

MARCH WEST & WHITE FEN INTERNAL DRAINAGE BOARD

At a Meeting of the March West & White Fen IDB
Held at the Middle Level Offices, Wednesday 6th April 2026 at 10AM.

PRESENT

Michael Mottram (Chair)
Daniel West (Vice-Chair)
Emma Alterton
Tony Alterton
Jonathan Brown
Jan French
David Fountain

Henry Kisby
Dee Laws
Alex Miscandlon
Daniel West
Hugh Whittome
Andrew Woollard

Mr Paul Burrows, the Clerk, was also in attendance and was Mr Morgan Lakey representing the Consulting Engineer. The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from J Neal and N Bates,

B.349 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.

- i) Messrs Brown, Whittome, Miscandlon and French declared an interest in all matters concerning the Middle Level Commissioners as members of the Middle level Board.
- ii) Messrs Mottram and Whittome declared an interest in the matter relating to pump attendants.
- iii) Councillor French and Laws declared an interest in all planning matters as a member of Fenland District Council's Planning Committee

B.350 Confirmation of Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 6th May 2025 were reviewed and T Alterton's apologies for absence should have been recorded. Other than this they were confirmed as a true record and no Matters Arising were identified.

RESOLVED

That the Minutes of the Meeting held on the 6th May 2025 are recorded correctly and that they be confirmed and signed.

B.351 Constitution & Membership

The Chair reported that Mr D West, the Vice Chairman, wished to step down from his position and also resign from the Board following this meeting and that Ms E Alterton also intended to step down following the

meeting. He thanked them both for this input and service on behalf of the Board. He added that technically they would both be in position until the elections later this year. He asked the Board to consider who may step forward as Vice Chair and also fill the two vacancies assuming others do not come forward via election.

Mr Burrows shared the register of electors and highlighted that elections will take place later this year. He added that members will receive a notice during July/August and are requested to return their slip as soon as possible as terms end on 31st October 2026. He added that in light of the Vice Chairman resigning it would be prudent to reaffirm the Chairmanship appointment. Mr H Whittome proposed Mr M Mottram continue as Chair, and this was seconded by Mr D Fountain and carried unanimously.

RESOLVED

That the register of electors be approved for use in the upcoming elections.

Mr M Mottram is re-appointed as Chairman

POST MEETING NOTE: On behalf of the board, the Chairman has identified and co-opted Mr Toby Sweet and Mr Guy Burton as elected members of the Board to replace Ms E Alerton and Mr D West. It is expected that their membership will be reaffirmed via the elections later in 2026. The Chairman has also discussed the vacant Vice Chairman role with Mr Chris White who has agreed to take on the role and will be an asset to the Board. The Board can re-affirm this appointment at their Spring 2027 meeting.

B.352 Clerk's Report

Mr Burrows provided an overview of his report highlighting in particular the Policy Review, Waste Exemptions and IDB1 items. He added that the Compliance & Enforcement Policy is now finalised and has been published and gave outlined the Standing Advice that now supports MLC and IDB regulation, one focused on system capacity and one on Byelaw strips.

The Chair asked about IDB Precept and Mr Burrows referred to the information the Environment Agency had produced outlined where the funds were invested and that this accompanied the invoice. He added that there is a journey of improved transparency that we are supportive of along with IDBs across the Gt Ouse catchment.

Mr H Whittome asked what members felt about the IDB governance future within the Middle Level, referring to the working group session the following day. The Board has four members who are part of the Working Group (H Whittome, J Brown, M Mottram & E Alerton). He asked what members thought about potentially being aligned with Whittlesey & District IDB who are administered and supported not by MLC. Discussion followed and the general view was that it is an important factor to consider as plans evolve.

RESOLVED

That the Clerk's Report is noted.

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

B.353 Environment Officer's Report

Mr Burrows 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.

Mr H Whittome asked if swift boxes could be erected at Stafford's Bridge as well as on the Chairman's building as there is also sufficient height to ensure they are successful. This was supported. Ms D Laws mentioned

that FDC planning are looking within their Local Plan for bee and swift bricks as standard. Mr M Lakey said there is a cross reference between IDB BAPs and the Local Plan to ensure suitable alignment.

