparing the form for return, each Chairman has been asked to respond with information covering a list of questions which will be provided, but include details around watercourse maintenance, Health and Safety, Board members training, and public and press engagement.

Mr Wool advised that at a recent meeting with Consultants working on behalf of Defra, he asked them what the information provided in the IDB1 form is used for, and he queried what value this information provided gives. He did not receive an answer to the question.

RESOLVED

That the Clerks Report is noted.

C.1069 Environment Officers Report

Mrs Martin gave a verbal report on behalf of the Environment Officer.

BAPS & LNRS

The launch of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Cambridgeshire (LNRS), which formally sets the priorities for nature conservation across our region, was significantly delayed in 2025 but was finally published on the 23rd December 2025. IDBs have a statutory duty to have regard for the objectives of the LNRS so the IDB Biodiversity Action Plans (BAPS) are necessarily centred around the priorities the LNRS. The final drafts of the BAPS are therefore being drafted and will be available for review very soon and will require approval by the May.

Standard Operating Procedures

SOPs for all regular routine maintenance were launched last year and are available either from the website or from the Ecology Department. New Tree / Hedge & Scrub cutting protocol has also just been launched. Please note that adherence to all the SOPS is mandatory for all those working for and on behalf of the IDB and to retain the Ecological Service Package from MLC.

Planning and Evidencing Compliant Works

We look forward to meeting Board representatives to compile a channel categorisation map, reasoning record and works schedule. The Commissioners are asked to contact the office to make an appointment for this and to complete environmental review ASAP for review and approval at the next Commissioners meeting.

Ecological Performance Review

From April 2026, the standard Environmental Performance Indicators will be launched which will help to assess and report the environmental compliance and delivery of each IDB in a consistent way. This will help to ensure that any areas of environmental risk are flagged promptly and the successes of the Board in achieving biodiversity enhancements are recognised. The following deliverables/actions are some of those that may form part of the assessment:

- A current channel categorisation map and maintenance plan (flail mowing and desilting), with reasoning completed, for review and approval at the Board meeting
- From 2027, the previous years' maintenance record available for review
- The annual schedule of works reviewed by the Ecology Department and survey requirements/mitigations highlighted ahead of board Approval/ESRs submitted
- Biodiversity budget set and defined as part of Board meeting
- Attendance at a biodiversity training/information day each year
- Environmental review completed including BAP review with 75% or more objectives on target for completion on time
- No net loss of open watercourse

We look forward to meeting with the Chair, Vice Chair and District Officer to discuss the above in the next few weeks

Newsletter

Please look out for the first refreshed edition of "Life on the Edge" environmental newsletter for IDBs which is in planning and will be published in March and October each year.

Environmental & waste permits

A review of Environmental and waste permits is required and will be planned with the Chair and VC in the coming months.

<u>RESOLVED</u>

That the Environment Officers Report is noted.

<u>C.1070 Consulting Engineers' Reports</u>

The Commissioners considered the Consulting Engineers' report, and it was taken as read.

<u>Enforcement and Compliance</u>

Mrs Martin reported that the new Enforcement and Compliance Officers had seen some successes. The Commissioners were asked to authorise the Chair and Vice Chair to take decisions on enforcement action on behalf of the Commissioners, having taken advice from MLC officers. They will engage with other Commissioners as they see appropriate and determine whether a Special Meeting of the Commissioners is needed on a risk and complexity basis.

Mr Marks said that he had been hearing through the Planning Committees that there have been improvements in Enforcement and welcomed the approach. The Commissioners agreed with the requested decision-making process.

RESOLVED

That the Chair and Vice Chair are authorised to take decisions on enforcement action on behalf of the Commissioners with advice from MLC

Mechanical & Electrical

Referring to the Mechanical & Electrical Engineers report, the Commissioners were advised to consider the development of an investment plan for asset refurbishment/replacement. However, the Chair advised that this was already in place.

Purls Bridge Pumping Station

The Commissioners reviewed the outcome of the recent inspection. The Chair advised that in his opinion there are two views, to comply with the Engineers report or if things are working effectively, to leave them. His current thought is that the Commissioners need to keep the equipment up to date and that they have already programmed the update to the control equipment for the current year. He added that he was concerned that at a Ministerial level Boards like Manea & Welney IDB do not have much influence and that grants are likely to become less available. The Commissioners would therefore need to fund any works themselves.

The Chair advised that he will respond to any recommendations.

He also advised the Commissioners that the MLC Chief Engineer is now a Fellow of the Institute of Civil Engineers. The Commissioners asked that a note of congratulations be sent to Mrs Oldfield in recognition of this achievement.

RESOLVED

That the Chair discuss the outcome of the last routine inspection of the Pumping Station with Mr Bantoft.

That Mrs Oldfield be sent a note of congratulations.

C.1071 Health & Safety

The Chair provided a verbal report, advising the Commissioners that he had recently met with a representative from AW Safety (formerly COPE) to carry out inspections of the pumping stations. At Glenhouse it was reported that the control panel steps have subsided, and it has been recommended that the foundations are reinstated, and the steps replaced. This is likely to cost in the region of £20k. However, the Inspector was happy with the Commissioners current arrangements.

The inspection highlighted that there was no fire extinguisher in the workshop and recommended that this be resolved. The Chair advised that he has purchased an extinguisher and it has been installed. He also thinks that the Commissioners should consider fitting them to the Boards vehicles.

The Chair concluded by reporting that Health & Safety inspections will continue to be held on an annual basis.

