

MIDDLE LEVEL COMMISSIONERS

Report of the Middle Level Board on the financial year 2025/26 for submission to the General Meeting of the Commissioners to be held on 6 November 2026

MEMBERS OF THE MIDDLE LEVEL BOARD – 2025/26

(year in which first elected in brackets)

JONATHAN BROWN (Chairman)	(2006) [Vice Chairman from November 2025]
HUGH WHITTOME (Vice Chairman)	(2002) [Chairman from November 2025]
PATRICK ALLPRESS	(2011)
DUNCAN BOUGHTON	(1985) - Resigned 2025
ROBERT BROWN	(2013)
MARK HALL	(2025)
MARC HEADING	(2004)
Dr DEREK LANGSLOW	(2023)
MATHEW LATTA	(2012)
ANDREW LENSEN	(2021)
ALISON MORRIS	(2024)
PAUL WEST	(2012) - Resigned 2025
STEPHEN WHITTOME	(1989)

CHRIS CROFTS

(representing the Borough Council of King's Lynn and West Norfolk under the provisions of the Land Drainage Act 1991)

Mrs DEE LAWS

(representing Fenland District Council under the provisions of the Land Drainage Act 1991)

ALEX MISCANDLON

(representing Fenland District Council under the provisions of the Land Drainage Act 1991)

Ms SALLY HOWELL

(representing Huntingdonshire District Council under the provisions of the Land Drainage Act 1991)

OFFICERS:

Clerk and Chief Executive – P Burrows FCIWEM C.WEM CEnv PSAg

Chief Engineer – Mrs N Oldfield IEng FICE ACIWEM

Head of Finance – A Wool FCCA

ACCOUNTS IN RESPECT OF THE FINANCIAL YEAR 2025/26

The Commissioners' revenue balance on 31st March 2025 was £2,943,051.37 and during the year has increased by £914,227.79 to £3,857,279.16.

The sum of £484,879.13 was received from the Environment Agency (EA), being the standard annual calculated contribution in respect of highland water contributions for maintenance works.

The precept paid to the EA amounted to £2,148.55 compared with £2,106.42 in 2024/2025.

The Commissioners borrowed £11 million from the Public Works Loan Board for the St Germans Pumping Station replacement scheme and the balance outstanding on 31st March 2026 was £6,321,978.27.

Development contributions were received in respect of all development which would give rise to an increase in the rate or volume of surface water discharge to maintained watercourses within the catchment.

There are no unusual features in the Navigation (Middle Level Act 2018) and Adventurers' Accounts. Within the (2018) Navigation Accounts the sum of £210,202.52 was received during the year for Navigation Registration/Licence Fees and the retained balance as at 31st March 2026 for the installation of facilities on the Link Route was £216,522.09.

MEMBERS ATTENDANCE

The attendances of most of the Members of the Board have been excellent as usual.

ETHNIC MONITORING

The Commissioners' workforce is ethnically classed as white European.

During the reporting period (April 2025-March 2026) ten members of staff were appointed (including two part-time roles), four members of staff resigned, and one member of staff retired.

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**THIS REPORT IS PROVIDED AS IT WAS PRESENTED TO THE BOARD AT THE APRIL 2026
MEETING**

(with the removal of employee matters and appendices)

2025/26 Annual Report

Chief Executive's Summary

Having experienced the wettest year for pumping on record (2023/24), the 2025/26 dry summer has provided me the opportunity to better appreciate how critical and valued our summer water resource operations are. Getting water to where it is needed to serve irrigators, navigators and the natural environment is closer to an art than a science and relies on the fantastic experience and local relationships we have. It is perverse that these critical operations are largely un-legislated and unfunded. The wet weather returned after Christmas and then showcased how we need to be ready for managing extremes and operate for overlapping drought and flood conditions.

2025/26 built from 2024/25 with delivery being the primary focus. We were successful in securing and delivering £4.7m of Internal Drainage Board (IDB) Fund (Tranche 2b) grants funded projects and the administration and delivery of these commitments has been a primary focus particular for staff in M&E, Operations, Environment & Ecology and Finance, meaning some 'business as usual' activity has been impacted:

- Mobile Pumps – Phase 2 (MLC with IDB enabling works)
- St Germans Pumping Station Resilience Phase 2 (MLC)
- Bevill's Pond Resilience (MLC and Sawtry IDB)
- Asset Resilience – Pumps and Channels (MLC and IDBs)

This fund, which came with less constraints than FCERM grant-in-aid, enabled us to think and invest differently. In my view we need to continue to change gear in terms of our business model and philosophy to become more commercially minded within the boundaries of a not-for-profit public authority. Whilst there remains work to do within our improvement and modernisation journey, our organisational foundations are now in a much healthier position to build from, albeit our base capacity and capability are a constraint to what needs to be, and could be, achieved. We will need to identify and nurture partnerships not only with traditional partners but with the innovators within our local agricultural and the development sectors. The Commissioners' active inputs here will be critical. At St Germans Pumping Station for example, we now are starting to gear our infrastructure turning our assets from feeling like a financial burden into engines that drive our business more efficiently.

The Middle Level System River Management Scheme dispute with the Environment Agency cast a significant cloud over the organisation in 2025/26, and I am pleased we can now move forward positively. It will take a few years, however I am confident that we can end up stronger for the experience. It is clear that we, and the IDBs, need to reduce our collective reliance on government grant in aid funding and highland water payments. Whilst we remain focussed on influencing and informing policy shifts, MLC and IDB assets are of the age that we cannot avoid the scale of capital works ahead of us that will cost hundreds of millions of pounds to develop and deliver. We have a significant gap in both capacity and capability. The uncomfortable truth is that our current business model and the IDB governance model within the Middle Level, has not been successful in leveraging sufficient grant during a period where grant has been relatively plentiful, and as a result it has mainly been relatively minor scale capital works that have been delivered during the last 10 years.

Thanks to the support of the Middle Level Board, we now have greater capability to press our regulatory teeth and turn the significant development pressure we face within our catchment into a risk management and financial opportunity rather than seeing it negatively. Fees and contributions from developers are a critical source of funding to develop and deliver the capital works on the MLC and/or IDB infrastructure that serves and benefits developments. We have turned the corner in this regard, however we need continued focus and investment to maintain and accelerate our positive trajectory.

We have assets, including winter excess water, that society needs. As our reputation matures, we need to lever new opportunities and better showcase the role our catchment, infrastructure and operations could play to support the needs of a growing country. Strategic water storage within the Bevill's Pond to serve irrigators, developers and new technology is one such opportunity.

Paul Burrows, Chief Executive & Clerk

Fens 2100+

Together, we are transforming our approach to secure a climate resilient future for the Fens.

As we know, the Fens is one of the most distinctive landscapes in the UK. Thanks to the ambition, targeted investment, and collaboration of previous generations the Fens today is one of the most important regions in the UK. It:

- is home to more than 600,000 people.
- plays a vital role in feeding the nation, producing a third of England's vegetables and supporting 80,000 food industry jobs.
- holds many important transport routes, energy networks and fast-growing industries such as agritech and life sciences.
- includes internationally protected habitats and supports many rare species.
- contributes major natural capital benefits, such as clean water, food productions, recreation and carbon storage in its peat soils.

However, as 87% of the Fens landscape is below the mean spring tide level it is extremely vulnerable to flooding from rivers and the sea.

The environment, infrastructure and communities here only function because a complex flood risk and water management asset system keeps the land dry. This system drains a substantially wider area than the Fens itself, moving water from 12% of England through the Fens to the sea. Protecting this infrastructure is essential to sustaining economic stability and future growth. Housing and employment opportunities in the area rely on flood resilience and water security.

The Fens are entering a period of significant and accelerating risk. The existing approach to managing water, flood, and coastal risks is no longer sufficient due to:

- ageing assets,
- increasing climate pressures,
- growing expectations from communities and industry.

The climate is changing, and we are experiencing:

- more frequent periods of heavy rainfall,
- more violent storms,
- rising sea levels.

This is putting pressure on our assets and amplifying flooding risks. As climate related pressures increase, the risk of cascading failures also increases.

The evidence is clear: without timely and coordinated intervention, the resilience of this nationally important region will continue to decline. This will increase long term costs and expose communities, infrastructure, and the wider economy to avoidable risk.

Fens 2100+ was set up to address these issues and develop a long-term plan to manage future flood risk in the Fens. Recognising that no single organisation can address these challenges alone, the Fens 2100+ Partnership was formed and we are a member. The partnership provides a platform for:

- collaboration,
- planning,
- shared action.

Built on strong principles and cross sector collaboration, it aims to secure a climate resilient future for the Fens. It will do this by:

- aligning investment,
- strengthening system performance,
- ensuring the decisions we take today are the right ones.

Following a Westminster session for MPs and Lords, a critical milestone was achieved on 2 April 2026 with the publication of key Fens 2100+ products:

- Baselining work - Bringing together the full picture of 17,000 flood risk management assets across the Fens.
- A Partnership Action Plan and Case for Change.

