RANSONMOOR DISTRICT DRAINAGE COMMISSIONERS

At a Meeting of the Ransonmoor District Drainage Commissioners
Held at the Middle Level Offices, March on Wednesday 13th May 2026.

PRESENT

Duncan Boughton (Chair)
Michael Dale (Vice Chair)
Charles Boughton
Raymond Mason
James Pollington
William Veal

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.

The Commissioners are referred to as Board throughout the minutes.

C.1343 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from J French and Chris White

C.1344 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.

Mr Dale and Mr Pollington declared an interest as District Officers in the District Officers Fee.

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

C.1345 Confirmation of Minutes

Excepting a small error in the recording of Mr Boughton's name, 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 14th May 2025 are recorded correctly and that they be confirmed and signed.

C.1346 Constitution & Membership

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

The Chair noted the comments in the report regarding the tenure of Chairman and the Cabinet Office's Code. He advised of his intention to remain in the Chair for a further year and then step down. The Chair asked if any Board member were aware of any other Commissioners in the area that are considering joining the Board. It was suggested that Michael Deptford may nominate Ben Brooks to attend the meetings as his representative. Mr Dale commented that Jason Jolley and Ricky Dring do not attend meetings but expect to have a seat on the Board. Mrs Martin advised that as they had not attended, they could be removed from the Board but would still remain Commissioners. Active Board members could then be recruited, but the Board decided not to take any action at this time unless other future Board members came forward.

The Chair advised that he attended the Chairs meeting and the Environment Training, and that he would be attending the meeting to be held on 1st July to discuss the 'Case for Change' and the future of Boards within the Middle Level.

Training

The Chair reminded Board members that Board training is reported on the IDB1 form and asked to advise the Clerk of any training completed or required. The Board advised that no additional training had been undertaken and did not consider any training was needed.

C.1347 Clerk's Report

The Chair introduced a review of each item in the Clerk's report, asking Board members for their comments on each item within 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 Board agreed to this proposal.

Waste Exemptions

Mr Lakey advised the Board of the current position with Waste Exemption licences and the proposals as detailed in the Clerk's report. He advised that over the next 12 months it is planned to move each IDB to having their own suite of waste exemptions, and that it is likely that there will be a need for associated training for IDBs and their District Officers.

The IDB Governance future within the Middle Level of the Fens

The Chair spoke of the need to amalgamate is being discussed at length, and that Mr Dale is a member of the 'Case for Change' Working Group reported on by the Clerk. Mr Dale advised of the plan to reduce the number of Boards from 23 to 7, phased over a period of 15 years or so. He commented that his preference would be to see the change happen in one. He has an ongoing concern that pumping stations are at different standards, and there is a difference in rates, and that he thinks the change should all happen on one day. The Chair also agreed that the amalgamations would be beneficial and would create efficiencies.

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 Officers. He added that Defra have been asked to provide more information on why this level of detail is necessary.

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.

Environment Officers Report

The Chair advised that he and Mr Dale and met with Sofi Lloyd and they had completed the revised Biodiversity Action Plan. Mr Dale explained the items discussed at the meeting.

Mr Lakey asked the Board to report any sightings of species to either Ms Lloyd or himself, or through the iRecord app as outlined in the report. Mr Lakey advised that this information can help the Board to enable works.

The Board were asked to review and approve the Action Plan. The Board approved the Plan but agreed that the Chair would carry out a full review of the Plan on the Board's behalf.

The Board discussed setting the Biodiversity Budget and agreed to the proposed £250 budget. They agreed to the installation of an Owl box in addition to Swift boxes. It was suggested that this should be sited away from the pumping station, and the Board were asked to identify any suitable locations for the boxes.

The Chair reported on the drain flail mowing policy, and that the approach had been not to mow until necessary, but that mowing on a 6 or 7 yearly basis improves Biodiversity. The Board were asked for their thoughts, and if they would prefer to see more mowing than in the past or to continue with the current policy. Mr Lakey advised that if the Board were to mow more regularly, it would be quicker to get round the district for maintenance. He suggested that this is not a good year to increase mowing. Mr Dale suggested leaving this year and considering it next year. It was agreed to defer any changes to the next meeting and discuss further then.

<u>RESOLVED</u>

> That a £250 fund for Biodiversity to be set aside to be used for owl and swift boxes
>
> That the mowing regime would be reconsidered at the next meeting

<u>C.1348 Consulting Engineers' Reports</u>

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

<u>Enforcement and Compliance</u>

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.

<u>New FCERM Grant Funding Guidance</u>

The Board noted the new guidance but did not consider that they would need to apply for funding any time soon.

However, the Board agreed that an asset improvement plan for future asset refurbishment and replacement works should be developed, and approved expenditure on a structural survey of the pumping station building if this is necessary.

<u>Operations Report</u>

Mr Lakey took the Board through his report, detailing the drainworks completed the previous year. He advised that fly tipping is still an issue, but measures are being taken to try to address this. He reported that the removal of silt and weed is included in the proposed ditch maintenance works, and there is also a sum included for the cleansing of drains to resolve issues with ponding.

Mr Dale advised that he has been asked not to flail both sides of the drain alongside the playing field and has agreed to this.

Mr Lakey advised that there has been an issue with the drain on Mr Knobb's land, and that this was jetted during the winter. Some drain beds are above the culvert and will need to be looked at again next year. This affects reach 7-17.

