

MARCH FIFTH DISTRICT DRAINAGE COMMISSIONERS

At a Meeting of the March Fifth District Drainage Commissioners
Held at the Middle Level Offices, March on Wednesday 15th April 2026.

PRESENT

Tony Hopkin (Chair)	Paul Hayes
Andrew Payne (V-Chair)	Dee Laws
Emma Alterton	Jack Lilley
Tony Alterton	Alex Miscandlon
Paul Beeton	Tim Taylor
Lucie Foice-Beard	Andrew Woollard
Jan French	

The Lead Clerk Mrs Ruth Martin representing the Clerk along with Mr Morgan Lakey representing the Consulting Engineer were in attendance.

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Geoff Hopkin.

C.1292 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 Board.

Mrs French and Mrs Laws declared an interest in Planning issues as Fenland District Council Planning Committee members.

The Chair declared an interest as District Officer in the District Officer's Fee.

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

C.1293 Confirmation of Minutes

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

RESOLVED

That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Board held on the 16th April 2025 are recorded correctly and that they be confirmed and signed.

C.1294 Constitution & Membership

Mrs Martin advised that there are currently no vacancies on the Board.

It was noted that Mr Taylor was attending the meeting in place of Stuart Harris who had been removed from the Board by Fenland District Council, although formal notification had not been received of this change. It was agreed that Member Services should be contacted by Gemma Ashby at MLC to formalise the arrangement.

Training

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

RESOLVED

That Confirmation of Mr Taylors appointment be sought from Member Services.

C.1295 Confidential Items Subject to Legal Privilege

This item is excluded under S1(2) Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960.

C.1296 Clerk's Report

Mrs Martin asked that the Clerk's Report be taken as read.

Policy Reviews

Mrs Martin asked the Board to consider delegating the approval of new and updated policies to the Clerk, as there are several polices that need to be developed and published. The Board agreed to this proposal.

Waste Exemptions

Mr Lakey explained that over the next 12 months it is intended to move each IDB towards having their own suite of waste exemptions, rather than continuing with the current situation where one suite of exemptions covers MLC and all Boards.

The Chair and Mr Lakey advised the Board that last summer the drain in Foxglove Way was cleaned, and Mr Hayes had noted that the material removed contained a large amount of plastic waste. He asked if there was anything that could done in future to remove plastic waste material before the arisings are spread. Mr Lakey advised that the drain could be litter picked first by hand before slubbing, and the Chair added that this would be considered next time maintenance is carried out.

IDB1 (Annual Reporting to Defra)

Mr Lakey outlined the extra information that is being reported on the IDB1 return and the challenges that this is causing. This includes additional information relating to drain maintenance which Mr Lakey is compiling for this Board with support from the District Officer. He added that Defra have been asked to provide more information on why this level of detail is necessary.

RESOLVED

That the Clerks Report is noted.

That the Board delegates the approval and publication of new and/or updated policies to the Clerk.

Environment Officers Report

Mr Lakey highlighted a change in approach to the Environment Officer's reporting. There will now be newsletters developed and circulated to Members of all MLC administered IDBs with interesting and generic updates. An annual report for each IDB will now be specific to that Board and focussed on their Key Environmental Compliance Indicators as seen in the paper for this Board Meeting.

He added that the Board's Biodiversity Action Plan has been compiled and that a meeting is scheduled with the Chair as the Board's Environment lead the following week. He referred to the KPIs shown in the report and that it was the intention to keep all of these in the 'green' area of the Red/Amber/Green rating. Some of these items relate back directly to the Board. The flail mowing hierarchy identifies drains for maintenance, with some drains not needing to be managed so intensely, which promotes biodiversity.

Mr Lakey went on to explain the proposal to set a Biodiversity Budget, which is for the Board to use to enhance biodiversity in the District, giving the example of using the funds to replace existing owl boxes. This fund will be ringfenced to the Board. Mr Beeton added that he has an owl box on his land and Mr Lakey asked that Board members advise him of any other locations they have owl or bat boxes, or sightings of other species such as mink or water vole, as this can be added to the Biodiversity Plan for the District. He added that these records help with funding applications.