They are available:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fens-2100>

With the Great Ouse baseline (within which MLC and local IDBs feature) available:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/great-ouse-fens-2100-baseline-evidence-report-and-appendices>

Efficiencies and Income Generation

In April 2025 we outlined the six 'Big Win' areas of organisational focus that will result in short, medium and/or long term significant financial benefit to rate and levy payers via:

- increased efficiency,
- reduced financial risk to MLC,
- increased investment and income generation and/or
- increase effectiveness/productivity.

Efficiencies - The BIG WIN Six		Page No
1	MLC Navigation	
2	Fens Reservoir	
3	Optimising St Germans Pumping Station	
4	Development & Consent Charging	
5	Use of MLC property, land and watercourses	
6	Levering grant and partnership funding to deliver capital works	

To achieve significant efficiencies our business model needs to evolve and commercialise within the boundaries of a not-for-profit public authority via continued proportionate upfront investment in capacity, capability and technology, this is required to identify, unlock and deliver efficiency opportunities.

Within sections of this report an update is provided on progress associated with these six areas. Given that we have had insufficient capacity and capability focussed on maximising income from development within our catchment over the last 20 years, we have very limited development and asset improvement funds held in reserve to enable us to develop and deliver the scale of capital works we have within our emerging Asset Investment Programme. We also need to reduce our reliance on government grant in aid as well as unlocking funding and partnership opportunities with other sectors that benefit (or could benefit more) from our infrastructure and operations.

With the support of the Board, we are addressing the immediate capacity issues associated with cost recovery and contributions from developers and capital works to reduce the risk of missing out on significant levels of income, increasing future costs to rate and levy payers and missing partnership opportunities.

The IDB Governance Future within the Middle Level of the Fens

IDBs and Board members had the opportunity to discuss and provide feedback on the outline design in Q1 of 2025/26. Members of the 'Case for Change' working group met in September 2025 to review the feedback on the Outline Design and agree next steps. The consensus is that people need something more specific to debate. We also, unsurprisingly, have people on either extreme of the spectrum between staying as we are and not seeing any need for change, and those that feel radical change is long overdue. Most are somewhere in-between.

A proposal has been conceived that the working group supported moving into 'Detailed Design'. This proposal is to move from the current 25 IDBs to 7 IDBs, in phases, over the next 15 years. This proposal aims to balance:

- 1 Hydrological common sense and logical alignment.
- 2 The Outline Design feedback.
- 3 Respective readiness and need for change.
- 4 Likely trigger points for change.

This proposal aims to provide:

- 1 An option for detailed design and subsequent debate.
- 2 The ability to phase change and make it more bite-sized.
- 3 Time for IDBs to make steps to align 'standards' ahead of amalgamation.
- 4 A meaningful change that will enable improvements and efficiency within MLC & IDB working.
- 5 A middle ground between the 'go big' and 'stay small' views.
- 6 A platform for further and quicker change should it be needed or if the Fens Reservoir enables.

The Detailed Design work is largely complete with final inputs required from the Working Group in May 2026, with the aim to then have an IDB Chairs session on it ahead of consultation through summer/autumn 2026. Depending upon response and agreement, Boards would be asked to approve any final proposal (particularly any Boards amalgamating in any Phase 1) at their 2027 AGMs.

Looking ahead, the Middle Level Commissioners may choose to take a view on their stance regarding the reform needed given the inter-relationship and inter-dependence of operations, resources and services with IDBs and the associated collective strengths and weaknesses. We also need to be prepared for a government view based on Local Government reforms and potential recommendations from the ongoing IDB Finance research.

Organisational Foundations

At its April 2023 meeting the Board recognised the Chief Executive's assessment of the range of organisational foundation building blocks that are needed; a programme of improvements is ongoing.

IT Report

An IT pathway has been developed to address critical risks and vulnerabilities, ahead of enabling more efficient and effective working. Within the last year:

- Rationalisation and replacement of IT hardware has taken place with the move to Windows 11 given that Windows 10 is no longer supported.
- The internet leased line at the Office/Depot is now in place and the enabling works for the line at St Germans have been undertaken.
- Our cyber security risks have been reviewed.

Tablets

We have successfully implemented *Smart Farmer*, a digital application designed to support the management of plant and vehicle maintenance, as well as health and safety (H&S) requirements. Widely adopted in the agricultural sector, Smart Farmer provides real-time data on machinery checks, fault reporting, servicing schedules and maintenance regimes. This information is seamlessly relayed internally, resulting in a significant reduction in equipment downtime.

The app also includes robust features for incident reporting, including photographic documentation and automated GPS tagging of identified issues. In addition, Smart Farmer integrates essential tools such as access to operational manuals, training resources and lone worker protection systems. However, the application does not fully deliver on its intention of providing a comprehensive lone working hazard control measure. Technical limitations arising from compatibility issues between device manufacturers and the app developer currently restrict its ability to reliably raise an alarm when the device is in a locked state. MLC are working with Smart Farmer in the development of a solution to address these constraints and are, in parallel, considering alternative lone working control measures.

The introduction of Smart Farmer, alongside tablet deployment to operational staff and the use of SharePoint, has significantly enhanced information sharing across the team. Operators now have direct access to critical documents, including operator manuals, health and safety procedures, risk assessments and safe systems of work. The forthcoming 2026 Operations Manual will be further integrated across multiple applications within the tablet software. Through GIS-based mapping of the MLC system, users will be able to select specific channels and expand into detailed mapping layers, providing information on local works within each reach, while also identifying key constraints, ecological points of interest and associated health and safety hazards.

This digital transformation has not only improved operational efficiency but has also strengthened our organisational health and safety culture. It fosters a more proactive, informed and safety-conscious workforce, reducing reactive behaviours and setting a strong foundation for continuous improvement.

HR

Jo Gray of Phoenix People continues to provide external HR support and advice. Incremental improvements are planned alongside line manager training that has taken place and support for employee related issues where external advice is prudent.

The following topics have been addressed over the last year:

- Sexual harassment awareness training and organisational risk assessments are in place.
- Sick Pay policy has been updated as per approval at the November 2025 Board.
- Pension salary sacrifice opt-in option for our NEST workplace pension scheme is in place.

In addition, we have been advised to alter the duration of our probationary period from 6-months to 3-months given upcoming changes to the Employment Rights Act 2025. The unfair dismissal threshold will be reducing to 6-months from January 2027. This change will mean we will need to develop a strengthened approach to new employee induction.

The Board is asked to agree that we change our probationary period to 3-months, with the ability to extend it in exceptional circumstances by up to an additional 2-months.

Health & Safety

External health and safety support continues to be provided by AW Safety Management Ltd (Previously COPE Safety Management). We will be reviewing their service provision during spring 2026, it is due for renewal in August 2026. AW support continues to include advisory visits, formal audits, and assistance with compliance against sector best practice.

Site Assessments and Audits

During the period, AW conducted several visits and assessments across MLC facilities:

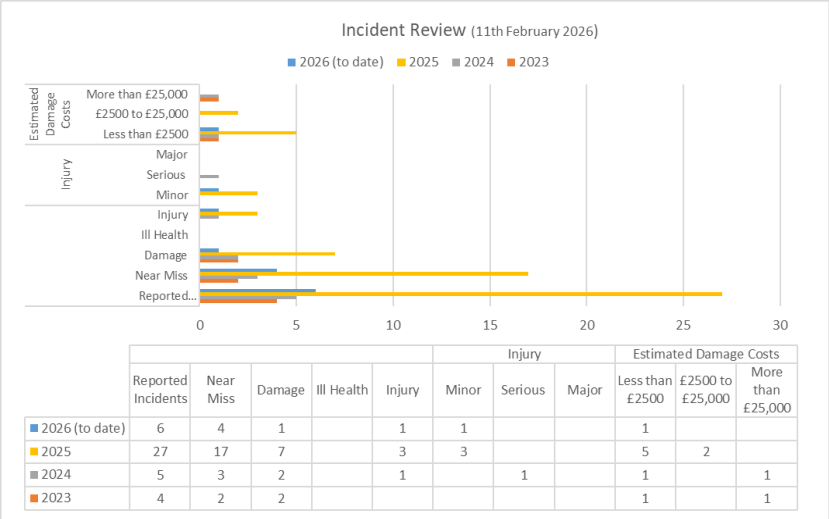
- Bevill’s Leam Pumping Station:** A fire risk assessment highlighted potential asbestos in ceiling tiles and recommended installation of additional fire doors to compartmentalise the building. An asbestos survey carried out by KM Asbestos Services confirmed no presence of asbestos and broken/spare tiles were removed. Considerations were also made for the then planned building extensions over diesel tanks and solar panel installation.
- Depot and Workshop:** Several safety improvements were implemented following inspection, including updating the displayed certification, marking hazards including an open inspection pit, periodic racking inspections (SEMA-accredited training completed), floor markings for fire exits in the racking area, and safe separation of flammable gases.
- Formal AW Safety Audit (November 2025):** MLC achieved 91% compliance (41/45 points), with minor corrective actions required, including emergency lighting log updates, PUWER inspection records, and completion of hazard marking at the depot pit (All actions raised have been completed).