The Chair reported that there is a crack in the tunnel under the Southern Drain that needs investigating. Mr Dale asked if this was the Board's drain, and the Chair thought that the road was in place before the drain was put in, and so the thinks that the tunnel belongs to the Board. Mr Dale was concerned that should maintenance be carried out and as the Board have not funded other similar situations, they need to be sure of ownership before any works were carried out.

The Board thanked Mr Lakey for his report.

<u>Mechanical & Electrical</u>

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 Dale reported that the pump had been run within the last few days, and that a previous M&E engineer had raised concerns about a vibration in the pump. Mr Dale noted that the pump is now getting noisy. Mr Lakey referred to the M&E report and asked the Board if they wanted to consider an overhaul of the pump, as advised in Dave Bantoft's report. The Board agreed that this should be undertaken and asked if this could be programmed in for as soon as possible.

Mr Lakey drew the Board's attention to the note that water level management advice is available should the Board require it. He advised the Board that this generic note is aimed specifically at Boards that need help to manage water levels to create efficiencies. He added that it is not a concern with this Board as they are already proactive in this area.

<u>RESOLVED</u>

> That the Chair and Vice Chair are authorised to take decisions on enforcement action on behalf of the Board with advice from MLC.
>
> That an Asset Improvement Plan for future refurbishment/replacement works is developed.

<u>C.1349 Health & Safety</u>

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 health and safety training be made available.

The Chair advised that he and the Vice Chair had met with a representative from AW Safety Ltd to carry out an inspection of the Pumping Station. The Board considered the Health and Safety Report provided by AW Safety Ltd and noted the content. The Chair advised that the battery covers and disposal of unused paint as identified within the report had been resolved.

RESOLVED

That the report is noted.

C.1350 District Officer's Report

The District Officers gave a verbal report, adding to items that had already been reported. Mr Dale advised that he had looked at a piece of land with the Farm Manager from Pretoria Energy and arranged for some drain works to be carried out, which had all be completed satisfactorily. He added that there has been a problem with plastic blocking the inlet pipe, and damage to a gatepost, but these items are in hand.

The block in the pipe at Coneywood Road is being maintained so as to divert the flow as previously agreed. Otherwise, Mr Dale and Mr Pollington had nothing further to report.

The District Officers were thanked for their work.

C.1351 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.

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 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.1352. 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.

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.

C.1353 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.

Fees & Remuneration

District Officers Honorarium

Mr Dale and Mr Pollington as District Officers declared an interest in this item.

The Board considered the District Officers fee allowance and Mr Boughton proposed that it be increased to £1000. Mr Dale asked if this could be split equally between him and Mr Pollington. The amount and split were agreed unanimously.

RESOLVED

> That the Board agree that an honorarium of £500 each be paid to Mr Dale and Mr Pollington in recognition of their 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 £6,628.12.

RESOLVED

> That the Precept is paid in full.

Land at Pumping Station Bungalow

The Board agreed to continue the agreement to lease land under licence for a fee of £10 per year.

RESOLVED

That the licence continues at £10 per year

Estimates & Rate Requirements for 2026/27.

Budget

The Board reviewed the proposed budget as recommended by their Responsible Finance Officer, and the Chair proposed that the budget be agreed. This was unanimously supported.

RESOLVED

That the budget is agreed.

Rate Requirement for 2026/27

Mrs Martin advised that the budget indicated that a rate of 19.0p in the £ would need to be set, which is no change to the rate of 19.0p set in 2025/26.

Mr Mason supported the proposal to keep the rate the same. The Chair agreed, adding that the rate would cover the costs but advising that the Board could continue to build funds by increasing the rate a little each year. Mr Dale said that he would not like to see the rate any higher than 19.5p and proposed that a rate of 19.5p in the £ be set. This proposal was seconded by Mr Mason and agreed by the Board. Mr Dale reflected concern that this small increase would still affect the agricultural rate payers.

The Board agreed that the outturn from the previous year be moved to the Asset Replacement fund.

RESOLVED

i) That the estimates be approved.

ii) That a total sum of £64,924 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 £49,594 and £15,330 respectively.

iv) That a rate of 19.5p in the £ be laid and assessed on Agricultural hereditaments in the District.

v) That a Special Levy of £15,330 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.

viii) That the outturn from 2025/26 be moved to the Asset Replacement Fund.

C.1354 Date of next Meeting

RESOLVED

The next meeting of the Board be held on Wednesday 12th May 2027 at 2pm at the Middle Level Offices.

C.1355 Any Other Business

The Environmental and Ecology Manager, Sofi Lloyd, joined the meeting. Referring to the draft Biodiversity Action Plan, a key action is to help support improved data gathering, and Ms Lloyd encouraged the Board to use the iRecord app to do this. The data can be specifically attributed to being record by the IDB through the app. Ms Lloyd advised that she would send a link to the app to all Board members, and that a link has been sent to the Chair for inclusion in the Parish Magazine as he requested. She reminded the Board that the species she is specifically interested in are listed in the BAP. However, she requested that all mink sightings are reported directly to either her or Mr Lakey as soon as possible after sighting so that swift action can be taken.

The Chair thanked Ms Lloyd, and with no other business raised the Chair closed the meeting at 16.05pm.

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Chair

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Date