Mr C White asked whether IDBs are eligible for biodiversity funding under the same schemes as farmers. Mr M Lakey advised not as they aren't generally a landowner adding that there are other funding sources that open up for peat management for example that IDBs can be eligible for.

The Chairman asked about culverting at point 106. Mr M Lakey reminded the Board that they have had a no culverting policy for about the last 20-years and to install a new culvert equates to habitat loss that would need to be off-set by opening up or enhancing elsewhere within the district.

RESOLVED

That the Environment Officer's Report is noted.

The Biodiversity Action Plan is approved.

A biodiversity budget of £250 was set for swift boxes and a barn owl box.

B.354 Consulting Engineers' Reports

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

Enforcement and Compliance

Mr Burrows reported that the new Enforcement and Compliance Officers have had success and are building the caseload. He added that Board members are important eyes and ears on the ground and asked that they report any questionable activity that is relevant to IDB and MLC operations and interests. The Board were asked to authorise the Chair and Vice Chair to take decisions on enforcement action on behalf of the Board, having taken advice from MLC officers. They will engage with other Board Members as they see appropriate and determine whether a Special Meeting of the Board is needed on a risk and complexity basis. Mr J Brown added that it is important to empower staff to act on behalf of the Board.

Operations

Mr M Lakey gave an overview of his paper highlighting the works delivered under the IDB Fund Tranche 2b and that the health & safety issues highlighted within the inspection have been addressed.

Mr H Whittome reflected on the bank works funded by grant under Tranche 2a and the water vole mitigation that meant only 150m of bank could be addressed. He had concerns that this leaves a stepped channel on a main drain which is not ideal from a pumping perspective and risks undoing the works benefit if longer lengths cannot be addressed. Mr M Lakey added that longer length can be tackled if well planned and there is a permanent water vole displacement. Mr P Burrows asked whether Mr M Lakey and Ms S Lloyd could outline what permanent displacement would look like and costs for this Board to help inform future plans.

Mr J Brown raised an observation on flail mowing and given the dry weather growth that whilst it was a good job overall there are large areas of cut reeds and bull rushes that simply fall back into the channel and create a blockage. He asked whether some form of harvester would be suitable to ensure cut vegetation is spread beyond the immediate bank top. Mr C White added that the mowing getting later does not help but asked whether we need to cut all the way down to the bottom of the bank. Mr M Lakey replied that this was something MLC were considering for their operations and added that the mowing timing is influenced by nesting birds. Mr H Whittome added that there is no reason to cut to the bottom of the banks especially on the larger drains, reflecting that some vegetation provides for bank stability. The Chairman suggested that he and Mr M Lakey identify some sections to trial less cutting. This was supported by the Board.

M&E and capital works

The Board reviewed the paper from Mr D Bantoft the MLC Head of M&E. The Chairman advised that the Staffurths pump and gearbox overhaul had been factored into the 2026/27 budget to be reviewed later in the meeting. He added that in his view as pump attendant that the control panels at West Fen and Beggars bridge would be okay for this coming winter and ought to be planned for replacement in 2027/28.

The Board agreed with the principle that they needed an Investment Plan as indicated by the Consulting Engineer but would value understanding what the cost is to develop one and what is included therein.

Mr P Burrows asked about electricity meter readings and the Chairman mentioned provision of readings by attendants is improving but not where it needs to be. He added that we are paying lots of money out and then getting credit back which is far from ideal. The Board did not want the MLC to take readings at cost.

RESOLVED

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

To overhaul the pump and gearbox at Staffurths.

To plan for the replacement of control panels at West Fen and Beggars Bridge in 2027/28 and delegate the decision to the Chairman who will make the decision in January 2027 to enable commissioning and earlier installation.

To not approve that the MLC take electricity meter readings.