Additional improvements include the installation and update of signage across MLC assets, updated asbestos registers covering all MLC and IDB buildings, and implementation of emergency response procedures for major incidents, mental health events, vehicle collisions, water entry, and environmental incidents. Safe working procedures for routine and ecological work have been formalised, and MLC risk profiling has been updated using the NEBOSH model.

Incident Reporting and Monitoring

Since the last report, 10 incidents have been reported, comprising five near misses, four damage-related incidents, and one minor injury. All incidents are reviewed, with ongoing monitoring and corrective actions implemented.

The chart below shows the incidents captured since January 2023.



Active monitoring templates and GIS layers for sensitive features have been rolled out to workforce tablets, enabling improved tracking of operational risks.

A dynamic risk assessment form, Bevill's pumps form and racking inspection form, all QR code-enabled, have been introduced to streamline reporting and reinforce safe working practices. Site induction forms are now in use at St Germans, ensuring all contractors are briefed on hazards and sign off before commencing work.

Training and Competence Development

We continue to invest in staff competence and engagement:

- 12 staff – GS6 training (5 June 2025)
- 24 staff - First Aid at Work training (July 2025)
- All staff - Manual Handling (July 2025)
- 3 staff – RYA Powerboat 2 training (July 2025)
- 19 staff – Counter balance forklift training (August 2025)
- 20 staff – Confined spaces (medium risk) training (September 2025)
- 8 staff – Mobile Elevating Works Platforms (MEWP) training (12 September 2025)
- 19 staff - Avant training (October 2025)
- 8 staff - HV training at St Germans (October 2025)
- 1 staff - Shoc GS6 training (14 November 2025)
- 1 staff -SEMA racking awareness training (November 2025)
- 3 staff - Chainsaw refresher training (December 2025)
- 10 staff - Woodchipper refresher training (December 2025)
- 1 staff - NEBOSH (November 2025 to January 2026)
- 7 staff - CDM Regulations Awareness training (12 March 2026)

Planned Training

- 3 staff - Borda 4x4 (February 2026)
- 6 staff - CDM Regulations (June 2026)
- 32 staff - Safe Working Near Water (May 2026)

These programmes complement ongoing initiatives to improve staff awareness, responsibility, and proactive engagement in health and safety.

Technology and Lone Worker Safety

Active monitoring and risk assessment tools have been enhanced through tablet-based GIS mapping. However, the current lone worker app functionality is limited, and additional measures—including a manual, externally monitored alarm—are being considered to ensure reliable emergency response.

Culture and Continuous Improvement

The enhanced focus on Plan-Do-Check-Act cycles and engagement of the majority of staff in health and safety initiatives continues to drive a positive cultural shift. Incident reporting has increased, reflecting improved awareness and confidence in constructive review processes rather than a decline in performance. This aligns with our ongoing work to embed sector best practice and achieve ADA Good Safety Guide standards.

We remain committed to continuous improvement across health and safety, including advancing emergency planning, contractor management, and compliance with CDM regulations.

Within the IDB1 Annual Report to Defra we are asked whether we have a Board member focussed on ensuring that health & safety is considered when Board decisions are made. The expectations are that every IDB will have a health & safety representative from their membership who will be suitably trained.

The Board is asked to review and confirm how they intend to meet the Health & Safety expectation set out in the IDB1 form.

Policy Reviews

We have an ongoing review and update of policies, with the following new policies needed or existing policies under review:

- IT Policy
- Artificial Intelligence Policy
- Policies for our approach to compliance with the CDM Regulations 2015 and the Procurement Act 2023
- Schedule of Reserved Matters and Scheme of Delegation, plus internal Scheme of Delegation
- Financial Reserves Policy
- Working Hours/Overtime Policy (with the Employment Committee)
- Policies associated with use of MLC Vehicles

A Compliance & Enforcement Policy has been developed to cover MLC and administered IDBs.

The Board is asked to approve the adoption of the Compliance & Enforcement Policy.

In support of our Planning & Consenting activity we have a suite of Standing Advice. Standing Advice is pre-written, published guidance provided for planners, developers, other authorities, residents, riparian owners and/or consent applicants and should be taken into account prior to receiving, or in lieu of receiving, site-specific advice or site-specific consultation responses (e.g., planning applications) provided by MLC.

MLC001 is Standing Advice covering 'Middle Level System Flood & Drainage Infrastructure Capacity' and essentially declares our system as 'at capacity'. We have recently updated and republished this advice.

MLC002a and MLC002b are newly developed Standing Advice notes, soon to be published, that aim to secure the MLC 20m Byelaw strip and 9m IDB Byelaw strip stating that we will only consent works within the respective strips if there is a compelling exception case that includes benefit to MLC or the relevant IDB.

At least one further Standing Advice note is planned focussed on culverting. This will either replace or support MLC and IDBs longstanding no culverting policy.

The Board is asked to support our continued development and publication of Standing Advice.

One of the gaps we have in terms of governance is staff declarations of interest. Annual declarations are standard in the public sector and important for transparency. A form has been introduced and staff have been asked to complete by 1 July 2026. We also have no current organisational position regarding publication of this information. In the public sector, it is only senior staff whose declarations are published and/or available upon request.

The Board is asked to adopt the position that only the Chief Executive, Chief Engineer and Head of Finance declarations of interest be made available and only if requested.

Insurance & Utilities

Insurance

Historically the number of insurance companies willing to quote for the insurance requirements of the MLC and administered IDBs is limited. In the past and before we moved to AXA we have found that only three or four insurers would consider quoting however at the time AXA were so competitive that some companies refused to quote.

There have been various cost increases within our renewal quotation based on sector wide adjustments as well as reflecting our evolving liabilities (e.g., inclusion of mobile pump assets and solar panels). In light of recent experience, we have made an upward adjustment to cater for our bridges' liabilities as well as matured the valuations for Bevill's Leam and St Germans Pumping Stations.

It is recommended that Board members and senior staff have a Q&A session with our broker in and around November 2026 to inform our renewal approach for 2027/28.

Electricity Service

The 12-month group (MLC and IDBs) contract with EDF Energy ceased on 30 September 2025. This contract was facilitated by brokers GEAB. A sub-committee of MLC Board Members and IDB Chairman reviewed options alongside MLC staff. We are now in contact with British Gas and are self-managing this within the Finance team for the 12-months to 30 September 2026.

Looking ahead, the sub-Committee support the move to Anglia Farmers, and this is now being explored. Given our adoption of renewables, export payment rates will become important within our decision making. However, export rate is not an important factor to the IDBs that are included within our overall portfolio. This may mean we need to have two portfolios in future.

Waste Exemptions

Defra and the Environment Agency introduced waste exemptions in circa 2008/09 and there is a suite of exemptions available to IDBs (including D1 exemption which allows for depositing waste from dredging inland waters). We followed Environment Agency advice at the time and have one suite of exemptions that covers the MLC and all our administered IDB operations.

This approach now requires improvement and mitigation to de-risk operations for IDBs and MLC individually and collectively. Following discussion with MLC and IDB Chairs, over the next 12-months we aim to move to MLC and each administered IDB having their own suite of waste exemptions and associated implementation controls. There will also likely be a need for associated training materials for IDBs and their District Officers.

We will likely require external resources/services to deliver this improvement and the cost associated with the work will be divided equally.

Electricity Net Zero

Stimulated by wise investment of the one-off government IDB Fund, the Board has adopted the ambition to become 'Electricity Net Zero' by ringfencing and reinvesting savings from renewables into resourcing and delivering further renewables until net zero has been achieved or all realistic opportunities have been exhausted.

The new rooftop solar on the depot and St Germans are operational and have been producing electricity all year (when the sun has been shining). The Bevill's rooftop solar (on a new building and not the pumping station itself) went online mid-March 2026 and the St Germans ground array has been constructed and the connections are coming on-line.

The export arrangements are complicated and are not yet fully in place to maximise their financial benefit.

2025/26

Site	Power Generated	Estimated Financial Saving (£)	Export income (£)
Office (Roof)	59MWh	£5,000	£7,000 Estimated
Depot (Roof)	172MWh	£5,500	£15,000 (Estimated not yet active, awaiting meter upgrade.)
St Germans (Roof only)	59MWh	£10,000	£10,000 (Estimated not yet active)
Bevill's (Roof)	2.1 MWh	£300	£75 (Estimated not yet active)
St Germans (Array)	NA	NA	NA
TOTAL	292.1 MWh	£20,800	£32,075

The St Germans site solar array and rooftop solar on the new building at Bevill's Leam Pumping Station have added to our portfolio and will comfortably cover the whole organisation's baseload requirements. Once export arrangements are in place, then options for the next phases of becoming Electricity Net Zero can be explored. Which will include the Aqueduct pump, the office and opportunities for wind.

