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 20th May 2026.

PRESENT

John Heading (Chair)
Robert Sears (Vice Chair)
Neil Cook
Christopher Crofts
James Hawes
Marc Heading
Alison Morris

Mrs Ruth Martin (Lead Clerk) representing the Clerk was in attendance.

Welcome and Apologies

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Apologies for absence were received from J Carney, M Fairey, R Gladwin, W Gladwin, C Sears and V Walker

The Commissioners are referred to as Board throughout the minutes.

C.1078 Declarations of Interest

The Chair 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 Commissioner.

Mr C Crofts, Ms A Morris and Mr M Heading declared interests (as members of the Middle Level Board) in any matters concerning the Middle Level Commissioners

Mr C Crofts declared interests (as members of Upwell IDB) in any matters concerning Upwell IDB

C.1079 Minutes of last meeting and matters arising

There were no matters arising and the Minutes of the Last Meeting were agreed.

RESOLVED

> That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Commissioners held on the 28th January 2026 are recorded correctly and that they be confirmed and signed.

C.1080 Constitution & Membership

Vacancies and Elections

Mrs Martin advised that there are currently two vacancies on the Board, but the Chair added that he did not think it essential to appoint to the vacancies. He thanked everyone for their support, noting that he joined the Board in 1961. Referring to item in the report regarding the tenure of the Chair, the Chair advised that he would stand aside should the Board wish him to. Ms Morris countered this, commenting that having a Chair in place for so long is not unusual, and that his knowledge is appreciated. She supported his continuing in office. The Chair accepted that few people had the depth of knowledge that he has but asked the Board if they were happy that they had the future governance of the Board in line he would be pleased to continue. Commenting on the Government guidance of a 10-year maximum tenure, Mr Marks thought that this was a relatively short period of time. He added that if someone is doing a good job and there in no one else who wants to take the role on, there is no reason to change. As long as we are confident, we have the next generation of Commissioners coming through, we should be satisfied with the position. The Vice Chair agreed, adding that whilst the Board have their current Chair, they should continue to look at who will take over when the time is right. Ms Morris agreed, adding that the Board need to have a 'Vice Chair in waiting'. The Chair commented that there is a lot to be said for local knowledge and experience. He does not disagree with the moves toward amalgamation. The Board have noted the guidance and will encourage newer Commissioners to become involved. Ms Morris thought that many Drainage Boards are managed in the same way, but that there may be some Boards that need to consider progression in more detail. The Chair said that he had tried to run the Board to the highest standards with the best of support. The Board discussed the vacancies, and Ms Morris asked if there was an area of the district that is not represented on the Board. The Chair observed that Cambridgeshire County Council own a large area of land but are not represented as landowners. Mr Marks reminded the Board that the County Council will dissolve with the creation of the Unitary Authorities. The Vice Chair suggested that the Board discuss the issue of membership further at the January meeting of the Board, and the Chair added that the Board need to have enough able people who are keen on the job. Amalgamation means it is not worth having more Board members. Mr Cook added that if amalgamation does happen, there will be more Chair's in post than will be needed anyway.

C.1081 Clerk's Report

The Chair asked that the Clerks Report be taken as read, and reviewed elements of the report.

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 Chair said that he would prefer that he and the Vice Chair review any policies before publication.

RESOLVED

> That the Clerks Report is noted.
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> That the Board delegates the approval and publication of new and/or updated policies to the Clerk in conjunction with the Chair and Vice Chair.

C.1082 Environment Officers' Report

Mrs Martin circulated printed copies of the report, and the Chair advised that he had met with the Environment Officer the previous week. He reported that the paper gave a simplified review of what had been discussed and he had agreed to what has been proposed in the report. The Board noted the Biodiversity Action Plan as referred to in the report, but as they had not had chance to review it, agreed that this would be considered at the January meeting. The Chair thought that the Board should be pleased to have the knowledge of Ms Lloyd, the Environment Officer, but noted that this comes at a cost that is not just financial.

