

MARCH SIXTH DISTRICT DRAINAGE COMMISSIONERS

At a Meeting of the March Sixth District Drainage Commissioners
Held at the Middle Level Offices, March on Thursday 11th June 2026.

PRESENT

Emma Alterton (Chair)
Alex Miscandlon (Vice-Chair)
Tony Alterton

Malcolm Arnold
Jan French (FDC)

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.

C.1126 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from M Deptford, C Marks & M Mottram

C.1127 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 on the Board.

Mr Miscandlon declared an interest in matters concerning the Middle Level Commissioners as a Middle Level Board member.

Mr Miscandlon and Mrs French declared interest in matters concerning planning as Fenland District Councillors.

Mr Alterton declared an interest in District Officers Fees and Payments.

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

C.1128 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 12th June 2025 are recorded correctly and that they be confirmed and signed.

C.1129 Constitution & Membership

Mrs Martin advised that there is currently one vacancy on the Board. She explained that after the last meeting the Clerk had written to Waldersey Farms which resulted in a meeting being held with their Technical Director after which he nominated a representative. The Board agreed that they be invited to attend the next meeting of the Board.

Elections, Vacancies and Appointments

The Chair and Vice Chair agreed to continue in post for a further year, although Mr Miscandlon advised the Board that with the pending Local Government Organisation, he did not know how the process for nominating Appointed Members to the Board would be undertaken. However, he expected to remain in place until the next Board meeting.

RESOLVED

That the Chair and Vice Chair continue in post.

That a Waldersey Farms representative be invited to the next meeting.

Training

Mrs Martin 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 identify any current training needs.

C.1130 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.

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.

The IDB governance future within the Middle Level of the Fens

The Chair gave the Board an overview of the discussions of the working group, of which she is a member. One of the proposals is that this Board amalgamate into a wider March Board, and she has represented that this Board would prefer a March based Board. There is a meeting on 1st July for Board Chairs, which the Chair will be attending, and the Board have been asked to feedback their thoughts to the Chair before the meeting.

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 Mr Lakey is compiling for this Board with the support of the District Officer. 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

The Chair reported that she and the District Officer had met with Sofi Lloyd, MLCs Ecology and Environmental Services Manager to look through the Boards Biodiversity Action Plan, following which the BAP was refreshed and updated. There are links to this on the website. The Board were asked to approve the updated BAP and this was agreed.

It was noted that the Board are doing well on their biodiversity targets, and that they are the only Board that show a complete, or green, status in their Key Environmental Compliance Indicators. The Chair added that lower margins in the drains helps to keep the bank margins protected.

The Board were asked to set a Biodiversity budget for 2026/27. The Chair reported that there had been some discussion around swift boxes, as with other Boards, but these need to be located on high buildings and it was felt that there were no suitable buildings within the District that the Board had access to. It was therefore suggested that, as both species need additional support, the Board could support sites for Black Poplar trees as an alternative. The Board agreed the proposal that a budget of £100 be set aside, and that the Board's pumping station area would be reviewed by Ms Lloyd to establish if the space could provide the space and environment that is suitable for Black Poplar trees.

RESOLVED

That the Biodiversity Action Plan is approved

That a £100 fund for Biodiversity to be set aside to be used for Black Poplar trees

C.1131 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. The Board also noted their appreciation of the work of the Enforcement Officers in bringing an outstanding payment to conclusion on the Boards behalf. Mr Miscandlon asked to be advised of any future enforcements undertaken on behalf of the Board.

Capital Programme

The Board were asked to consider the development of a capital investment plan for asset refurbishment/replacement and instruct the Consulting Engineer accordingly. The Board agreed that a plan should be developed.

Mrs French noted that when the Board respond to planning applications, the planning officers do not seem to take note of the Boards comments. However, she encouraged the Board to continue submitting their comments.

Operations Report

Mr Lakey reviewed his report, advising the Board of the works carried out during the previous year. He explained the works carried out as a result of the T2A and T2B Storm Recovery Grant funding, with an installation of hard standings at the pumping station, and channel improvement works being fully funded. A District Inspection has been carried out in conjunction with the Chair and District Officer, and the Boards drains are in good condition. A slipped headwall has been highlighted, and contact will be made with the landowner for this to be resolved. It is recommended that dam boards and deck boards are replaced along with the kick board and handrail at the Control Structure. These works have been included in the budget, but it will not be possible to carry out the works until winter when the water levels are dropped.

Mr Lakey explained that the drains east of the prison were machine cleansed last year, and two sections of rabbit fencing will need to be removed next time these sections are cleansed. Mr Lakey will make contact with the landowner at the appropriate time.

The proposed drain works were discussed and agreed.