Alongside investment in further renewables, we will look at options for sleeving benefit across our and IDB electricity needs.

We are now in partnership with CUB (UK) Ltd (a local March-based firm) to participate in the UK Government's Capacity Market Scheme. This scheme provides payments to organisations that can reduce electricity demand during rare periods of system stress. St Germans Pumping Station and Bevill's Leam Pumping Station are included within our 3-year agreement which begins in October 2026. The estimated annual income is £11,944 (subject to the value achieved through capacity market trading in each delivery year). We are now working with CUB to bring online a secondary trade agreement covering the period May-September 2026 that if concluded would generate an additional income of approximately £2,500.

The Board is asked to identify Commissioners to act in an advisory capacity to identify and mature future delivery plans to achieve Electricity Net Zero. The Board is also asked to delegate the decision-making regarding re-investment of the Electricity Net Zero Reserve to the Executive Committee.

It is expected that the next delivery activity will be a quick-win installation of additional solar on the concrete base of the soon to be removed existing diesel tanks at Bevill's Leam Pumping Station.

Land & Property

Improved management and registration of land is a critical foundation activity that enables our drive for strategic efficiencies and increased income generation. The formal registration of MLC owned land continues to be progressed by the Land Registry who have a team dedicated to our programme of work. The latest position is that the properties at Salter's Lode, Stanground and 31 & 33 Sluice Road are now registered with Land Registry, along with Reeds Cut and Sixteen Foot Drain. The Middle Level Main Drain and the Forty Foot Drain is ongoing and takes time given the length and number of neighbouring landowners that need to be consulted with.

The registration of land at Stanground has uncovered land ownership issues with two parcels of land that we are in discussions with the Environment Agency about. This has implications for our access to and use of land at Stanground, in particular for boater facilities.

In terms of the Cardea land transfer, we have an agreed position with Persimmon Homes and issued draft transfer paperwork to them in October 2025. The Catchwater land transfer is still with solicitors following valuation of the land by DVS, and negotiation is ongoing with Rochester Bridges Trust.

Over the last year, Notices to Terminate the tenancy agreements on all remaining leased Middle Level Main Drain bank lots have been issued and all are now back in hand. Grazing lots are also back in hand.

31 Sluice Road has been refurbished over the last year and is let, with professional tenancy management services now in place for this property and 33 Sluice Road. We are considering using these services for the management of Salter's Lode and Stanground Lock properties.

There is a small land parcel at St Germans where we are in early discussions with the landowner regarding trees on the land that pose a risk to the electricity substation that serves the pumping station.

Office, Depot & Sites

The review and improvement of the office electric car charging point, alongside a mechanism for staff/visitors to pay a contribution has yet to be actioned due to IDB Fund delivery pressures.

We have had a focus on document retention and storage within the Archive Room. This will continue as time allows but has highlighted the space that we have available and the need for smarter storage solutions. As we have reached the capacity of the current office, plans are being developed to convert the mezzanine space within the depot and consideration of better use of the current Archive Room. This will enable consolidation of space and improved ways of working for the M&E team and also potentially Operations, freeing up space in the office for additional capacity.

Planning permission has been granted and quotes will soon be sought for building works estimated at £40k-£80k. The Board has approved in principle the use of the property fund for these works.

Debt Management

In terms of some of the legacy developer charges debt, our new Compliance & Enforcement Officers are having success. Additionally, we have been successful in securing a charging order on the property of one ratepayer debtor.

We continue to explore further options regarding a package of drainage rate and navigation debt.

Defra Flood Funding Policy

The Government published the new FCERM funding guidance on 3 March 2026 with the new policy arrangements coming into effect from 1 April 2026.

To be eligible for funding a project must deliver strategic objectives and government policy, including:

- value for money (Net Present Value),
- reducing flood risk,
- focusing on deprived areas,
- prioritising projects with contributions from others (this would include funding provided by IDBs themselves),
- a percentage investment in Natural Flood Management (NFM) across the programme.

Project types that are eligible for grant funding include:

- refurbishing or replacing existing assets,
- building new assets,
- NFM projects,
- Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SuDS).

Asset Refurbishment Projects

Asset refurbishment is a significant renewal to one or more components in an existing asset that is not covered by routine maintenance. It includes work to mitigate for the loss of asset performance. This covers issues that asset maintenance cannot manage and that would be significant and permanent if not fixed.

It does not include asset replacement projects where an existing asset at the end of its life is replaced with another like for like asset which sustains the standard of service.

Under the new FCERM funding policy existing FCERM assets are eligible for 100% of funding for refurbishment.

New or Improved Asset Projects

Projects that are not refurbishment are eligible for 100% funding for the first £3 million, and 90% for costs above £3 million.

These include projects:

- replacing existing assets with a like for like replacement,
- building new or improved assets.

Projects cannot be artificially split into smaller components to fall below the £3 million fully funded threshold.

Maximising the likelihood of securing grant

It should be noted that there will be more projects that are eligible for investment than there is funding available. Projects will need to be prioritised to meet government targets and achieve best value for money.

Therefore, it is recommended that should the Middle Level Board (and our administered IDBs) wish to apply for FCERM grant funding and increase their likelihood of securing grant, that they plan to part-fund schemes to boost our works up in terms of priority for funding. This is like the funding rules that were in place prior to 2011 when IDBs only received 45% of project costs.

For new projects to be considered for funding, the first step is to collate relevant cost and benefit data to submit to the Environment Agency from 1 July 2026. This requires collating costs and benefits and other relevant data required by the Environment Agency in order to determine a project's eligibility and prioritise the programme.

If a project already appears on the FCERM investment programme with an allocation for future years, an application for grant funding approval (FCERM2)/Outline Business Case will need to be submitted using the new templates that have yet to be published.

The Board is asked to acknowledge the approach to part-fund future capital projects, the amount to be agreed on a project-by-project basis.

IDB Funding & Costs Research

A joint Defra and MHCLG IDB funding and costs research project is underway. It is being led by ICF, a consultancy with expertise in economic and financial analysis, particularly in evaluating the costs and benefits of environmental and regulatory policies in the water and land use sector. Supporting ICF is Logika, a consultancy specialising in flood risk management, drainage, and sustainable development and valuable experience from the water sector. The project is scheduled to conclude by July 2026.

The overarching goal of the project is to conduct a comprehensive review of IDBs' operations, focusing on financial efficiency and value for money, with the aim of assessing whether changes are needed to ensure the long-term sustainability of IDBs.

The research is structured around three core objectives:

1. Funding and Financial Review: To analyse IDB funding mechanisms, operational costs and financial pressures over the past decade and explore future funding options.
2. Benefit Evaluation: To assess the economic and social value of IDBs' work, both locally and nationally.
3. Data Modernisation: To explore how the annual IDB1 Form can be improved and modernised for better data collection and reporting.

The project will include:

- an evidence review,
- analysis of financial information and IDB1 reports,
- interviews with selected IDBs and stakeholders,
- an IDB survey to identify any gaps in the data, and
- case studies.

We have been engaging with the consultants leading the work and provided them with information to get them started. We have hosted them within the Middle Level and form a case study within their reporting. Given we collectively represent c25% of the IDB sector nationally, we will, in one way shape or form, inform their results and associated recommendations for change. Whilst this research is an opportunity to highlight and influence much needed policy change for collective benefit, there is equally the likelihood that it will draw out some uncomfortable truths.

In September we hosted the Local Delivery & Rural Floods Policy Team from Defra. We took them on a whistlestop tour from Stanground Lock through the Middle Level to St Germans Pumping Station and used the time and the backdrop to discuss and showcase our system and breadth of water management operations.

We highlighted the 'big ticket' areas of efficiency we are driving at the MLC, including how we are using the governments 'IDB Fund' wisely. We discussed the strengths and successes in how we work across the Middle Level but also the areas of policy and associated financing that are constraining our collective ability to plan and be as efficient and as effective as possible in a world that's changing, due largely to factors beyond our control.

One of the key issues the research will be assessing is the impact that special levies to IDBs is having on Local Authorities. This issue is being promoted by a Local Government Association 'IDB Levey Special Interest Group'.

Around 40 councils across England are working together to lobby the Government for reform to the funding system that supports the vital work of IDBs. IDBs are primarily funded through drainage rates charged directly on the occupiers of agricultural land within each drainage district and a special levy on district and unitary councils on behalf of the non-agricultural land within each district. Each council primarily funds the cost of the special levy through a combination of central government grants, their share of business rates and revenue from council tax levied on local properties. Due to rising costs in such things as electricity that power the pumping stations at times of flooding and sustained heavy rain, the special levy amount has been increasingly significantly in recent years.

On the evening of Tuesday 2 September 2025 there was a parliamentary meeting of the LGA's IDB Levy Special Interest Group. The meeting was attended by the leaders and portfolio holders from a number of special levy paying local authorities at the House of Commons alongside several members of parliament. ADA and IDBs were also represented by Robert Caudwell, Michael Sly, Daniel Withnall (Black Sluice IDB), and Paul Burrows (Middle Level Commissioners).

