SUTTON & MEPAL INTERNAL DRAINAGE BOARD

At a Meeting of the Sutton & Mepal Internal Drainage Board
Held at Chatteris Cricket Club on Thursday 21st May 2026.

PRESENT

Mathew Latta (Chair)	Edward Jackson
Christopher Lee (Vice-Chair)	Martin Jackson
Richard Angood	Richard Lee
Charlie Baker	Robert Smith
Trevor Edgley	James Sole
Marc Heading	Mr E Veal (inspection only)

The Lead Clerk Mrs Ruth Martin representing the Clerk was in attendance.

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

B.2412 District Inspection

The Board visited Mepal (Fortrey Hall) Pumping Station and were joined by the District Officer, Zach Robinson. The Board carried out a review of the station. The flail and tractor were viewed and Mr Robinson advised that the tractor will soon be due for a service and currently showed 2250 hours of running time. Mr Lee updated the Board on the observations of the Inspection by AW Safety Ltd. Moving further into the pumping station, Mr Robinson advised that the diesel pump had been run recently and was all OK. He added that he had been using the diesel pump when electricity was more expensive, but now diesel prices have increased it is more cost effective to run the electric pumps.

Mr Robinson confirmed that a pump is on order for the cooling tower, and the heaters are fixed and working. Outside, the weedscreen has had works carried out thanks to grant funding. The control panel has also been rebuilt and funded through the Storm Recovery Grant. All of the electric pumps have now been refurbished, and the pumps are in a healthy place. Mr Robinson discussed the challenges of water level management with the Board, and the Chair reminded of the balance that needed to be maintained in water levels between the north and south sides of the district. He explained that levels on the south side of the district can be held higher than those on the north side but lowering the north side will drain the area completely. He discussed putting boards in to give more control on the boundary of Mr Sole's and Mr Allen's land, and letting water in at Kings Farm, the Pumping Station, Argents Farm, and Hold Farm. He explained that it is critical that water can be let in at the Pumping Station and Kings Farm, but that siltation at the Pumping Station causes issues, and further complicates water levels on the north side which is then questioned by rate payers. The Chair advised that the auto sensors on the pumps are currently not working, and this has added to the challenge, but this is being addressed. Pump 4 is generally only used during the summer, and in the winter, it is possible lift the door and use gravity to move the water. They have to keep the slacker at the Pumping Station open as there is not enough height in the Cranbrook Counter Drain, particularly as variances to the maintenance in the Counter Drain affects the flow.

The Chair advised the Board of the intention to slub the main drain this year, and that he has received a price from Land and Water that he would like the Board to accept. It is intended to use a long reach digger with an amphibious digger in the drain, as previous years. The extent of the works were discussed, with the clearance of the basin and most of the drain included in the works, but with the possibility of extending the works to the bottom of the Gault, although this would involve moving the equipment and therefore a higher cost to the works. Mr Veal raised a concern that the slub is always deposited on his land, but the Chair advised it has been at least 10 years since this operation was last carried out. Mr Veal asked if the spoil could be deposited in the centre of his field or elsewhere, and this was discussed. The Chair confirmed that the slubbing would need to be carried out this year as the water cannot get to the pumps quickly enough at present, advising the intention to consider more extensive cleansing elsewhere once this year's planned works were complete. The challenge is they it would be more beneficial to make the channels deeper and wider every year, but ecologically and financially this is not possible. The Chair explained that the works are planned for this September, but they need to balance keeping water back for irrigation whilst draining down for the slubbing works. They also need to consider stacking the arisings and spreading this the following year, which would allow them to push the works back to later in the year, making dropping the drain levels easier. The Chair asked the Board when they thought it would be suitable to drop the drain levels, and it was agreed that the beginning of November would be most suitable.

The Board walked along the drain and considered the proposed slubbing works. It was established that it would be possible to place arisings on the opposite side of the channel once past the existing power lines, placing some of the material on Mr Lee's land rather than all on Mr Veal's land. It was established that access would still be needed along the road during the works, but the alternative access could be provided.

The Board returned to the meeting venue, leaving Mr Robinson at the Pumping Station. Mr Angood reflected on how well Mr Robinson had settled into the job and how he seems to know what he is doing and learning who the local landowners and farmers are.

