SAWTRY INTERNAL DRAINAGE BOARD

At a Meeting of the Sawtry IDB
Held at the Admiral Wells, Wednesday 3rd June 2026 at 10:00am

PRESENT

Stephen Custance (Chair)	Stephen Parsley
David Elmore (Vice-Chair)	Samuel Raby
Anthony Darby	Karen Sanderson
Philip Custance	Simon Bywater

Mr Paul Burrows, the Clerk, was also in attendance and the Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, including Karen Sanderson a Councillor from Sawtry Parish Council.

Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from A Lenson.

B.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 S Raby declared interest (as a Member of the Middle Level Board) in payments to and any matters concerning the Middle Level Commissioners.
>
> Mr A Darby declared an interest in any matters concerning and payments in relation to pumping station attendants (AgReserves and T E Darby & Son respectively).
>
> Mr S Raby declared an interest in matters concerning payments and drain maintenance works within the district (H Raby & Son).

B.1345 Confirmation of Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 4th June 2025 were reviewed and confirmed as a true record.

Matters Arising – Lease between the Board and Sawtry Parish Council

Cllr Sanderson provided an update on the activity undertaken over the last year on the woodland area of land leased from the Board. Tree guards have now been removed by volunteers and bat boxes installed. She added that bird boxes are also planned.

She added her disappointment that both parties were no further forward in terms of a new lease agreement, with direction from the Middle Level Commissioners on behalf of the Board only being received yesterday. The advice is that first the parties need to agree Head of Terms and then this can be passed to a solicitor to surrender the existing agreement and create a new one. The advice included that safeguards would be needed to be included within an agreement to mitigate the risk of a public right of way being created. The solicitor cost is estimated to be £2,500 plus VAT and disbursements which will amount to a copy of the Title Register and Plan (being £14 plus VAT). Cllr Sanderson clarified that any agreement would need to be for the whole Board landholding (Bill Hall Way Land) rather than just the woodland area.

The Chairman asked whether the Board would be comfortable in a 50:50 spilt of costs with the Parish Council, however Cllr Sanderson confirmed she did not have delegated authority to agree to this and would need to take it back to the Council for their approval. Mr Raby suggested we need to consider the cost before agreeing in the context of all the Board's requirements, however it was highlighted that the benefit to the Board of the Parish Council's management and maintenance was significantly greater than the one-off cost of getting a new and more robust agreement in place. Mr Bywater added that it is important both parties have sufficient legal protection. Cllr Sanderson would like both parties to aim for having a new agreement in place by the end of October 2026 so winter maintenance works can take place.

RESOLVED

That the Minutes of the Meeting held on the 4th June 2025 are recorded correctly and that they be confirmed and signed.

Approve a sub-Committee be set up with the delegated authority to agree Head of Terms with the Parish Council and to commission, finalise and sign the updated lease agreement. The Chairman and Mr S Bywater to form the sub-Committee.

That any costs associated with updating the lease be split with the Parish Council 50:50.

Councillor K Sanderson left the meeting at this point.

B.1146 Constitution & Membership

Mr Burrows reported that he had written to the Area Director at Natural England regarding their membership and had no response. The Chairman reflected how important it was for Natural England to be part of the Board and that the vacancy ought to be kept open for them. The Board were comfortable in Mr Burrows escalating higher up the management chain in Natural England.

Reflecting on the Chairman's 9-year tenure, the Vice Chairman highlighted that he has no desire to take on the Chair role and therefore would be happy to stand down such that a clear succession for the Chair role could be paved. No Board Members put themselves forward for Chair or Vice Chair succession.

B.1347 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. Mr S Bywater added that this advice is hugely important given the proposed development affecting the Board, citing discussions held on site with prospective developers at Moto Services.

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.

Mr Burrows also provided an overview of the MLC delivery under the government's IDB Fund grants that benefit the Board through improved resilience and management of the Bevill's pond.