Reflecting on the meeting within the ADA Gazette, Paul Burrows said:

"It's pleasing that Local Authorities and MPs appreciate the criticality of the work the Internal Drainage Board sector play in enabling prosperous local communities. After all, every other Council service relies on keeping homes, business, land and infrastructure dry. We need to be mindful of potential unintended consequences within any call

for funding reform, particularly the special levies that Councils raise on our behalf. It is important that the IDB Costs & Funding Research commissioned by Defra gets under the skin of the issues and makes considered and well-evaluated recommendations.”

Lowland Peat Water Schemes (Discovery and Implementation Grants)

There are two grant schemes that will be launched in April 2026 available to a range of delivery partners. The grants build on the previous Lowland Agricultural Peat Small Infrastructure Pilot (LAPSIP) and Lowland Agriculture Peat Water Discovery Pilot (LAPWDP) schemes.

Possible delivery partners



The Discovery grant will fund the creation of water implementation plans to enable the raising and managing of water tables in lowland peat soils.

The Implementation grant will fund the installation of infrastructure needed to enable safe and sustainable raising and maintaining of water tables to improve lowland peat soils.

Anticipated application and delivery windows

	Discovery	Implementation Round 1	Implementation Round 2
Application Window	Apr – Jun 2026	Jun – Aug 2026	Apr-Jun 2028
Recommended funding thresholds	£50,000 - £300,000	£100,000-£1 million	£100,000-£1 million
Grants awarded	Sept 2026	Dec 2026	Sept 2028
Grant project timeframes (max)	Sept 2026 – Mar 2028	Jan 2027-Mar 2030	Sept 2028-Mar 2030

Further details on the application process are expected in April. It is anticipated that we will apply primarily for Implementation grants to deliver recommendations made in the LAPDWP study we delivered in partnership with Fenland SOIL. As a minimum we intend to apply for grant to install the new tilting weir structure at Horsey Toll, the structure itself was designed and purchased as part of the LAPSIP grant scheme.

The Board is asked to support the development and submissions of applications for Lowland Peat Water Schemes.

Highland Water and IDB Precept

We expect that both Highland Water and IDB Precept will be topics that are assessed within the IDB Costs and Funding Research project. We have provided our 'Highland Water conundrum' document to assist.

We understand from ADA that the long-awaited secondary legislation may be enacted in August 2026, and this enables IDBs to extend their districts, including rating, to catchment boundaries. Once this is in place, along with an associated process to follow, we, and the dual rated IDBs with areas of highland need to consider the relative pros and cons of extending rated areas. Local Authority and Environment Agency involvement in optioneering on this will be crucial.

In terms of 2026/27 IDB Precept payments to the Environment Agency, the Environment Agency Board approved the recommendation from the Anglian (Great Ouse) Regional Flood & Coastal Committee's (RFCC) for a 2% increase.

The local Environment Agency teams have committed to improving the transparency as to where and how IDB Precept funding is invested for the benefit of IDBs. A new annual statement approach has been developed to support the invoices received for payment. The Board and our administered IDBs will no doubt wish to consider these once received.

Communications & Engagement

In terms of general public engagement, during 2025/26 we have continued to use social media to promote our activities, to seek feedback and to respond to others' posts where necessary.

On social media our LinkedIn followers have increased from 632 to 736 over the last year. Followers of our Facebook page have increased from 1,371 to 1,844.

A key challenge we face is that very few people (be they members of the public, developers, politicians or potential investors) know who we are, how our system operates and how important our infrastructure is. It takes significant amounts of time to engage and educate with real impact and we know that impact is maximised when people see our system first hand within a guided tour.

To assist we are working with a local marketing firm who developed a professional media [video](#). The next stage of this activity will be some materials to better enable the efficiency and effectiveness of our planning and consenting work with developers and landowners.

We aim to make use of community engagement opportunities where possible and appropriate. We will be attending the Whittlesey Big Bash in June 2026 (adjacent to Ashline Lock) and hope to take part in Apple Day hosted by the Great Fen in October 2026. This gives us the ability to reach a wider audience at relatively low cost but relies on the support and willingness of our officers to give their time outside of normal working hours.

Environmental Risk Management

Review of key work 2025/2026

Improving understanding of Environmental Law and the impacts and risks of non-compliance

This has been a key focus for 2025 and was a focus for Board member awareness training within the November 2025 meeting.

Environmental Compliance and Standard Operations

This year we have developed and published a new suite of standard operating procedures (SOPs) for all routine channel maintenance operations, for both MLC and IDBs. The procedures set out, in practical terms, how operatives should undertake each activity to remain compliant with a wide range of environmental law including around protected species. The SOPs are also provided to all contractors working for or on behalf of MLC and IDBs to ensure that there is harmony in the way all IDB channels are managed across the district. The SOPs cover flail mowing, desilting and weed-cutting basket work, managing aquatic plants with weed boats, biosecurity procedures and managing dissolved oxygen levels. This helps to evidence our competence in environmental management, which helps to increase opportunities to access funding for further environmental enhancements that would benefit our water level management activities. It also helps to reduce the risk of prosecution and the associated costs for non-compliance.

Environmental Screening of non-routine works

A large number of non-routine works have been assessed by the department this year to identify and mitigate for environmental impacts. Assessments have included large Defra-funded projects such as St Germans solar project and Bevill's Leam pump overhaul, IDB tranche 2 works including bank repairs and culvert replacements and for residual MLSRMS activities, such as bank reinstatement and cutter-suction dredging preparation. These assessments have been undertaken alongside a full book of "normal" IDB and MLC non-routine projects such as culvert repairs, tree and scrub encroachment management, invasive non-native species control and aquatic vegetation control. This has helped MLC and IDBs to ensure their compliance with a full spectrum of environmental and wildlife laws.

Website

The "[Ecology and Environment](#)" web pages on the MLC website have been updated to showcase all the great work we do and the approaches we take to support our local wildlife to thrive, alongside our flood risk and water level management. News of our latest activities and surveys are published along with a library of resources and links to help others to better support nature in and around IDB channels. A dedicated [page](#) for IDBs has been developed which includes a library of advice, guidance, templates and much more to help them achieve and excel in environmental compliance and delivery.

Biosecurity and Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS)

Our biosecurity procedure has been updated and published this year, along with new biosecurity kits for all operatives and refreshed biosecurity training. This is well timed as a number of extremely problematic invasive non-native species (INNS), such as floating pennywort, are getting ever closer to us in bordering systems. We have renewed our efforts to ensure that everyone that uses or works in our channels are better informed of common INNS and what to do if they are spotted. Alerts have been refreshed and reissued to all stakeholders, partners, contractors and IDBs; flyers are being handed out to all boaters and the planning department are to begin to include an alert with all consent application responses. This should help to strengthen our borders, for now at least.

Updating Biodiversity Action Plans and maturing the IDB service package delivery

Focus over the past few months has been on re-developing Biodiversity Action Plans for all IDBs, as is statutorily required. These are large, complex and bespoke documents and much has changed including Legislation, priorities, national population trends and local nature conservation strategies, all of which have to be incorporated. Consequently, this is a huge job and is taking up most of our time. The new BAPs written so far have been well received and approved and we look forward to helping the IDBs to deliver positive outcomes for biodiversity. The BAPs are helping to showcase the amazing and improving biodiversity support IDBs provide through their everyday work indirectly, and directly through targeted actions. It is being noticed!

The way IDB environmental performance and compliance is assessed and reported has also been streamlined and standardised into Key Compliance Indicators (KCIs). This will help to ensure that any areas of environmental risk are clear, flagged promptly to the Board and the necessary mitigations approved, as well as highlight the good work the Board is doing. It also helps to make the Board Report a bit more focussed, IDB specific and digestible.

IDB Service Packages

IDB service package delivery has progressed well in its first season since launching. We have met with nearly all IDBs to discuss their environmental compliance and delivery and new Biodiversity Action Plans (BAPs) are being drafted for each. The new SOPs and other resources, templates and procedures have been disseminated and are available through the IDB portal on the MLC website. A number of annual surveys have been completed and published which help to benchmark the effect that current operations have on biodiversity. We can then be more confident in promoting the positive effects our management has on biodiversity, or in adapting regimes to improve environmental outcomes.

Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) Development

We are grateful to have led the development of the “Fen Main Drain” and “Drainage Ditches” sections of the new (draft) Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) for Cambridgeshire. The LNRS will be key to focussing efforts to conserve and enhance biodiversity in our local area and it recognises that the habitats we manage are of significant importance in our area for biodiversity. Our driving role has ensured that only activities and enhancements that are compatible with our flood risk and water level management operations are promoted for consideration via development or funding. For IDBs, the Strategy could generate significant funding opportunities where the IDB can demonstrate that biodiversity will be enhanced by improving flood risk and water level management. Such measures may include the funding of additional or improved water level control structures, such as solar-powered tilting weirs, which could provide more localised and flexible water level management within IDB catchments in a more efficient and dynamic way. The Strategy is likely to encourage more funding for riparian margins to be taken out of cultivation to benefit biodiversity but will also allow more flexible and efficient management access for IDB operations.