B.2413 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from A Allan, D Griffiths, P Sole, W Veal,

B.2414 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.

The Chair and Mr Heading declared interests as Middle Level Board members.

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

B.2415 Confirmation of Minutes

RESOLVED

> That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Board held on the 15th January 2026 are recorded correctly and that they be confirmed and signed.

B.2416 Constitution & Membership

Mr Angood advised that he thought former Councillor, Stephen Criswell would like to return to the Board and the Chair agreed to contact Huntingdonshire District Council to establish if a Councillor will be nominated or if they would consider appointing Mr Criswell as an alternative. If a new Councillor is appointed the Chair agreed to write to Mr Criswell to thank him for his time on the Board.

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 discussed Health and Safety training which is reported on under Health and Safety in the minutes.

B.2417 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

Mrs Martin updated the Board on the current position with Waste Exemption licences and the proposals as detailed in the Clerks report. She drew their attention to the plan 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.

IDB1 (Annual Reporting to Defra)

Mrs Martin advised the Board that extra information is being reported on the IDB1 return and the challenges that this is causing. This includes additional information relating to drain maintenance which is compiled for the Board with support from the District Officer, and Mrs Martin stressed to the Board the importance of keeping this data and providing the information when it is requested. She 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

Mrs Martin circulated printed copies of the report, and the Chair advised that he and the District Officer had met with the Environment Officer a few weeks prior to this meeting. He reported to the Board that lengthy discussions were had with the Environment Officer on cutting regimes, and that as the district is rich in biodiversity after 200 years of intensive management there seems little benefit in changing. Moving to cutting only one side of drains may not be beneficial to biodiversity. The Vice Chair added that making areas environmentally rich habitat is more of a problem. He added that people seem to be scared to report sightings of voles, badgers, and other protected species, but by reporting them it is possible to show that they are not as scarce as once considered. He explained to the Board how the reporting of sightings of Spined Loach showed they were much more common than originally thought, which had ultimately allowed for works to be undertaken in an area they were known to inhabit where works had previously been restricted. Badgers are a case in point, as it is clear to the Board how prevalent they are in the District but they are still a protected species. Board members are encouraged to report sightings using the iRecord app as detailed in the Environment Officers report.

Mr Angood referred to the reference a tilting weir in the report and asked if there were funding opportunities around environmental enhancements. He identified an area where it could be useful to be able to drop water levels remotely. The Chair reported that there are currently no plans to do this work but if the funding opportunity arose the proposal is included in the Boards plans.

The Board discussed setting the Biodiversity Budget and agreed to the proposed £250 budget for a swift box. The location of the box is still to be determined.

RESOLVED

That the Biodiversity Action Plan is agreed

That a £250 fund for Biodiversity to be set aside to be used for swift boxes

B.2418 Consulting Engineers' Reports

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

New FCERM Grant Funding Guidance

The Board noted the new guidance and considered the Consulting Engineers comments. The Chair commented that the Board could not clearly develop an investment plan until they knew what was happening with the EA Pumping Station at Welches Dam. The Board agreed with his opinion that they were in a good position with the Board's pumping station following several years of investment and improvements. The Board again considered the position of not retaining a spare pump and it was agreed that as there are other fail safes in place it is not necessary to hold a spare pump in storage. Mr Baker asked how often all of the electric pumps need to run at the same time. The Chair advised that this rarely happens, and that the diesel pump running alone is the equivalent of all of the electric pumps running, even though the diesel pump is aging. The Board agreed that they were content with the current arrangements and although they understand the importance of developing a long-term plan, they regularly discuss their position and are comfortable with their current position.

Mechanical & Electrical

The Board considered the Mechanical & Electrical Engineers report and noted the content. They discussed how they were already working in conjunction with MLC on Water Level Management in the District.

RESOLVED

That the reports are noted.

B. 2419 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 reinforced this position, and the Boards responsibilities were discussed in detail. It was felt that the Chair and Vice Chair (as the Boards Health & Safety Officer) should receive further training in order to understand the Boards risks. It was agreed that the Chair and Vice Chair attend the IOSH 3-day Training Course. Adequate insurance cover is also essential, and the Board asked for more information to be provided so they could identify if any further cover is needed. The Vice Chair advised that this could be essential as insurance may cover the costs of legal fees and fines should there be any incidents.