Referring back to revetment works carried out with Defra funding, Mr Alterton asked if a further length of channel could be addressed. Mr Lakey advised that this could be carried out but this would have to be funded by the Board. The Chair said that she would prefer not to commit to any works unless there were funding available.

Mechanical & Electrical

The Board considered the Mechanical & Electrical report. Mr Lakey advised that the pump is now 62 years old, and that it has been 20 years since the last overhaul. The age of the controls and weed screen bars are also of concern, and cost estimates to replace these have been given.

The Chair observed that the weed screen condition had not changed, and Mr Lakey reported that Dave Bantoft had advised that these had not previously been an issue as there is no automatic weed screen cleaner. Mr Bantoft had also advised that the Board should not replace the pump without first replacing the control panel. The Chair noted that there is a problem with leaves in the pump causing it to cut out. Mr Miscandlon asked if it were possible to clean the bottom of the pump out, and the Chair advised that the pump has not been lifted out for some time. Various solutions were discussed, with Mr Lakey advising the Board that whatever decision is made, it will require forward planning and that it is too late to make plans to lift the pump this year. He added that Mr Bantoft had suggested that the Board could pay for a panel to made and then fit it when appropriate, but the Board do need to spend £2k replacing the power factor. Mr Alterton suggest that a small submersible pump is also fitted on top of the pump to lubricate it, and that it would be helpful if an indicator could be fitted.

Discussion followed on the most suitable timing for any works, with Mr Lakey advising that availability of contractors and Middle Level staff also needs to be considered. The Chair proposed that the Board agree to replace the panel during 2026/27 as proposed by Mr Bantoft and then overhaul the pump in 2027/28. There are adequate funds in the Developer Fund to cover these works, and if GiA funding becomes available in the interim then this could be applied for. The Board agreed with this approach.

The Board agreed to provide electricity readings and do not require this service to be provided by MLC.

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 plan to replace the control panel in 2026/27

To plan to lift and refurbish the pump in 2027/28

C.1132 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 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.

Board training was discussed, and Mr Alerton advised that he would like to attend a flail mowing course if the opportunity arose.

The Chair reported that she had met with a representative from AW Safety Ltd and they had reviewed the pumping station. They reported that they could see where improvements to the pumping station had been made since their last visit.

The Chair reported that there had been a near miss since the last meeting and explained the issues with a winch handle which has now been replaced by the Chair and District Officer following discussions with Mr Bantoft.

Mr Alerton raised a concern regarding the degradation of a lifting hole on the flap. Mr Lakey agreed to arrange a repair if this were possible or provide an update to Mr Alerton and discuss a plan to replace the flap.

RESOLVED

That the report is noted.

C.1133 District Officer's Report

The District Officer advised that he had nothing further to add to Mr Lakey's report, and that the District was in good order.

C.1134 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 – 2024/2025RESOLVED

- 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 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.

C.1135 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 2025/2026

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.

The Chair observed that in reviewing the accounts she noted that the Board have £122k of funds, with annual running costs of £13-20k and so in her opinion the Board is in a financially secure position.

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.1136 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

Mr Alerton declared an interest in this item as District Officer and abstained from voting.

The Board agreed unanimously that the fee allowance increase by 5.25%.

RESOLVED

That the Board approved to award the following fees and remuneration level for contracted officials for 2026/27:

Name	Role	Asset	2026/27 Max Value
Tony Alterton	District Officer	--	£944

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 £1,247.75.

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 32.5p in the £ would need to be set. In 2025/26 a rate of 26.50p in the £ had been set, against a budget estimate of 31p in the £, and the shortfall planned to be met from reserves.

The Chair advised that she had reviewed the budget and estimates, and that funding had been included in the budget to cover the proposed district works, the increase in District Officers fee, and the expected flail mowing costs. She felt that these were conservative but realistic estimates. However, with the balances in the general fund being what they are, she did not think it necessary to increase the rate and proposed that the rate stay the same, at 26.50p. With no other rates suggested, Mrs French proposed that a rate of 26.50p be set, and this was seconded by Mr Alterton. This was agreed by all present.

RESOLVED

- i) That the estimates be approved.
- ii) That a total sum of £17,736 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 £10,164 and £7,572 respectively.
- iv) That a rate of 26.5p in the £ be laid and assessed on Agricultural hereditaments in the District.
- v) That a Special Levy of £7,572 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.

C.1137 Date of next Meeting

RESOLVED

The next meeting of the Board be held on Thursday 17th June 2027 at 10am at the Middle Level Offices.

C.1138 Any Other Business

With no further items raised, the Chair thanked the Board for their attendance and closed the meeting at 11.10am.

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Chair

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Date