MLC Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) and environmental delivery

The refreshed MLC BAP is being drafted for review before and approval at the November 2026 Board meeting (via the Environment Committee). It will include considerations of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy objectives and will identify opportunities to harness environmental funding to enhance some of the habitats we manage, not only for improved provision for biodiversity but for improved water level management also.

St Germans Eel Pass

There is increasing public and political interest in the impact that the invasive non-native Chinese mitten crab is having in our channels, both on bank integrity and on our native wildlife. The new eel pass at St Germans, which incorporates bespoke design to help reduce the immigration of mitten crabs into our system from the tidal River Great Ouse, is nearly complete.

The eel pass is now in operation to secure passage for eels through the main migration period. However, we await the final fit of redesigned capture trays and some other small adjustments to get it working as intended. The project has been challenging with lessons to be learned but we already know that the solution we have designed and installed is trail-blazing and delivers significant time efficiencies and health and safety improvements over the original installation and, equally as importantly, safer passage for eels and improved control of invasive species. We hope it will provide a replicable template for other water managers to follow to improve the fate of the critically endangered species. The Mitten Crab expert from the National History Museum visited our site and reviewed our plans and designs and was very impressed and supportive of our efforts to control the invasive species. We will focus on building the shed over the top of the structure now to finish the project.

Badgers

Further badger setts were closed under licence in the west bank of Woodwalton Fen in late November 2025. But, as usual, they have found new, un-proofed areas of bank to re-excavate so further setts will need to be closed this autumn.

Water Quality

A team from Anglian Water met with us at the MLC offices, along with a number of other local water stakeholders including Local Authorities with the aim of helping them to better understand our priorities and jurisdictions, and for them to inform us of the work they have been doing to improve water quality and management in our system,

particularly around the Bevill's Pond. While the meeting was informative and open, it is clear that Anglian Water need to liaise much more closely with us when they are making decisions and taking action that affect our watercourses, as they are required to do, by law. Their improvement projects, which have been substantial, in the area are coming to an end with an acceptance, on their part, that whilst improvements have been made, pollution from their infrastructure into our watercourses will unfortunately continue as further improvements are too costly and otherwise unfeasible for a number of reasons. This is disappointing and we will continue to offer to work with them to help to design and progress any realistic solutions to help improve the quality of their water reaching our system.

Looking forward – Key focus for 2026/27

We are confident that the new processes, procedures and training that we have developed and delivered over the past two years have provided solid, compliant and productive environmental delivery foundations for MLC which we can now build upon and begin to develop and progress plans to maximise our environmental delivery.

MLC Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) and environmental delivery

Draft proposals for ambitious but efficient environmental delivery are being developed to be included in the refreshed MLC BAP. The proposals will be put forward to the Environment Committee ahead of the November Board meeting, with the aim of seeking approval for the progression of a number of projects to enhance our support of biodiversity. This includes making some of our unused spaces work harder for nature, such as the office site, St Germans, Cardea settlement ponds and meadows, Main Drain bank lots, Counter Drain and Old Popham's Eau. It includes considerations of the just-launched Local Nature Recovery Strategy and will identify opportunities where environmental funding and partnership working and even volunteer groups could be harnessed to help support delivery.

Bevill's Leam Pumping Station Eel Pass

Plans for any significant works to Bevill's Leam pumping station in the future will have to include the installation of an eel pass, in line with relevant Regulation. The design and approval for eel passes can take a long time so in anticipation, plans, designs and costings will be developed in advance, so the process is more efficient, and the solution can be delivered in harmony with refurbishment timescales. Budget for the design and plan development will be required, with the intention that as much funding as possible will be sought for the build and installation for the pass itself at the appropriate time.

IDB Service Package Delivery

Plans are in place to mature and deliver the other parts of the IDB service packages including the first bi-annual environmental newsletter for all Boards, due to be sent out in Q1 2026/27. This is where all the general updates, notices, advice and guidance that was previously included in the Board reports will now be included, further streamlining the Board reports and meetings for the IDBs.

MLC Biodiversity Event

We are pleased to have already booked some interesting and well-respected local speakers for the reignited MLC BioDay event, to be held locally, venue TBC, in December this year. These had been on hold for a couple of years while we gauged how the new ADA Environment Day fitted into the space. However, we are confident that there is huge value in an event that discusses IDB-relevant local nature conservation priorities and projects, that are more relevant to IDBs in and around the MLC area.

Navigation

Navigation Advisory Committee (NAC)

This year a representative of the Well Creek Trust became a welcomed member of and addition to our Navigation Advisory Committee.

Boater Facilities

We have a commitment to ringfence 25% of licence income and invest this in provision of facilities for boaters on the link route to meet IWA standards.

As a reminder, the IWA's minimum standards are:

Water points, rubbish disposal points including recycling points, portable chemical toilet disposal points and electricity (shore power mains connection charging sites) at the following frequency:

Every 5 hours of cruising across most of the inland waterways system, including between waterways managed by neighbouring navigation authorities.

For the Middle Level navigation, this means facilities at Stanground Lock, in March, and at Salter's Lode Lock. Given there are good public facilities in March town, our focus is at Stanground and Salter's Lode.

Progress on installing a water point at Stanground has been paused given the land ownership issues mentioned earlier in this report and the potential use of the Stanground Lock site as part of any Nene water transfer associated with the Fens Reservoir. A water point has now been successfully installed at Salter's Lode Lock. This required agreement from the Environment Agency, as pipework was needed to be installed across their land, as well as Anglian Water facilitating a road closure. The Well Creek Trust have been asked to liaise with their Parish Councils and local businesses to identify opportunities within the villages where MLC funded elsan disposal and/or refuse disposal could be securely and safely hosted.

As time allows, we are also exploring the other opportunities along our navigation where boater facilities may be possible. In the last few months, Ramsey Town Council have delivered improvements to the Ramsey Basin area which enhances the offering to boaters and other users of our waterways. We are also in early discussions with the Great Ouse Boating Association (GOBA) to establish whether there are opportunities to expand their presence into the Middle Level navigations.

Middle Level Vessel Registrations

In the 2025/26 season we registered 309 navigation vessels. We have approximately 200 vessels that re-register automatically every season and then the remaining vessels require chasing. Our regulation and enforcement approach is working, albeit proportionally given resources available.

For 2026/27 we have adjusted the criteria and approach for 'project boat' registrations to make it more efficient and effective to administer and reduce non-compliance. Annual Registration fees have been increased by an inflationary 3.8%.

Anglian Pass

An Anglian Pass partnership agreement was signed to cover a five-year period from 1 April 2024. With a couple of critical closures on our collective network the numbers sold understandably reduced in 2025/26.

Canal & River Trust (CRT) Gold Licence

Currently the Environment Agency receives the Gold Licence income for approximately 11 boaters who have their home mooring on the Middle Level. We now have a local arrangement that sees that income, less an administration fee, provided annually to us. We have received income from the Environment Agency covering 2024 and 2025.

Unregistered and abandoned boats

Our approach to unregistered boats is having a positive effect, albeit not at the pace, visibility and scale of impact we would like. In 2025/26 we removed six abandoned vessels from our system.

Paddle UK

2025/26 was Year 3 of a 3-year agreement with Paddle UK for the Middle Level navigation to be formally included as part of their waterways licence. The income we receive from Paddle UK is being ringfenced and re-invested into improved portage. We have secured 50% funding contribution from the Canoe Foundation to supplement this income to install canoe portage at Stanground Lock. The portage has been installed and is being used.

We have provided Paddle UK with information to improve the information available on their Paddlepoints website and they have visited our waters to develop some associated media.

We are also working with Peterborough Environment City Trust (PECT) to explore developing a vision, external funding options and some early delivery for a 'Blue Wheel' focussed on improving and opening up paddle opportunities along Kings Dyke and Pig Water.

Vegetation Management

The very dry summer last year made water level management challenging. We were fortunate in the Middle Level to have greater control of water levels compared to other navigation authorities. At Stanground/Kings Dyke there was more weed clearance needed than normal to help aid water transfer and Well Creek has continued to be an area of focus. We combined the use of vegetation clearance by boat (mainly focussed on the link-route) with the use of a long-reach machine, particularly focussed within the Bevill's pond. Reduced boat movement has also not helped with vegetation management.

There has also been a new approach to in-channel vegetation removal, by creating conservation bays on the banks (areas of bank that were cut short) to place vegetation removed from the channels which helps birds and reptiles in the area. However, some cut areas have been mistaken for angling swims but despite this the approach will become a common feature as it also helps to promote diversity of habitats.

Marmont Priory Lock

There have been no issues reported with the new downstream gates. The total cost for the gates was £379k. A general tidy up and 'spring clean' of the site has recently been undertaken along with some minor refurbishment works including fencing works and grip board to assist navigators with improved footing when operating the lock.