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.

The Vice Chair advised that he 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 Vice Chair reported that they had talked through the dynamics of the station and had discussed the District Officers training, which the Vice Chair outlined to the Board. The report picked up on housekeeping in the Pumping Station workshop, and the Vice Chair advised the Board that he and the Chair are addressing this and some other issues with the District Officer. He reported that an asbestos survey of the Station has also been carried out.

RESOLVED

That the report is noted.

That the Chair and Vice Chair attend an IOSH 3-day Health and Safety training course at an approximate cost of £600 per person

B.2420 District Officer's Report

The Chair gave a verbal report on behalf of the District Officer. The work of the District Officer was discussed by the Board, and the Board noted their satisfaction with his work. Some areas for improvement were discussed, including better record keeping enabling accurate works planning and issuing of notices, and to assist the IDB1 return. Suggestions were made by the Board of ways that the District Officer could be assisted to do this. The time the District Officer spends Lone Working was also discussed, and all Board members committed to checking in with the District Officer when they saw him.

B.2421 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 Valuations were reviewed, and the Board agreed that they were content with the valuation.

RESOLVED

That the valuations are 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.

B.2422 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.

B.2423 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 Salary

The Chair reported to Board the District Officers salary and working arrangements. He advised the Board that the District Officer has now been in post for a year, and that this was an appropriate time for the Board to consider his salary.

Mr R Lee suggested that an inflationary rise would be appropriate, and Mr Angood suggested that a rise in line with the Middle Level pay award be considered. The Chair advised that the Board had no fixed policy in place, and that he would prefer for the Board to have a discussion on a figure rather than link it to somewhere else. Some discussion followed, with a proposal of 3% being made by Mr Smith, and seconded by Mr R Lee. The Board agreed to the proposal and suggested that this could be increased the following year pending action on the housekeeping issues previously identified.

RESOLVED

> That the Board agree a 3% increase in the District Officers Salary
>
> (Post meeting note: this will be effective from 1st June 2026)

Reimbursement of out-of-pocket expenses of Chair and Vice Chair

Both the Chair and Vice Chair reported that they had no out-of-pocket expenses.

Plant Charges

The Vice Chair confirmed that the Board's plant is not being used outside of the District. Mr Smtih suggested that if plant hire is being charged at lower rates than the industry standard, the Ratepayers are subsidising the plant hire costs. The Chair advised that there is very little contract work being undertaken, and the Board agreed not to make any amendments to the current plant hire charges.

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 £11,170.66.

RESOLVED

That the Precept is paid in full.

Determination of Annual Values for Rating purposes.

The Board considered the recommendation for the determination of annual value for rating purposes.

RESOLVED

i) That the determination recommended be adopted by the Board
ii) That the Clerk be empowered to serve notices and to take such other action as may be necessary to comply with statutory requirements.
iii) That the Chairman and the Clerk be empowered to authorise appropriate action on behalf of the Board in connection with any appeal against the determination.

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 55.50p in the £ would need to be set, which is a change to the rate of 56.5p set in 2025/26.

The Chair asked the Board for their considerations, and the Vice Chair reflected that the proposed rate position reflected the Storm Recovery Grant funding the Board had received in 2025/26. With that in mind he proposed that the rate be set at 55.50p in the £, and this was seconded by Mr R Lee. The Board agreed unanimously with the proposal.

RESOLVED

i) That the estimates be approved.

ii) That a total sum of £352,925 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 £282,425 and £70,500 respectively.

iv) That a rate of 55.5p in the £ be laid and assessed on Agricultural hereditaments in the District.

v) That a Special Levy of £12,728 be made and issued to the East Cambridgeshire District Council, £33,860 be made and issued to Fenland District Council, and £23,912 be made and issued to Huntingdonshire 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.2424 Date of next Meeting

RESOLVED

The next meeting of the Board be held on Thursday 14th January 2027 at 8.30am at the Chatteris Cricket Club.

That the following Meeting of the Board be held on Thursday 20th May 2027 at 8.30am at the Chatteris Cricket Club. The meeting will commence with a District Inspection.

B.2425 Any Other Business

With no other business brought to the attention of the Chair, the meeting closed at 11.35am.

…………………………………………..
Chair

………………………..
Date