

MARCH THIRD DISTRICT DRAINAGE COMMISSIONERS

At a Meeting of the March Third District Drainage Commissioners
Held at the Middle Level Offices, March on Thursday 7th May 2026.

PRESENT

Martyn Wilkinson (Chair)
Michael Deptford (Vice-Chair)
Andrew Dunham
Jan French
Alex Miscandlon

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.

B.1264 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from C Marks, J Pollington and T Taylor

B.1265 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 declared an interest in Planning issues as a Fenland District Council Planning Committee member.

Mr Miscandlon declared an interest as a Middle Level Commissioners Board Member.

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

Mr M Deptford declared an interest as a tenant of the Boards land at Pillards Corner.

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

B.1266 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 21st May 2025 are recorded correctly and that they be confirmed and signed.

B.1267 Constitution & Membership

Mrs Martin advised that there is currently one vacancy on the Board.

Mr Deptford suggested that he could ask his son to join the Board, but the Chair advised that he had already had interest in joining the Board from Mr Mottram. It was agreed that the Chair would speak to Mr Mottram to establish if he would like to join the Board, with Mr Deptford agreeing to ask his son if Mr Mottram decided against becoming a Board member.

Training

Board members were reminded that Board training is reported on the IDB1 form and asked to advise the Clerk of any training completed or required. The Board had a long discussion on Health and Safety training and established that at present no further training needs were identified, but that the Board would be interested in any training that MLC provided in the future.

Governance

Mrs Martin advised the Board that as a result of the land owned by the Board at Pillards Corner, the Board were eligible to declare as a Middle Level Commissioner. The Board agreed that they would like to take up this opportunity and would declare as a Commissioner. Mrs French advised that she would like to represent the Board at the Middle Level Commissioners meetings.

RESOLVED

The Board will declare as a Middle Level Commissioner with Mrs French being their representative.

B.1268 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 policies that need to be developed and published. The Board agreed to this proposal.

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.

IDB Funding

Mrs Martin advised the Board of the revised approach to funding along with the changes to FCERM funding. The Board noted the changes.

RESOLVED

That the Clerks Report is noted.

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

B.1269 Environment Officers Report

Mr Lakey highlighted a change in approach to the Environment Officer's reporting, and the new Key Environmental Compliance Indicators as seen in the report.

He added that the Board's Biodiversity Action Plan has been compiled and reviewed by the Chair as the Board's Environment Lead. The Board have been invited to review the Action Plan prior to the meeting, and Mr Lakey asked the Board if they were happy to approve the updated Action Plan. The Board approved the updated Biodiversity Action Plan.

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. Given the potential for the Board to develop the use of their land at Pillards Corner, it was suggested that £500 be ringfenced to contribute to an ecological survey of Pillards Corner. Mr Lakey added that this would also be reported on the IDB1. He added that the land could be suitable for BNG development should the Solar Farm project not progress, and that the survey would give a benchmark of the drain condition. The Board agreed to set a budget of £500.

The Board were also asked to consider setting a requirement for land rental renewals to have an uncultivated margin of a minimum of 4m from the top of the bank. The Chair suggested that a letter could be sent to all tenants to ask for a 4m margin of grassland to be established, and that their rental could be decreased to reflect this. However, with the potential for the Solar Farm to take on the land, it was agreed not to progress this at present, but should the Solar Farm go forward, there would be a requirement for the grassland to be established.

Waste Exemptions

Mr Lakey reported that a review of Environmental and Waste Permits are planned to be undertaken with the Chair and Vice Chair in the coming months. He explained that 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.

RESOLVED

That a £500 fund for Biodiversity to be set aside to be used for ecological surveys at Pillards Corner.

B.1270 Chairmans Report

The Chair gave a short verbal report. He reported that there was nothing to update the Board on regarding the Solar Farm, and that as there has been no progress on this item the Board need to consider the reletting of the land that is currently tenanted by Mr Hills, which is due to end in October.

The Board considered it they should try to let the land on a one-year tenancy agreement, and if it should be offered to existing tenants. After some discussion it was decided that the Board would like to let the land on a 3-year agreement, and that this should be managed through Maxey Grounds. The agreement will need a clause relating to the Solar Farm and also include a 'no maize' clause.

RESOLVED

That the land currently tenanted by Mr Hills be relet on a 3-year agreement, Maxey Grounds to be engaged to advertise the land and arrange the agreement.

B.1271 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.

New FCERM Grant Funding Guidance

The Board agreed that they would consider submitting projects for inclusion in the FCERM investment programme, and that they would like to liaise with the Consulting Engineer to determine project suitability and timescales. The Board understood that they may need to make a contribution towards project costs.

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

Operations Report

Mr Lakey took the Board through his report, detailing the drain works completed the previous year. He advised that funding from the Defra IDB funding packages have enabled the Board to carry out some access improvements at the pumping station.

Mr Lakey reported on the condition of the Boards drains and advised that M & C Agri Services are available to carry out the Board's flail mowing. He has reviewed the District with the Chairman and they consider that the drains are in a good condition.