However, there were a few instances of loss of water on Well Creek over last season. There had been issues with Aqueduct pump from the Middle Level Main Drain to Well Creek, and a few incidents with slackers at the lock. We attended the Well Creek Trust (WCT) AGM to discuss and review. There was one incident where all four slackers were left open at Marmont Priory Lock which subsequently started to drain Well Creek, and it was suspected that it was an intentional issue but was dealt with quickly. The WCT members now have lock handles and more people watching the Well Creek from the Trust, so that any similar incident could be dealt with much quicker in the future. The adjacent Lock Keeper's cottage was recently sold by the late Lock Caretaker's family. The new owners have connections and an interest in navigation and therefore it is hoped that this local presence will deter tampering of the lock structure and slackers.

Salter's Lode Lock

See Boater Facilities.

Over the course of winter 2025/26 the hydraulic hoses of the guillotine gate have all been replaced. A general tidy up of the lock site and extensive Lock Keeper's cottage garden at Salter's Lode has recently been undertaken. Potholes along the access track have been back filled and some trees in the garden area required felling, as they had been highlighted by a neighbour as problematic to his adjoining residence. For their part the Environment Agency removed self-sown willows from the bank of the tidal Great Ouse which now allows for visual contact with Denver Complex lock and tidal moorings to be made.

The Environment Agency also undertook tidal river desilting operations at Salter's Lode and Denver ahead of the start of the 2026 season. Within these works they identified a bank-slip which we had previously reported to them in October 2024. We have escalated this issue within the Environment Agency for consideration given the risk regarding tidal defence integrity and any failure could also block navigation to/from Salter's Lode Lock.

However, in March 2026, the tidal guillotine gate failed in the closed position. Our M&E team responded immediately, and contractors were called to further diagnose and address the issue with the control panel. The panel is of an age that replacement is now due. Thankfully, the contractor who originally created the existing control panel is still working and was available; with many of the components obsolete it is hoped that a temporary fix can be made and installed to get through the 2026 boating season before a full control panel replacement can take place.

The bridge at this location is also showing signs of deterioration. A full structural survey will be undertaken to identify what remedial works are required. This will be included in the planned detailed asset inspection programme.

Stanground Lock

See Boater Facilities.

The downstream wooden lock doors are now in a poor condition. Periodic inspections of the wooden doors will continue to be undertaken.

A general tidy up and some basic 'site housekeeping' has recently been undertaken by Middle Level workforce prior to the start of the main navigation season commencing.

Ashline Lock

Ashline Lock Refurbishment requires careful planning and delivery to manage several key risks, including negative impact on navigation of the link route (closure), accessibility by the public (public safety and reputational risk), potentially unstable ground conditions (seepage around wingwalls), and the need for potentially extensive tree removal from the grounds of Manor Leisure to gain access to the site. We have appointed RYR Ltd to manage stakeholder engagement; we have planned to undertake all necessary works in one season – including lock chamber refurbishment, any works needed to the overspill and culvert, replace both sets of lock gates, and stabilise the bank toe opposite the overspill discharge where erosion has caused the bank to slip.

Dependent upon resourcing and finance, the project will be split into two stages:

1. autumn/winter 2026 - full asset condition inspection of lock structure and overspill, and site enabling works including tree canopy pruning and removal (Manor Leisure Centre controlled by FDC). Production of detailed work scope, programme and budget costing.
2. autumn/winter 2027 TBC - lock gate replacement and lock/overspill refurbishment works.

This project requires significant resource to plan and deliver. Approximately £75k is required within the Board's current approval to undertake Stage 1. This will identify what extra work is required to the lock and/or overspill bypass. If time and resources allow, any minor remedial works can be undertaken during Stage 1. The gates could also be inspected and measured in-situ to inform Stage 2.

The lock gates are in very poor condition and have a limited residual life. However, there are some significant challenges to overcome, particularly the risks associated with ground conditions.

For Stage 2, we intend to appoint a designer and contractor via tender using an Environment Agency Framework. A contractor has visited site and provided an initial budget estimate of £506k (in 2025) for the lock gate replacement works only. Once the inspection has been carried out, we can reassess the costs for the whole project and revert to the Board for additional approval.

We have approached the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Mayor and asked for consideration of a funding contribution from the Combined Authority. Heritage Lottery Funding may provide an additional minor source of contributory funding for these works and our future navigation capital works, however this funding source will not cover statutory responsibilities.

Boat Passages

Boat movements through Stanground and Salter's Lode Locks are shown below (the figures for the previous year are shown in brackets):

Boat Passages 2025/2026 (2024/2025)				
	Salter's Lode Lock		Stanground Lock	
Month	In	Out	In	Out
April	0 (0)	10 (0)	29 (4)	30 (4)
May	47 (0)	53 (0)	51 (18)	52 (22)
June	28 (22)	28 (23)	27 (31)	28 (33)
July	49 (35)	56 (44)	54 (41)	40 (39)
August	34 (48)	32 (35)	53 (50)	53 (64)
September	26 (26)	18 (26)	20 (26)	20 (19)
October	11 (3)	4 (9)	7 (9)	11 (6)
November	5 (4)	5 (1)	4 (7)	1 (0)
December	1 (0)	0 (0)	1 (0)	2 (0)
January	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
February	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
March	0 (0)	0 (0)	1 (3)	3 (6)
TOTAL	201 (138)	206 (138)	247 (189)	240 (193)

Old Bedford – Environment Agency

The Old Bedford Overspill is a flood risk asset in the village of Salter's Lode that connects the Old Bedford River (Environment Agency Main River) with Well Creek (an MLC watercourse) and it is located on land that is largely owned by the Environment Agency. Records recovered so far are incomplete and inconclusive.

The ownership of the asset is currently uncertain and therefore maintenance and management of the structure have effectively ceased. The ongoing Cranbrook/Counterdrain Strategy, focussing on the future of Welches Dam Pumping Station, will need to consider and address this asset and other interfaces along the Old Bedford. There is strategic opportunity to consider rationalisation of all assets associated with both the Old Bedford and Well Creek outfalls.

We await information from the Environment Agency to clarify ownership and responsibilities for the Old Bedford Overspill. In February 2026, they undertook a detailed asset inspection of the structure as part of broader issues with the condition of Old Bedford Sluice.

MLC Services for IDBs

2025/26 involved preparing for the transfer of services for the following administered IDBs to different service providers, whilst being ready to welcome Ramsey IDB into our administration.

As of 1 April 2026, the following IDBs have transferred to the Water Management Alliance:

- Bluntisham IDB
- Over & Willingham IDB
- Haddenham Level Drainage Commissioners
- Swavesey IDB
- Hundred of Wisbech IDB
- Waldersey IDB

As of 1 April 2026, the following IDB has transferred to the Ely Group of IDBs:

- Hundred Foot Washes IDB

We will continue to work closely with these IDBs and their new service provider as part of the transition and to conclude 2025/26 accounting. The latest position in terms of Ramsey IDB is that we will become their clerk as of 1 September 2026 with a transition period up until that point.

These changes mean we are consolidating our services within the Middle Level which in turn better enables us to consider more efficient and effective ways of working between MLC and IDBs, particularly the dual rated IDBs. It is becoming clearer that for a long time the MLC has been subsidising the administration/clerking functions of its administered IDBs, however fully covering costs will be both unaffordable and unpalatable to IDBs and will further evidence the sustainability weaknesses of the IDB governance model we have within the Middle Level. This is an important topic that will require Board focus over the next couple of years.

As previously reported, a new 'Service Guide' is in development, the original ambition was for this to go live from 1 April 2026 following engagement with IDB Chairs. However, given the priority focus on delivery and legal matters in 2025/26, the intent is to continue to develop our Service Guide with a view to adopting it from 1 April 2027.

The Guide is being written predominantly for the IDBs that are administered by MLC and outlines the suite of professional services offered across disciplines and associated fees. Each IDB, as an independent public authority, is within their rights to review and choose other service providers. Indeed, as with other procurement decisions, they should from time to time undertake due diligence to ensure there are receiving value for money and the quality of service expected.

However, it needs to be recognised and valued that a disaggregation of services would introduce inefficiency and increased costs to rate and levy payers. Our commitment is that our fees will remain not for profit and will be competitive compared with peer IDBs and those of qualified external profit-making consultants and contractors. Investing with MLC strengthens our collective delivery within the landscape where IDB and MLC operations and responsibilities are interwoven and interdependent. For the small number of IDBs within the Middle Level that are not administered by the MLC, many of our services remain open for them. The Guide will provide an outline of the services that may be available, subject to capacity. A fee arrangement will be tailored accordingly.

The development of the guide is highlighting topic areas where there is no current service offer from the MLC and IDBs may be operating at risk. There is a balance to be found in terms of managing respective accountabilities that will need to be explored with the Chairs and IDBs.

Fens Reservoir

The Fens Reservoir continues to be a priority area of focus for us working with Anglian Water and their consultants. The resource requirements are escalating beyond our base capacity, and this is a risk to delivery of the scheme. This issue has been escalated to government level and we continue to be in discussion with Anglian Water.