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.1348 Environment Officer's Report

Mr Burrows highlighted a change in approach to the Environment Officer's reporting. There will now be newsletters developed and circulated to Members of all MLC administered IDBs with interesting and generic updates. An annual report for each IDB will now be specific to that Board and focussed on their Key Environmental Compliance Indicators as seen in the paper for this Board Meeting.

The Chairman reported a positive discussion with Ms S Lloyd to develop the draft Biodiversity Action Plan. The Board discussed potential locations for a swift box with no firm conclusion. Mr S Raby suggested a location on Mr Behagg's building may be suitable and that he could approach him.

Mr Burrows added that it was really important for Members to record their sighting on the iRecord app, highlighting 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 a swift box.

B.1349 Chairman's items

The Chairman reported that Duke's Drain requires slubbing out and a bank slip on Raveley Drain (Point 4) also needs addressing. Mr P Burrows added that neither of these had been accounted for within the proposed budget therefore suggested that given these are both in Area 1 that the Chairman be authorised to use the A1(M) fund once the works are scoped and costed. An Environmental Screening Report will be needed. Mr S Raby offered his support to addressing these issues and other members agreed.

The Chairman was grateful for the MLC Compliance & Enforcement Officer's support in starting to address the long-standing issues on Sawtry Brook and the M&E team for securing and delivering three new control panels on behalf of the Board under the government's IDB Fund. Mr T Darby added his thanks and outlined as pump attendant he was waiting for a laminated instruction sheet, so he knows how to work the new controls.

RESOLVED

That the Chairman be authorised to use the A1(M) fund for works to Duke's Drain and to address the bank slip at point 4.

B.1350 Consulting Engineers' Reports

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

M&E and capital works

The Board reviewed the paper from Mr D Bantoft the MLC Head of M&E along with the request from Mr A Lenson of AG Reserves for the Board to consider and plan for the purchase of automated weed screens for both Castle Hill and Moat Farm Pumping Stations for which he is contracted by the Board as their pump attendant. Mr Lenson has instructed a quote from Factum Alpha Ltd for a refurbished unit at a cost of

£51,196.58 per station. Mr Lenson's request was on the basis of the need to improve the safety of the operation, especially at Moat Farm PS.

Mr Burrows clarified that it would be highly unlikely that these works would be eligible for government grant and given the Board also has full suite of pump overhauls to consider and currently has inadequate funds to address all matters therefore they would need to prioritise accordingly.

Mr T Darby suggested that the pump overhauls ought to be the Board's priority and that the installation of automated weedscreen cleaners may require the original weedscreen bars to also be replaced at both stations, therefore the overall cost would be higher. Mr S Parlsey agreed that the Board would need advice on this matter. Mr T Darby agreed that manual cleaning of Moat Farm was the most problematic of the Board's stations and the Board were sensitive to the operational safety risks that need to be considered by their pump attendants.

Mr Burrows added that AG Reserves are the only ratepayer served by Moat Farm pumping station therefore the cost of any works would be borne by AG Reserves in one way shape or form, either self-funded and delivered, via the Area 4 drainage rate or via a Public Works Loan and then rated with interest over a number of years. He added that without Mr Lenson being at this meeting to inform the rate decision and without any funding commitment within his request, it may be difficult for the Board to commit at this stage.

Mr Burrows highlighted that currently there was no budget earmarked for the pump overhauls. Mr T Darby added that there was now a healthy balance in Area 3 General Fund which could provide some funding. Mr D Elmore also suggested an internal loan from the A1(M) Fund may also be appropriate and more cost effective than a Public Works Loan which should be the last resort.

In terms of the comment in the M&E report regarding the length of the onsite chrome at Sawtry Roughs, Mr T Darby highlighted that he carries a longer chrome for the operation but that it is too long to be stored at the station. The Chairman also confirmed they had already agreed to the installation of LED lighting at the station.

