



**middle level
commissioners**

Proudly managing water levels in the Fens since 1862

Standing Advice Note MLC004:

Catchwaters

Issued: August 2026

Key messages

- Catchwaters are strategic flood defence channels that intercept surface water runoff from highland areas, capturing and diverting excess water in a rainfall event to prevent it flooding low lying farmland, roads and rural communities. Our catchwaters intercept water entering the lowest part of our catchment; the water is pumped twice to discharge it to sea.
- The important role of our catchwaters should be recognised within strategic documents such as SFRAs and in FRAs, Local Plans and drainage strategies.
- Catchwaters are likely to respond very quickly meaning that water levels can rise and fall very quickly, flowing deep and fast when high and falling again once a rainfall event has passed. Assessing a catchwater outside a rainfall event may not truly reflect its critical role in water level management as it may appear shallow and insignificant.
- Development and land use change heavily impact our receiving catchwaters and this should be considered at all stages of development.
- The MLC 20m byelaw strip (and the Internal Drainage Board 9m byelaw strip) is crucial for the efficient and effective maintenance of our catchwaters and for enabling future works. Our consent will be required for any works within the byelaw strip; it should not be presumed that consent will be granted.
- Our consent will be required for any water that ultimately discharges into our catchwaters (or other watercourses) along with associated fees. Impacts on our catchwaters will be assessed on a case-by-case basis to ensure there is no adverse impact on these significant watercourses or elsewhere in the system.
- Our catchwaters are likely to need additional capital works funded by development to enable improved capacity. This may mean they need to be deepened, widened, embankments may need to be raised, or additional flood storage capacity provided elsewhere in the catchment.

What are Catchwaters?

Our catchment is at and below sea level; flood risk is complex and often misunderstood. The way our catchment responds to rainfall depends on ground saturation levels and the amount, duration and intensity of rainfall. Our catchwaters and other watercourses work integrally with the Internal Drainage Boards (IDBs) that pump into our system.

Our watercourses and pumping stations were designed primarily to manage water from agricultural land. Urban development and the way land is managed in highland areas have significant impact on our catchwaters. 'Slow the Flow' and attenuation measures are not silver bullets in terms of reducing flood risk, and catchwaters play a crucial strategic role protecting lives, livelihoods and the environment from flooding.

Development that impacts on our catchwaters needs careful design, in collaboration with us and the affected IDBs to ensure that we can continue to accommodate additional flows and manage water safely and efficiently.

Catchwaters in the Middle Level

MLC manage three catchwaters which perform a key function in wet and dry weather scenarios. There is also one catchwater managed by an IDB within our catchment. These are:

Pig Water (MLC): Receives highland flows from Cardea/Stanground (Peterborough), Farcet and the east of Yaxley. Pig Water conveys water into Yaxley Lode and ultimately to Bevill's Leam Pumping Station. We actively manage this essential watercourse to protect land and properties from flooding in the winter and enable us to transfer water for irrigation in the summer. This water also supports the local ecology, peat restoration and two national nature reserves within the Great Fen. In future, water levels in Pig Water may need to be held higher to better enable conservation of valuable lowland peat and support agriculture.

Yards End Dyke (MLC): Receives highland flows from the west of Yaxley (south of the A15) and Stilton and directs it into Yaxley Lode. It now also receives water from parts of Great Haddon (north of the A15). It is an essential watercourse protecting land and properties from surface water flooding.

Middle Level Catchwater Drain (MLC): The Catchwater Drain intercepts highland flows from Sawtry and west of the A1, diverting it into Great Raveley Drain. It works in combination with Woodwalton Fen Flood Storage Reservoir and Bevill's Leam Pumping Station to manage flood risk to the lowest land in the country

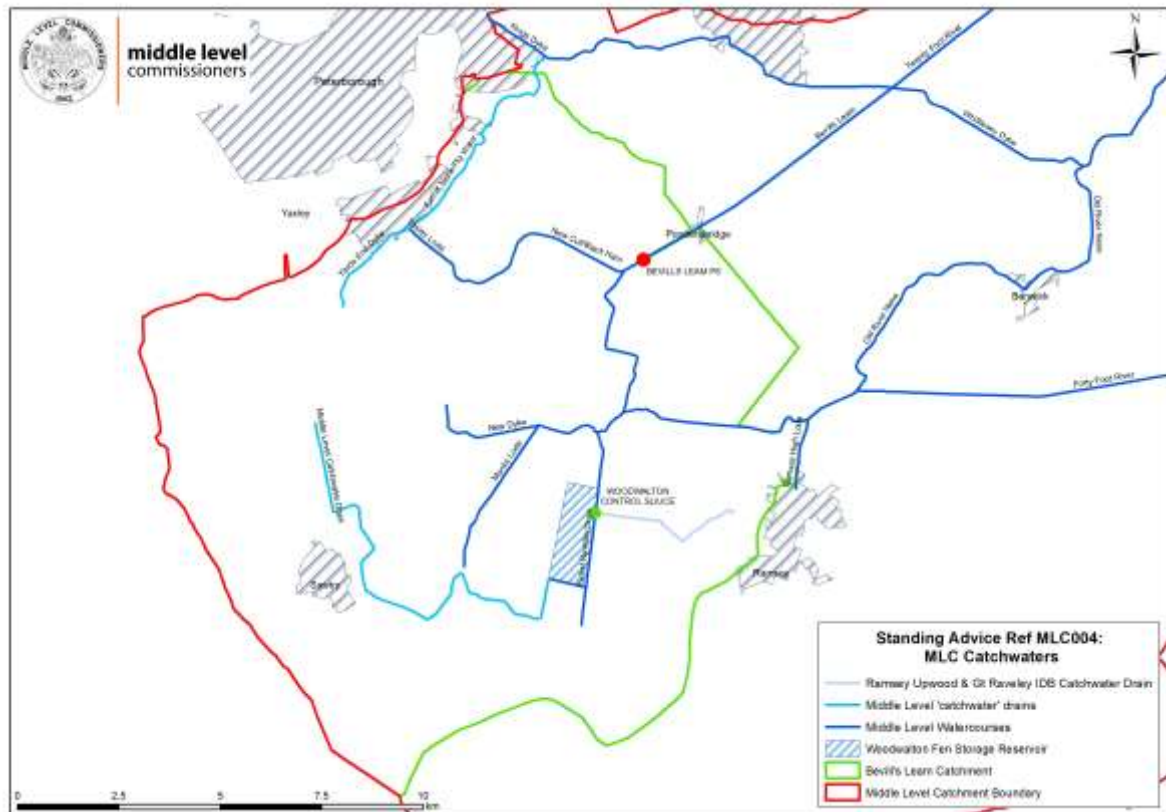
Catchwater Drain (Ramsey, Upwood & Great Raveley IDB): Intercepts flows from the developing highland areas of Ramsey and Upwood and discharges to the MLC's Great Raveley Drain.

This advice is primarily for:

- **Local Planning Authorities (LPAs):** Huntingdonshire District Council, Peterborough City Council
- **Lead Local Flood Authorities (LLFAs):** Peterborough City Council, Cambridgeshire County Council
- **Developers**
- **Infrastructure providers**
- **Landowners/occupiers/residents/tenants/riparian owners**
- **Internal Drainage Boards within the Middle Level catchment area**

Geographical coverage

Our catchwaters intercept water in the western part of the catchment (Bevill's Leam Catchment), which is the lowest-lying part the Middle Level. This also includes areas where there is the potential through development to transfer water from outside the catchment boundary across the watershed into the Middle Level. Further details can be provided on request.



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