The Board agreed that a budget of £100 would be set aside for spending on enhancing biodiversity in the District.

RESOLVED

That a £100 fund for Biodiversity to be set aside.

C.1297 Chairmans Report

The Chair advised that the items he had intended to bring up had already been covered, and so he had nothing further to report.

C.1298 Consulting Engineers' Reports

Mrs Martin referred to the Consulting Engineers' report, asking that it be taken as read.

Enforcement and Compliance

Mrs Martin advised the Board of the progress of the new Enforcement and Compliance Officers and asked the Board to authorise the Chair and Vice Chair to take decisions on enforcement action on behalf of the Board. This was agreed by the Board.

System Study

As reflected in the Report, the Board had previously identified a System Study on the FCERM investment programme, but the EA have indicated that this allocation has been deferred. The Board were asked if they wanted to progress with the System Study or to revise the project to an asset refurbishment project. The Board felt that with other potential issues being faced by the Board that they would not progress the Study and defer revising the project.

However, the Board indicated that they wish to further develop investment plans and asked the Consulting Engineer to progress this.

The Board discussed making further contributions towards project costs to aid funding prioritisation. The Chair asked the Board to consider where they will be in 2030, being mindful of the ongoing discussions around amalgamation. Ms Alterton said that the Board needs to understand the direction of travel towards amalgamation, and that there is no burning need for the Board to put plans in place. Mr Lakey referred the Board to the Mechanical and Electrical Report and the works identified therein. He added that there could be GiA funding available in 2027/28 which the Board should consider. Ms Alterton responded that there is a lot happening for the Board at present and that with no indication of costs it is difficult to make decisions on potential funding contributions. However, the Board did agree that they would be interested in allocating funds in order to help secure further funding but that this would be dependent on the figures required.

Operations Report

Mr Lakey took the Board through his report, detailing the drain works completed the previous year. He advised that Harrison Contracting are available to carry out the Board's flail mowing, and he will continue to work with the EA on the issues identified at Foxglove Way.

Mr Lakey has reviewed the District with the Chairman, and they consider that the drains are in a good condition. The proposed works and costings for this year's drain works were reviewed and agreed by the Board. Mr Lakey advised that there is some invasive weed near to North Creek Pumping Station that he would like to spray off and remove, but generally the system is looking good.

The Board thanked Mr Lakey for his report.

Mechanical & Electrical

The Board considered the Mechanical & Electrical report, with Mr Lakey explaining that the corroded bolts shown in the report were an example of what could happen when regular maintenance is not carried out. The Board noted the recommendations of the M&E Engineer but did not resolve to carry out any works at this time.

The Board spent some time considering the summer and winter levels within the drains, noting that reactive pumping can help with levels. The Chair added that the pumps work according to the set levels and so further amendments may not be necessary. Mr Lakey added that the differential between summer and winter levels is not too big and so any changes may not be significantly beneficial.

Mr Hayes asked if it would be possible to increase the flow into the drains near to his property. The Chair and Mr Lakey agreed to meet with Mr Hayes to discuss potential solutions.

RESOLVED

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

That development investment plans are progressed.

The Chair and Mr Lakey to meet with Mr Hayes to review water levels.

C.1299 Health & Safety

Mrs Martin gave an overview of the report and the recommendations that the Board consider showing how it could strengthen its approach to health and safety. The Board were asked to take note of their Health and Safety accountabilities and reminded that they cannot delegate their responsibilities.

The Chair and Mr Beeton advised that they had attended an NFU Safety Brief, and the Board confirmed that the Chair is the Board's Health and Safety lead.

Mr Beeton suggested that MLC hold Health and Safety Training sessions and provide all Boards the option to attend. Ms Alerton added that a further benefit of amalgamating Boards would be that not so many Board representatives would need to be trained across all Boards. The Chair would be happy to invest in Board member training but would need to be satisfied that the Board would see benefit from that training with membership commitments from the trainees. The Board would also be happy to explore sourcing services from other providers such as MLC provided the fees are competitive.