<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
>
> Request quotes for pump overhauls at all three stations.
>
> That a sub-Committee of the Chairman, Mr T Darby and Mr S Bywater be delegated the authority to determine and instruct a delivery plan for one, two or three pump overhauls once quotes have been received, taking advice from the Responsible Finance Officer in terms of responsible use of reserves, internal loan and Public Works Loan.
>
> That the Clerk write on behalf of the Board to Mr Lenson of AG Reserves in response to his request.

<u>B.1351 Health & Safety</u>

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.

Mr Bywater and Mr Parsley enquired regarding liabilities for contractor safety given the issues raised by Mr Lenson. Mr Burrows suggested that it is the contractor's responsibility for their own risk assessments and method statements and the Board's responsibility to assure their contractors have suitable management approaches in place.

He added that for IDBs that use MLC for their operational services that this is a role undertaken by MLC on behalf of the Board and ordinary it ought to form part of the responsibilities of the Board's District Officer. Mr Bywater suggested that it may be a better use of AW Safety Ltd's services in the interim assuring and supporting the Board with these gaps rather than another site inspection.

The Chairman reminded the Board that they had been without a District Officer for a number of years and re-introducing the role would come at a cost. Mr Bywater added that it may be a cost well spent if it better manages the Board's risks. Mr Burrows suggested he reach out to District Officers of neighbouring Boards to see whether there is interest such that the Board can consider next year.

The Chairman ran through the key issues highlighted in the H&S inspection and asked whether the MLC are able to address. Mr Burrows committed to ask the team who would be in touch in due course.

B.1352 District Officer's Report

Not applicable, however refer to above

B.1353 Governance

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

RESOLVED

Completion 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 2026/26 authorising the Chairman and Clerk to sign the statement.

B.1354 Finance Report – Looking Back

Finance 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. Mr D Elmore proposed the accounts be approved and this was seconded by Mr P Custance 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.1355 Finance Report – Looking Forward

The Board noted the position as laid out by their Responsible Finance Officer. Subject to a review of the budget position in Q4 once winter pumping costs are clearer, the Board agreed to move up to £70,000 from Area 3 General Fund into an Asset Management Fund for the overhauls to Sawtry Rough and Castle Hill.

Fees & Remuneration

RESOLVED

The Board approved to award up to the following fees and renumeration level for their contracted official(s) for 2026/27

Name	Role	Asset	2026/27 Max Value
Mr A Lenson	Pump Attendant	Moat Farm	£423
Mr A Lenson	Pump Attendant	Castle Hill	£423
Mr T Darby	Pump Attendant	Sawtry Roughs	£423

Rental agreement with Sawtry Parish Council to remain at £5 per annum.

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 £7,158.84

RESOLVED

That the Precept is paid in full.

Determination of land for rating purposes

RESOLVED

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.

Rate Requirement for 2026/27

Having reviewed the budget, members considered the rates for the four Areas. Area 1 rate was proposed by Mr P Custance and seconded by Mr D Elmore, Area 2 rate proposed by Mr D Elmore and seconded by Mr T Darby, Area 3 rate proposed by Mr S Bywater and seconded by Mr P Custance and Area $ rate proposed by Mr D Elmore and seconded by Mr T Darby. All were carried unanimously.

RESOLVED

i) That the estimates be approved.

ii) That a total sum of £61,525 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 £37,188 and £24,337

iv) That the drainage rates in the £ be laid and assessed on Agricultural hereditaments in the District.

Area 1	3.3p
Area 2	0.0p
Area 3	36.00p
Area 4	75.00p

v) That Special Levies of £24,337 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.

vii) That the Clerk be authorised to recover all unpaid rates and levy by such statutory powers as may be available.

B.1356 Date of next Meeting

RESOLVED

The next full meetings of the Board is on 9th June 2027 at the Admiral Wells 10:00 start.

B.1357 Any Other Business

None Raised

The meeting closed at 12:20

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Chair

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Date