

MARCH EAST INTERNAL DRAINAGE BOARD**At a Meeting of the March East IDB****Held at the Middle Level Offices, Thursday 28th May 2026 at 09:15AM.****PRESENT**

Clive Martin (Chair)
Charles Albutt (Vice Chair)
Timothy Boor
Gary Christy
John Clark
Maureen Davis
Graham Dunham
Jan French

Adrain Gee
Roger Gladwin
Dee Laws (arrived for item 8 H&S onwards)
Alison Morris
Donald Morris
Michael Mottram
Sam Murphy
Mark Purser

Mr Paul Burrows, the Clerk, was also in attendance and was Mr Morgan Lakey representing the Consulting Engineer. The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from L Foice-Beard, W Gladwin, P Hayes, P Hicks and T Martin.

B.1471 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 declared an interest in District Officers matters.

Mr Christy, Mrs French and Mr Clark declared an interest in matters involving Fenland District Council.

Ms Morris declared an interest in matters concerning the Middle Level Commissioners as a Middle Level Board members.

B.1472 Confirmation of Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 29th May 2025 were reviewed and confirmed as a true record and no Matters Arising were identified.

RESOLVED

That the Minutes of the Meeting held on the 29th May 2025 are recorded correctly and that they be confirmed and signed.

B.1473 Constitution & Membership

Mr Burrows reported that frustratingly there had been no news from Defra with regards to the Board's ongoing amalgamation with Euximoor IDB and that the last the Environment Agency heard from Defra was in December 2024. He added that the Lead Clerk had been chasing this regularly with the EA lawyers and he had escalated within Defra for an update.

The Vice Chairman added that this was most dissatisfactory, and it had been 6 years waiting for a simple governance change. Mr Burrows asked whether the Board would like him to put in a complaint to the Minister on their behalf depending upon the response he receives to his last escalation of the issue. The Board were happy for a complaint to be logged on their behalf.

The Chairman reflected on the Board's vacancy and given that the timescales associated with the amalgamation were uncertain, he suggested having a full membership would be wise. He sought the Board's support to approach Waldersey Farms in terms of co-opting a member to the vacancy.

RESOLVED

The Board resolved that the Chairman approach Waldersey Farms Ltd in terms of co-opting a representative to the elected member vacancy.

B.1474 Clerk's Report

Mr Burrows provided an overview of his report highlighting in particular the Policy Review, Waste Exemptions and IDB1 items. He added that the Compliance & Enforcement Policy is now finalised and has been published and outlined the Standing Advice that now supports MLC and IDB regulation, one focused on system capacity and one on Byelaw strips.

The Chairman added that he'd reviewed the draft IT policy that had been developed and was supportive of its publication. Mr Christy asked about resilience to cyber security and Mr Burrows highlighted that this was in MLC's IT policy given their services to the IDB and the IDB needs to be reassured that MLC has sufficient mitigations in that regard.

Mr Burrows also provided an update on the Working Group focussed on IDB amalgamations within the Middle Level, noting a session for IDB Chairman is planned for 1st July 2026 before potentially bringing a proposal to the relevant IDBs for consideration and decision.

Post meeting note (discussion between Chairman and Clerk)

The Chairman cannot make the session and will ask the Vice Chair to attend, adding that he is open minded about the need for change and feels fewer than seven IDBs is more resilient as we need to avoid the need for further change.

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.

B.1475 Environment Officer's Report

The Chairman reported a positive discussion with Ms S Lloyd and Mr M Lakey to develop the draft Biodiversity Action Plan.

Ms Morris enquired regarding swift boxes given a discussion with the RSPB during a different IDB's meeting. She added that £250 was a high cost compared to the boxes available on the RSPB website. Mr Lakey clarified that £250 purchases a bespoke box for a colony of swifts and you'd need a number of the simple RSPB boxes

if they were to be used as an alternative. The price includes lure, and he added that swifts are present locally and there is a national drive to boost their numbers.

The Chairman added that it was really important for Members to record their sighting on the iRecord app. Mr Lakey added that this really helps underpin the quality of IDB operations and if we can demonstrate thriving populations of key species then it supports the case for a more pragmatic approach to management of works and operations.

RESOLVED

That the Environment Officer's Report is noted.

The Biodiversity Action Plan is approved.

A biodiversity budget of £250 was set for swift boxes.

B.1476 Consulting Engineers' Reports

The Board considered the Consulting Engineers' report, and it was taken as read.

Enforcement and Compliance

Mr Burrows reported that the new Enforcement and Compliance Officers have had success and are building the caseload. He added that Board members are important eyes and ears on the ground and asked that they report any questionable activity that is relevant to IDB and MLC operations and interests. The Board were asked to authorise the Chair and Vice Chair to take decisions on enforcement action on behalf of the Board, having taken advice from MLC officers. They will engage with other Board Members as they see appropriate and determine whether a Special Meeting of the Board is needed on a risk and complexity basis.

Operations

Mr M Lakey gave an overview of his paper highlighting the access works delivered for mobile pump deployment under the IDB Fund Tranche 2b. He added that the Board's drains are generally in a good condition and outlined the planned programme for this year, which includes the revetment works (points 3-5) that were deferred from last year. The Chairman expressed gratitude on behalf of the Board for the grant funded works and remarked at the good quality of the access improvements.