The Board discussed the purchase of a swift box as detailed in the report. Mr Marks advised that Manea Parish Council have been working to develop a Community Orchard, and that they would be pleased to support the Commissioners Biodiversity commitment by hosting swift boxes. It was agreed that Manea Parish Council would purchase a swift box on behalf of the board and install in the orchard. This was agreed by the Board. As the Parish Council could purchase a swift box directly from the RSPB for £50, Mr Croft asked if the Board could be advised on how the figure in the Environment Report had been reached*

The Chair advised the Board of the iRecord app, asking that sightings are reported within the district.

RESOLVED

That the Environment Report be approved.

That a swift box be purchased by Manea Parish Council on behalf of the Board and installed at the Manea Community Orchard.

Post Meeting Note*
The £250 swift box will be made bespoke for the IDB to host a colony of swifts as advised by national swift experts. The price includes lure. Multiple RSPB boxes would be needed to be purchased and erected together to meet the BAP objective will not meet the BAP objective and installing it in the orchard is unlikely to be successful as it needs to be located approx. 6m above ground at the correct orientation.

C.1083 Consulting Engineers' Reports

The Board considered the report of the Consulting Engineer, and this was taken as read.

The Chair, referring to the report, noted his disappointment that the Board's long standing improvement plan had not been recognised. It was proposed some years ago that an alternative energy source be considered for the Glenhouse Pumping Station, with solar panels with battery being proposed. At present the pumps are diesel, being regularly serviced by the District Officer and checked by Dave Bantoft, MLCs Mechanical and Electrical Engineer. The remote location of the Pumping Station means that the cost of installing an electrical supply is substantial. Looking to the future, the Chair would like to consider HVO as an alternative, as it is simple to convert the engines, but the fuel is currently double the cost of diesel. The Environment Agency are using HVO at Welches Dam. The Chair pointed out that the pumps are aging and will need replacing in the next 20 years, so the Board need to get on with their plans. He is please that they may have predicted what would happen with grant funding and does not expect 100% funding to be available in future. He also reflected on the wording in the report, that the Board had 'only done regular servicing' implied they had not done enough. He observed that the pumps and weed screens are working well.

Ms Morris asked if the Chair was aware of any of the grant funding currently available in relation to peat initiatives, and if there was anything the Board could make use of. The Chair knew that there were grants available, but that the district was covered by the peatland investigations. Mr M Heading advised that he understood that the grant funding was available for water level management specifically targeted at holding water up for peat restoration purposes. The Chair added that the Board have a site where they manipulate water levels, and that some Boards receive funding, but this is for specific schemes. Ms Morris asked if there were anything in the District that the Board could receive funding for, and Mr M Heading reflected that some Boards have been able to take advantage of this. The Board asked if the Consulting Engineer could review any opportunities in the District that would satisfy the grant wording and make the appropriate applications.

The Board agreed to the proposals with the Consulting Engineers report and were happy to develop refurbishment plans.

Mechanical and Electrical Report

The Board reviewed the Mechanical and Electrical report and noted the content. The Board agreed to the replacement of the main contactor and overload unit on Pump 1 at Purls Bridge as detailed in the report.

The Board discussed at length the proposal to overhaul Pump 2 at Purls Bridge. The Board agreed in principle to the refurbishment of the pump, but Ms Morris voiced concern that the Board had not considered the benefits of replacement rather than refurbishment, and that they did not have enough information in front of them to make such a decision. She noted that other Boards had replaced aged pumps, but that the replacements were not as good as the pumps they had replaced. However, if the Board were going to the cost of removing the old pump, installation of a new pump would not be significantly more. The Board resolved that they agreed to the principle of refurbishing Pump 2, but that they would like more information in order to make a decision and asked that this be provided at the next meeting.

RESOLVED

That the reports be approved.

That an investment plan for asset refurbishment/replacement and grant funding is developed, and the recommendations of the Consulting Engineer are accepted.

That the Board wish to include the development of a refurbishment/replacement plan for Glenhouse for inclusion on the GiA programme

That the Board are happy to go ahead with the replacement of the main contactor and overload unit on Pump 1 at Purls Bridge

That the Board agree in principle to the refurbishment or replacement of Pump 2 at Purls Bridge

C.1084 Health & Safety

The Chair advised the Board that, in his position as the Boards' Health and Safety representative, that he meets with the H&S consultants on a minimum of an annual basis. He referred to the report received from AW Safety Management following their visit in January and reflected on the issues that had been identified. He advised that the fire extinguisher has been installed, and that the issues with the steps at Glenhouse Pumping Station have been acknowledged. It is intended that this will be reviewed further within the next year.