The Board considered the Health and Safety Report provided by AW Safety Ltd and noted the content. The Chair advised that the new insurance certificate had been received and would be posted in the Pump Houses.

RESOLVED

That the report is noted.

C.1300 District Officer's Report

The Chair gave a verbal report, advising that all items had been covered in the Operational Services report and that he had nothing further to add.

C.1301 Governance

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

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

RESOLVED

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

The Board noted the continued appointment of Whittings as Internal Auditor.

Consideration of potential litigation, liabilities, commitments.

Mrs Martin reported that as part of the Annual Governance review the Board 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 Board that would need to be included within the accounting statements for the financial year ended 31st March 2025.

Risk Management Strategy and Internal Controls

The Board did not highlight any specific risks or issues not covered within the Board's 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 Board agreed that they were content with the valuation.

RESOLVED

That the valuation is acceptable

IDB1 (Annual Report to Defra)

RESOLVED

That the Board note the submission of the IDB1 to Defra.

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.

Transparency Code for Smaller Authorities

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

RESOLVED

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

C.1302 Finance Report – Looking Back

Finance officer's review and key messages

The Board considered and noted the key finance messages of the Responsible Finance Officer.

Payments for 2025

The Payments were reviewed and accepted.

RESOLVED

The accounts for 2025/26 and accounting statements are approved and the Chairman is authorised to sign the Annual Return.

C.1303 Finance Report – Looking ForwardFinance officer's review and key messages

The Board considered and noted the key finance messages of the Responsible Finance Officer.

Fees & RemunerationDistrict Officers Fees

The Chair as District Officer declared an interest in this item and the Vice Chair took the Chair.

The Board considered the District Officers fee allowance and the Vice Chair proposed that it be increased by 5.25% to £1,099. This was agreed unanimously.

RESOLVED

That the Board agree that the sum of £1,099 be allowed for the District Officer duties for 2026/2027.

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 £2,337.45.

RESOLVED

That the Precept is paid in full.

Estimates & Rate Requirements for 2026/27.Budget

The Board reviewed the proposed budget as recommended by their Responsible Finance Officer.

RESOLVED

That the budget is agreed.

Rate Requirement for 2026/27

Mrs Martin advised that the budget indicated that a rate of 8.3p in the £ would need to be set, an increase from the rate of 7.4p set in 2025/26.

The Chair said that he would like to see the rate stay the same, reflecting on the difficulties the agricultural sector is facing at present. Ms Alterton said that the figures do not take into account the extremes in fuel costs currently being seen and would therefore prefer not to underrate. She asked the Board if they should keep the rate the same, knowing that they are underrating, or if they should increase the rate at least a little. The Chair said that farmers are feeling the pinch, and that the Board should support them in managing the expected volatility of the coming months. Ms Alterton asked if, by rating at 7.4p, the Board could fund the

£10-12k that would not be received through the rates. It was noted that the Board had sufficient balances to withstand the reduction in income. With this in mind, Mrs French suggested that the rate stay the same and proposed a rate of 7.4p in the £. This was seconded by Mrs Laws and agreed unanimously.

The Chair concluded that although this was not necessarily the right rate to set, the Board need to manage the position. Mr Alterton suggested that the Board could cut back on maintenance, if necessary, particularly as it had already been reported that the Board's drains were in a good position.

RESOLVED

- i) That the estimates be approved.
- ii) That a total sum of £36,177 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 £3,926 and £32,251 respectively.
- iv) That a rate of 7.4p in the £ be laid and assessed on Agricultural hereditaments in the District.
- v) That a Special Levy of £32,251 be made and issued to Fenland District Council for the purpose of meeting such expenditure.
- vi) That the seal of the Board be affixed to the record of drainage rates and special levies 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.1304 Date of next Meeting

RESOLVED

The next meeting of the Board be held on Wednesday 14th April 2027 at 7pm at the Middle Level Offices.

C.1305 Any Other Business

The Vice Chair asked if the position of land registration in relation to the Pumping Station at South Creek could be established. It was agreed that the Lead Clerk would investigate and report back to the Chair and Vice Chair.

With no other business raised the Chair closed the meeting at 8.30pm.