It was highlighted that the Board had to remove circa 3.3 tonnes of fly-tipped material last year and Mr Lakey added that just last week a trampoline needed to be removed from the Board's drain. Ms Morris asked what more could be done to reduce the cost of antisocial behaviour to the Board. Ms French added that she would report the matter to the Fenland District Council portfolio holder. Mr Burrows offered to write to the Council in addition to this.

M&E and capital works

The Board reviewed the paper from Mr D Bantoft the MLC Head of M&E. The Board were grateful to for the weedscreen works delivered by MLC on their behalf funded by grant.

Mr Lakey gave an update on the Latches pump confirming that it'll be reinstalled ready for winter. The Chairman reflected that whilst it was positive that the Board coped with the pump out during the wet period earlier this year, for resilience it's important it's back in service.

Mr Burrows summarised that there are control panel works to be discussed under the budget item and beyond this there are two overhauls that the Board need to plan for financially, and this effectively forms the Board's next 3-5 year plan.

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 the Clerk write to Fenland District Council regarding the increasing issue of antisocial behaviour and the cost to the Board.

The Board agreed that they need an Investment Plan to include pump overhauls.

B.1477 Health & Safety

Mr Burrows gave an overview of his report and the recommendations that the Board consider how it could strengthen its approach to health & safety. He added that MLC intended to develop a H&S service provision offer that would be discussed at the Chairman's meeting in December 2026 for potential roll-out from August 2027. The Board noted the paper and reaffirmed that the Chairman is the Board's H&S lead.

The Chairman added that he was impressed with how thorough the last AW Safety inspection was and that the minor matters to address are with Mr Lakey for action.

B.1478 District Officer's Report

The Chairman reported that it had been a non-exceptional year with nothing out of the ordinary to report. He added that the pump attendants were all doing a good job and happy to continue.

B.1479 Governance

Mr Burrows asked the Board to consider the Governance report and that its content be noted.

RESOLVEDCompletion of the Annual Return – 2024/2025

- 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.

Risk Management Strategy and Internal Controls

The Board did not highlight any specific risks or issues not covered within their 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.

The Board wish to continue to index link their pumping station valuations for insurance purposes.

Exercise of Public Rights

Mr Burrows 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.

Consideration of potential litigation, liabilities, commitments.

Mr Burrows 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. It was 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.

IDB1 and Annual Governance Statement

The Board noted the IDB1 return for 2024/25 submitted on their behalf.

The Board noted and approved the submission of their Annual Governance Statement for 2025/26 authorising the Chairman and Clerk to sign the statement.

B.1479 Finance Report – Looking BackFinance officer's review and key messages

The Board noted the position as laid out by their Responsible Finance Officer and were grateful for the work undertaken by MLC to secure grant and deliver works under the IDB Fund Tranche 2b. Ms A Morris proposed the accounts be approved and this was seconded by Ms French and carried unanimously.

RESOLVED

The Payments were reviewed and accepted.

Accounts for 2025/26 were reviewed and approved with the Chairman authorised to sign the AGAR.

B.1480 Finance Report – Looking Forward

The Board noted the position as laid out by their Responsible Finance Officer.

Fees & RemunerationRESOLVED

That the maximum value the Board will pay for District Officer's duties be increased from £7,800 to £8,210 with expenses of up to £568

That the sum of £1,382, be allowed for Pump Attendant Fee's for 2026/27

That a sum of £8,778 be allowed for the rental of Latches Fen bungalow for 2026/27

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 £13,298.66

RESOLVED

That the Precept is paid in full.

Determination of land for rating purposesRESOLVED

The determination of annual values for rating purposes and associated write off be approved.

Estimates & Rate Requirements for 2026/27.Budget

The Board reviewed the proposed budget as recommended by their Responsible Finance Officer. The Chairman outlined that the rate was currently 20p and that without the improvements works recommended by the M&E Engineer the Board could reduce the rate to 16p, however he felt that the responsible position was to hold the rate and agree to the budget proposed which includes the works to replace the control panels at Latches Fen and Bedlam Pumping Stations, along with the reinstallation of the Latches pump.

Mr Gladwin asked if there were efficiencies of programming the control panels works and future overhauls at the same time. Mr Lakey said there were limited efficiencies to be gained as they are discrete operations with different contractors. Mr Burrows added that if the Board approved these works, then the M&E Engineer will need to package and prioritise them for delivery along with similar works approved by other IDBs, therefore the timescale for delivery may not be within this financial year.

Mr Mottram highlighted the added risk regarding energy costs given the Middle East conflict and the timing of our electricity contract renewal in October may mean we have a high short-term deal at a time when prices are inflated.

Rate Requirement for 2026/27

Ms Morris proposed that the budget be approved, and the rate set at 20p. This was seconded by Ms French and agreed unanimously.

RESOLVED

- i) That the estimates be approved.
- ii) That a total sum of £174,552 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 £88,326 and £85,848.
- iv) That a rate of 20p in the £ be laid and assessed on Agricultural hereditaments in the District.

- v) That Special Levies of £85,848 be made and issued to Fenland District Council for the purpose of meeting such expenditure and a contribution from Cambridgeshire County Council of £378 in respect of Stiches Fen.
- 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.1481 Date of next Meeting

RESOLVED

The next full meeting of the Board is on 27th May 2027 at the Middle Level Offices, 09:15am start.

B.1482 Any Other Business

None raised

The meeting closed at 10:30am.

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Chair

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Date