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 the Board agreed to consider such a provision dependent on cost.

The Board also noted their contentment to remain with AW Safety until the contract termination next year. They also asked to be advised should any further training be made available.

C.1085 District Superintendents Report

The Chair asked that the District Superintendents report be taken as read and thanked the District Superintendent for providing another detailed and informative report.

No questions were raised by the Board.

C.1086 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 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 Whitings 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.

Annual Governance Statement

RESOLVED

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

C.1087 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. The budget comparison was noted.

Payments for 2025

The Payments were reviewed and accepted.

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.

C.1088 Finance Report – Looking Forward

Finance officer's review and key messages

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

District Inspection

The Board moved on to the Environment Agency's Pumping Station at Welches Dam where they were met by Gary Roberts representing the EA. Gary gave the Board a tour of the station, explaining how the pumping station currently works and proposals for the future. He added that the station was last refurbished in 2010, with a design life to 2035 where it is expected that the next planned refurbishment of the station to cost £15-£20 million and will need to include fish friendly pumps.

The impact of the Fens Reservoir was discussed, including water quality and how the water in the Middle Level is too high in sulphates to be suitable for water treatment for potable water. The impact of legislative changes on water quality was also considered. The Ouse Washes are significant both nationally and internationally, and water quality is becoming more important which could result in issues in future with discharges.

The Water Level Management Plan (published 2025) includes assessing levels in the Manea & Welney district. Mr Hawes asked if planning permission were being sought today for the Welches Dam Pumping Station to be built, would it be granted despite pumping into a flood reservoir, as The Ouse Washes is considered to be one of these. Mr Roberts thought that permission would still be given.

Mr Roberts advised the Board that the proposed works at Welches Dam also sits within the Fens 2100 scheme.

The Board discussed how the IDB outlook differs to EA's, in that a 25 year design life for an IDB would be countered by maintenance / condition, extending the life of equipment considerably beyond 25 years. Unlike the EA, an IDB asset being 25 years old would not automatically make it eligible for consideration for replacement.

There was also a discussion about fish screening for pumps, and why this was necessary. The Board discussed challenging the environmental protections, and the cost v benefit of accommodating environmental requirements.

The Board moved on to a short tour of part of The Ouse Washes with Jonathon Taylor from the RSPB. He is the Ouse Washes Site Manager, and he took the Board to the Welches Dam hide.

He explained that the washes cover 2000 hectares and can have up to 27km of water channels depending on levels. The washes were created in the 1960's by the RSPB, WWT and Wildlife Trust. They now manage all of the livestock on the washes, which can be up to 2000 head of livestock. The livestock were introduced to the Washes initially for conservation interests, but the cattle help to maintain the Washes in their current form and weed management was further discussed.

The Ouse Washes had been a failing SSSI because of the flooding but without the flood water the area would not be any good for birds. Government funding was sourced to improve the area. Another challenge is keeping foxes and badgers out of the reserve, as there are lots of wading birds with chicks which are attractive to foxes and badgers along with birds of prey. A significant challenging for RSPB is to decide the best way to manage the land. The EA has also purchased an additional 200 hectares of flood free grass land known as Coveney to provide alternative habitat. However, they cannot move birds onto the washes, the RSPB can only create the habitat and 'signpost' it for the birds. The are currently 12 pairs of Blacktailed Godwits here of only 30 in the UK.

Mr Roberts and Mr Taylor were thanked for their time and the Board returned to the meeting venue.

C.1089 Date of next Meeting

RESOLVED

> That next Meeting of the Commissioners be held on 27th January 2027 at The Lamb & Flag, Welney, including a meeting of the Finance Committee at 10am followed by the Commissioners' meeting at 11am.
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> That a Meeting of the Commissioners also be held on Wednesday 26th May 2027 at 9.30am, including a District Inspection.

C.1090 Any Other Business

With no other items being raised by the Board, the meeting was closed at 1pm.

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Chair

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Date