B.355 Health & Safety

Mr Burrows gave an overview of his report and the recommendations that the Board consider how it could strengthen its approach to health & safety. He added that MLC intended to develop a H&S service provision offer that would be discuss at the Chairman's meeting in December 2026 for potential roll-out from August 2027. The Board noted the paper and reaffirmed that the Chairman is the Board's H&S lead.

B.356 Governance

Mr Burrows asked the Board to consider the Governance report and that its content be noted.

RESOLVEDCompletion of the Annual Return – 2024/2025

- i) The Board 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 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.

Risk Management Strategy and Internal Controls

The Board did not highlight any specific risks or issues not covered within their 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.

The Board wish to continue to index link their pumping station valuations for insurance purposes.

Exercise of Public Rights

Mr Burrows 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.

Mr Burrows 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. It was 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.

IDB1 and Annual Governance Statement

The Board noted the IDB1 return for 2024/25 submitted on their behalf.

The Board noted and approved the submission of their Annual Governance Statement for 2025/26 authorising the Chairman and Clerk to sign the statement.

B.357 Finance Report – Looking BackFinance officer's review and key messages

The Board noted the position as laid out by their Responsible Finance Officer and were grateful for the work undertaken by MLC to secure grant and deliver works under the IDB Fund Tranche 2b. Ms E Alerton that not all pump attendants had been paid and advised prompter invoicing is necessary to ensure payments are made and accounted for within the financial year. Mr C White observed that there were payments to three different energy providers. Mr P Burrows advised this was correct because of the legacy issues with Corona Energy and then the handover to EDF and then British Gas.

RESOLVED

The Payments were reviewed and accepted.

Accounts for 2025/26 were reviewed and approved with the Chairman authorised to sign the AGAR.

B. 358 Finance Report – Looking Forward

The Board noted the position as laid out by their Responsible Finance Officer.

Fees & RemunerationRESOLVED

That the Pump Attendants fees be increased by 5.25% from £1,182 to £1,244

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 £17,724.99

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. The Chairman outlined that he had been in discussion with Mr A Wool to derive the budget and whilst there was 20% increase factored in for electricity cost increases, he feels that given the Middle East war and the timing of our contract renewal there is risk here. He also reminded the Board of the scale of impact from the 2023/24 wet year and Ukraine war energy cost spikes.

Mr H Whittome suggested that it would be more appropriate if the Improvement works were funded from the soon to be rationalised reserves for plant refurbishment with the 2025/26 c£32k underspend being moved from the general fund into this reserve for this purpose. He suggested that the rate proposal not be adjusted and the c£8k for these works that was also to be rated be added to the reserves and then is available for allocation to the control panel replacements in 2027/28.

Mr J Brown proposed approval of the budget with the adjustments outlined by Mr H Whittome. This was supported unanimously.

Rate Requirement for 2026/27

In order to raise the budget, Mr Burrows highlighted that the rate would need to be set at 18.5p and that this was a reduction from the 19p raised in 2025/26.

The Chairman added that he felt it was the responsible thing to do to lower rates given the Board's relatively good financial health. He added that if there is a wet winter and continued energy cost increases then there is a risk that next year the rate would need to increase. The Board acknowledged this risk and congratulated the Chairman on prudent management of the Board's finances. Mr M Lakey added that the Board's forward planning had enabled the MLC to maximise the grant funding opportunity when it came along, and this has been a key contributory factor in the Board's current financial position.

Mr J Brown proposed a rate of 18.5p and this was seconded by Mr D Fountain and carried unanimously.

RESOLVED

- i) That the estimates be approved.
- ii) That a total sum of £182,000 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 £127,149 and £54,851.
- iv) That a rate of 18.5p in the £ be laid and assessed on Agricultural hereditaments in the District.
- v) That Special Levies of £54,851 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.

B.359 Date of next Meeting

It was noted that next year's meeting will clash with local elections to be held the following day.

RESOLVED

The next full meeting of the Board is on 5th May 2027 at the Middle Level Offices, 10:00am start.

B.360 Any Other Business

None raised

The meeting closed at 12:05pm.

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Chair

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Date