Mr Lakey advised that the Cannon Kirk system is currently full of reeds, and the MLC Enforcement Officers have been making contact with the developers to resolve this. He reported on the issues with the Pump Track in West End Park and this is also being dealt with by the Enforcement Officers. They have been discussing this with a representative of Fenland District Council, and currently it is proposed to remove some of the ramped area in order to increase the Board's maintenance strip to 8m, which is a workable size. However, the Pump Track still remains unconsented. Mrs French asked if the Enforcement Officers could contact her so she can try to move things forward within FDC, in her role as Portfolio Holder for Parks and Open Spaces.

The proposed works and costings for this year's drain works were reviewed and agreed by the Board. The Chair warned the Board that although costings had been reported here, the price may change due to the current instability in fuel prices. A certain amount of this has been taken into account when setting the budget, but there is a risk that fuel costs may increase further.

Mr Lakey advised that some Boards are only cutting one side of banks in order to reduce costs, but this has an added benefit in reducing the likelihood of bank slips. Leaving vegetation at the bottom of the banks has also helped to improve water quality, which can help to reduce cott growth, an issue that this Board has in some reaches. The Board noted Mr Lakey's advice.

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.

Mr Lakey reported that the Storm Recovery Fund had funded the replacement of the Pumps Control Panel and the Weedscreen controller replacement, at no cost to the Board. The M&E engineer has advised the Board that the pumps now require overhaul or replacement, but that the pumps were suitable for overhaul and this would be at an estimated cost of £40k per pump. Mr Deptford asked what a pump overhaul would entail, and Mr Lakey was able to describe in detail the steps that would be taken. He suggested that the Board would overhaul one pump at a time (taking out both pumps at the same time would be a significant risk),

refurbishing pump one in Summer 2026, and then pump two either later in 2026, or in summer 2027. Timing would depend upon contractor availability and lead times for parts.

The Board agreed to go ahead with the refurbishment of both pumps.

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.

That the Board wish to submit projects for inclusion in the FCERM Investment Programme (from July 2026), particularly the refurbishment/replacement of pumps. However, the Board agree to progress the refurbishment of the pumps as soon as practical and will fund this from the Development Fund.

B.1272 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 Board were advised that MLC are planning to terminate their agreement with AW Safety (formerly Cope) in August 2026, but that the Boards agreement would continue until August 2027, after which time alternative service providers would be considered. It is MLCs intention to develop a service provision which they would offer to IDBs, and Mrs Martin asked the Board if they would consider such a provision. The Board agreed that they would, but this would be dependent on the services being cost effective.

The Board also noted their contentment to remain with AW Safety until the contract termination next year. The Board would be contacting AW Safety to ask them to write a risk assessment for operating the inlet.

The Board then considered the Health and Safety Report provided by AW Safety Ltd and noted the content.

RESOLVED

That the report is noted.

B.1273 District Officer's Report

The District Officer gave a verbal report, adding to items that had already been reported. He concluded that the Board have returned to a normal year's pumping, and that the pumps were working well considering their age.

B.1274 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.

Annual Governance StatementRESOLVED

That the Chairman be authorised to sign the Annual Governance Statement on behalf of the Board for the financial year ended 31st March 2026.

B.1275 Finance Report – Looking BackFinance 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.

Highland Water Contributions

The Board noted the Highland Water contributions.

Annual Accounts and Finance Papers 2025/2026

The Board considered and approved the Annual accounts and Finance Papers for the year ended 31st March 2026, as required in the Audit regulations.

RESOLVED

That the Chairman be authorised to sign the Annual Return, on behalf of the Board for the financial year ended 31st March 2026.

B.1276 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.

The Board considered the District Officers fee allowance and Mr Miscandlon proposed that it be increased by 5.25% to £2,068.00. This was agreed unanimously.

RESOLVED

That the Board agree that the sum of £2,068.00 be allowed for the District Officer duties for 2026/2027.

Rental of Land at Pillards Corner

Mrs Martin advised that notice of rent review had been issued to all tenants. The Chair proposed that, despite previous resolutions, the rental values are not changed due to the current economic climate. This was agreed by the Board. The Lead Clerk was asked to write to the tenants to advise of this decision.

RESOLVED

That the rental values are not changed, and this decision is conveyed to the tenants by letter.

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 £2,093,29.

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 2.0p in the £ would need to be set, which is no change to the rate of 2.0p set in 2025/26.

The Chair said that he would like to see the rate stay the same, reflecting on the difficulties the agricultural industry is facing at present. This was agreed unanimously by the Board.

The Board noted from the Finance Reports that £5k was still showing as an Option Agreement fund and asked that this be moved to the Development Fund. They also agreed that the earlier agreed works to refurbish the pumps would be funded from the Development Fund.

RESOLVED

- i) That the estimates be approved.
- ii) That a total sum of £10,738 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 £1,036 and £9,702 respectively.
- iv) That a rate of 2.0p in the £ be laid and assessed on Agricultural hereditaments in the District.
- v) That a Special Levy of £9,702 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.1277 Date of next Meeting

RESOLVED

The next meeting of the Board be held on Thursday 6th May 2027 at 6pm at the Middle Level Offices.

B.1278 Any Other Business

With no other business raised the Chair closed the meeting at 8.40pm.

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Chair

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Date