C.1072 District Superintendents Report

The written report of the District Superintendent was considered, with the Chair advising that the Commissioners are relied upon to read all of the reports prior to the meeting. Mr Crofts commented that the District Superintendents report was excellent as always, and Mr Marks asked that the Commissioners' thanks be passed to the District Superintendent for the brilliant job he has been doing in the Manea area.

C.1073 Governance

Mrs Martin asked the Commissioners to consider the Governance report and that its content be noted.

RESOLVED

Completion of the Annual Return of the Commissioners – 2024/2025

i) The Commissioners considered and approved the comments of the Auditors on the Annual Return for the year that ended on the 31st March 2025.

ii) The Commissioners considered and approved the Audit Report of the Internal Auditor for the year that ended on the 31st March 2025

The Commissioners noted the continued appointment of Whitings as Internal Auditor.

Risk Management Strategy and Internal Controls

The Commissioners did not highlight any specific risks or issues not covered within the Commissioners' Risk Management Strategy (published in 2024 and on the website), noted the system of financial Internal Controls (as published on website) and no additional controls were highlighted as required.

Insured Values

The Insurance Valuation was reviewed, and the Commissioners agreed that they were content with the valuation.

Exercise of Public Rights

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

Consideration of potential litigation, liabilities, commitments.

Mrs Martin reported that as part of the Annual Governance review the Commissioners were required to consider if there were any litigation, liabilities or commitments, events or transactions, occurring either during or after the year-end that have a financial impact on the authority. She confirmed that there were no such matters that have been raised through the office of the clerk. Members gave consideration to the position.

RESOLVED

That there are no such events that would have an adverse financial impact on the Commissioners that would need to be included within the accounting statements for the financial year ended 31st March 2025.

C.1074 Finance Report – Looking Back

Finance officer's review and key messages

Mr Wool drew the Commissioners' attention to his key finance messages, noting that the expenditure for the Financial Year 2025/26 was currently in line with the budget set.

Payments for 2025

The Payments were reviewed and accepted.

Highland Water Contributions

The Commissioners noted the Highland Water contributions.

C.1075 Finance Report – Looking Forward

Finance officer's review and key messages

Mr Wool reviewed his report, and the Commissioners considered and noted the key finance messages. He reminded the Commissioners that the estimates for 2026/27 and the associated rate had been discussed at the earlier Finance Committee meeting.

Fees, Remuneration & Subscriptions:

District Superintendent

The Commissioners agreed with the Finance Committee's recommendation that the Chair would deal with this matter outside of the meeting.

ADA subscription

Mrs Martin reported that ADA have increased subscriptions by 5.0% for 2026, and therefore the annual fee will be £811 (plus VAT).

RESOLVED

That the requested increased ADA subscription for 2025 is paid.

Precept

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 Anglian (Great Ouse) Regional Flood & Coastal Committee (RFCC) determined that the Precept will increase by 2% for 2026.

The precept for 2025 was £83,109.85.

RESOLVED

That the Precept is paid in full.

Estimates & Rate Requirements for 2026/27.

Budget

The Chair advised the Commissioners that the Finance Committee had reviewed the proposed budget for the year 2026/27 and recommended its approval. The Commissioners agreed with this proposal.

RESOLVED

That the budget is agreed.

Rate Requirement for 2026/27

The Chair advised that the budget provisions indicated a rate requirement of 54.0p in the £, but that the Finance Committee recommended that a rate of 55.0p in the £ be set. He added that he suspected that this is one of the more cautious Boards in the way in which they spend money. There was some relief in the pumps still running on diesel.

Ms Morris added that the Finance Committee's reasoning behind increasing to 55.0p was due to the projection that the rate would need to rise to 56.5p in the £ for the year 2027/28, which would be a big step change, and hence the proposal to increase to 55.0p this year.

Mr Marks and Mr Crofts advised that due to the planned creation of the new Combined Authorities from May 2027, they would both be unlikely to be present at next year's budget setting meetings, and that the Special Levy would be paid from different budgets. The Commissioners discussed the future of appointed Board members, although it is still not known how this will be addressed.

Ms Morris then proposed that the rate of 55.0p in the £, as recommended by the Finance Committee, be accepted by the Commissioners. This proposal was seconded by Mr Marks and was agreed unanimously.

RESOLVED

i) That the estimates be approved.

ii) That a total sum of £263,020 be raised by drainage rates and special levy.

iii) That the amounts comprised in the sum referred to in ii) above to be raised by drainage rates and to be met by special levy are £187,709 and £75,311.

iv) That a rate of 55.0p in the £ be laid and assessed on Agricultural hereditaments in the District. (Area 2 = 75% of the main area rate)

v) That Special Levies of £48,133 and £27,178 be made and issued to Fenland District Council and The Borough Council for Kings Lynn & West Norfolk respectively for the purpose of meeting such expenditure.

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

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

C.1076 Date of next Meeting

The Chair reported that several Commissioners had requested an inspection of Glenhouse. Mr M Heading suggested that the RSPB have a meeting room at Welches Dam, and the Commissioners could convene there. Mr Roberts offered to take the Commissioners on a tour of the EA's Welches Dam pumping station, which was accepted.

RESOLVED

That the next meeting be held on Wednesday 20th May commencing with an inspection of the Welches Dam Pumping Station.

That the Environment Officer be invited to attend the next meeting.

C.1077 Any Other Business

Mr Marks reported that he has been trying to arrange an open inspection of the AD plant in Manea and asked if the Commissioners would support this event by opening up the Old Pumping Station to visitors, to publicise the work of the Commissioners. The Commissioners agreed that the Chair and Mr M Heading would liaise with Mr Marks to organise a suitable time and date.

With no other items raised, the meeting closed at 1.10pm.

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Chair

…………………………..
Date