Phase 3 public consultation began on 15 October 2025 and closed on 10 December 2025, and we provided a comprehensive response.

Anglian Water is currently progressing through a transition to new Project Delivery Partners - Mace, Turner & Townsend and AtkinsRéalis - with the full handover expected by 1 April 2026. Alongside this, a summary of the Consultation 3 feedback is being compiled and is expected to be issued mid-to late April 2026.

Recent engagement has focused on technical review and legal arrangements, with a legal meeting being held with Anglian Water and their lawyers, Pinsent Masons, to discuss the need for MLCs costs to be covered throughout the whole length of the project. Monthly meetings and bi-weekly catchups with Anglian Water's stakeholder engagement lead continue to support coordination and issue resolution.

Looking ahead, most planned engagements have been postponed until after April 2026, but Anglian Water intend to schedule further technical discussions covering water quality, flood risk, emergency draw down, water connectivity and operational interfaces.

Further ground investigation works are also planned for spring and work is being done to suggest a suitable location for the trial embankment. Some ongoing issues regarding consents and payments remain unsolved but we are working with Anglian Water to make sure these issues do not present an operational risk to the business.

Great Fen

We continue to provide guidance and advice on water management and identify ways to work collaboratively, particularly regarding lowland peat management and new funding streams.

The next stage of the Alternative Flood Storage Project is of particular interest to stakeholders, especially Natural England and they are very keen for us to progress this.

We will likely be hosting a VIP visit in September in partnership with Great Fen and the Wildlife Trust.

Following the success of the Great Fen-led Apple Day in October 2025 we have had initial discussions about MLC attendance at the next event in October 2026.

Chief Engineer's Summary

Middle Level System River Management Scheme (MLSRMS)

We have been in legal dispute with the Environment Agency since January 2025. This has been a priority focus, requiring significant resource inputs, has been emotionally challenging and has diverted senior focus from other important areas of organisational delivery and improvement.

On 29 January 2026, ahead of a Judicial Review hearing, we attended a mediation session with the Environment Agency. A negotiated settlement was reached. Given confidentiality clauses, we cannot disclose the terms of the settlement. However, please be reassured that the Chairman, Vice Chairman, Chief Engineer and Chief Executive are comfortable with the outcome. The dispute cast a significant shadow of financial uncertainty over the

organisation which has now been clarified. We are now focussed on re-building relationships with Environment Agency colleagues.

Critical channel refurbishment works to reinstate the Middle Level Main Drain to its design standard of service have been delivered and as such reduces flood risk to all those that benefit within our catchment, and we have a concept design for system-wide dredging and bank raising. There are residual activities associated with fully closing down the project that now are in-hand. This includes a report on the Social Value contributions the project made and capturing lessons learned that can be used to improve future project delivery across the organisation.

Asset Investment Programme (AIP)

Environment Agency grant and local levy funding allocations for 2026/27 have now been ratified by the Anglian (Great Ouse) Regional Flood & Coastal Committee (RFCC). Projects were prioritised through Local Choices for Local Levy funding. Our Alternative Flood Storage project has funding of £50k in the 'over programme', i.e. there may be funding available if there is a shortfall in overall programme expenditure.

Our highest priorities for MLC funded capital works in 2026/27 include the following key critical needs:

- Bevill's Leam Pumping Station gearbox overhauls and pump 4 refurbishment,
- Salter's Lode Lock control panel replacement,
- Yaxley Overspill Footbridge replacement,
- Decommissioning of the Twenty Foot Drain swimming baths,
- Inspections of critical assets including Ashline Lock and St Germans pumps.

We will also plan the next stage of the Woodwalton Fen Alternative Flood Storage with our key partners and investigate renewables as part of the next step on our Electricity Net Zero journey.

When resources allow, we will develop our AIP further and start developing a project pipeline; if we can have projects planned in advance, we can be ready to apply for any ad-hoc funding streams that become available (like the recent IDB Fund) and ensure that all eligible projects are logged on the Environment Agency's grant in aid programme for future years.

It is recommended that we develop and, subject to budget, commence an asset inspection programme to inform the development of a project pipeline. This should focus on our key assets including those where the Commissioners have a statutory duty, these include:

- Salter's Lode Lock and bridge, and
- Bridges owned by the Commissioners.

We also need to determine a responsible and fair approach to assessing the risk and any works needed due to 'penetrations' through the Commissioners' raised embankments (e.g., IDB pumping station outfalls) where the responsibility may fall to a third party.

Depending on the type of asset and inspection to be undertaken the average cost of an inspection may be between £2.5k-£10k. This is in addition to inspections at Ashline Lock, and Bevill's Leam and St Germans pumping stations.

It is recommended that the Board approves the creation of a costed asset inspection programme to be adopted and then budgeted for going forward.

Contracts and commercial management

Capital construction contracts can be complex. To manage the cost, delivery, health & safety, environmental and commercial risks associated with delivering our capital programme, we need to ensure we have the right procurement approach, contract management knowledge and experienced resources in place.

Contracts procured in this way may be considered more costly as invariably they use the larger construction companies, and fees apply to some Frameworks. However, there are considerable benefits as described below.

The work in our pipeline programme will need experienced specialist consultants and contractors with extensive resources to deliver; the tender process can be time and resource heavy. To make sure we can appoint suppliers and deliver projects as efficiently as possible, we may need to use suitable, established Frameworks. This gives us reassurance that they have already been through a recognised pre-qualification exercise. Work is then let through a mini competition or may be directly awarded, depending on circumstances. This complies with our own procurement and governance. Contracts are delivered using standard industry contracts, generally the New Engineering Contract.

For larger projects the timescales needed to work through this process can be more than 3 months, consisting of: sign Framework User Agreement; issue Expression of Interest to contractors; prepare contract documents; undertake mini competition; award contract.

We are already improving our in-house capability to manage these types of contracts through training, but additional skills are required, especially if in-house delivery is considered more appropriate and efficient in some cases.

Capacity

Developing a robust programme of projects, securing funding and appointing suppliers (where necessary), requires considerable capacity and capability that we currently do not have internally. There was historically greater engineering and project delivery capacity within Technical Services (6-7FTEs up until the end of the 1990s), however for many years now we have only had 1FTE available to cover MLC and IDB projects. Nowadays projects also have greater complexity and there are more partners to engage and regulations to comply with. We have a significant programme of capital improvement projects in addition to the emerging IDB programme.

The Middle Level System River Management Scheme strained resources even when bolstered with bought-in services at great expense. Bought in services also require significant management by internal staff. The IDB Fund Tranches 2a and 2b have also taken up significant resource capacity and although this reactive, unplanned work has delivered significant benefits and proved that we have the capability to deliver packages of minor/simple capital works, it has come at the expense of key business as usual activity.

This has confirmed that we need up-front investment in the right resources with the right skills to develop the MLC and IDB pipeline programme of work and ultimately deliver it. This will enable us to:

- Prioritise capital works.
- Develop business plans for funding.
- Ensure the right resources, suppliers and contractors are in place.
- Properly plan the work to ensure it is compliant with H&S and environmental legislation.
- Ensure all permits and approvals are in place as needed.
- Deliver projects efficiently and consistently and within capacity.

Conversely, if we haven't planned work, it is more difficult to have confidence in being able to prepare robust bids for funding and subsequently deliver projects on time. For any projects eligible for grant in aid, this will include funding the resources working on them. This also includes potential future short-term funding streams such as the IDB Fund and Lowland Agricultural Peat funding. We need to invest in some up-front costs ahead of any grant availability so that we can submit robust bids for planned projects and maximise any short-term funding that may become available.

We have limited internal skills for project and contract management, especially for large complex projects such as the River Management Scheme and Woodwalton Fen Alternative Storage. To keep up momentum on these and other critical projects for the remainder of this year we ideally need an additional 7.5 FTE. This need increases by a further 2 FTE to ramp up for works in subsequent years. This includes resources to develop and manage the MLC

and IDB capital programme, to deliver projects already in progress, to develop project plans and grant funding bids, along with the necessary supporting ecological and financial resource capacity.

Role	Department	FTE (25/26)
Programme/Funding Manager/Line Manager	Technical Services	1
Senior Engineer/Project Manager	Technical Services	1
Delivery Manager	Operations	1
Senior Engineer/Project Manager	M&E	0.5
Technical Advisor	Technical Services	0.5
Technical Advisor	Navigation	0.5
Environmental Project Manager	Ecology & Environment	1.5
Project Support/Data Officer	Technical Services	1
Finance Assistant/Assistant Clerk	Finance/Clerk	0.5

However, capacity increases of this scale are not currently affordable. Therefore, in November 2025 the Board approved we invest in two additional FTE to start our journey in an affordable manner. An update on recruitment will be provided at the Board meeting.

Role	Department	FTE (25/26)
Senior Engineer/Project Manager	Technical Services	1
PSO/Technical Advisor	Technical Services	1

MLC Pumping Stations

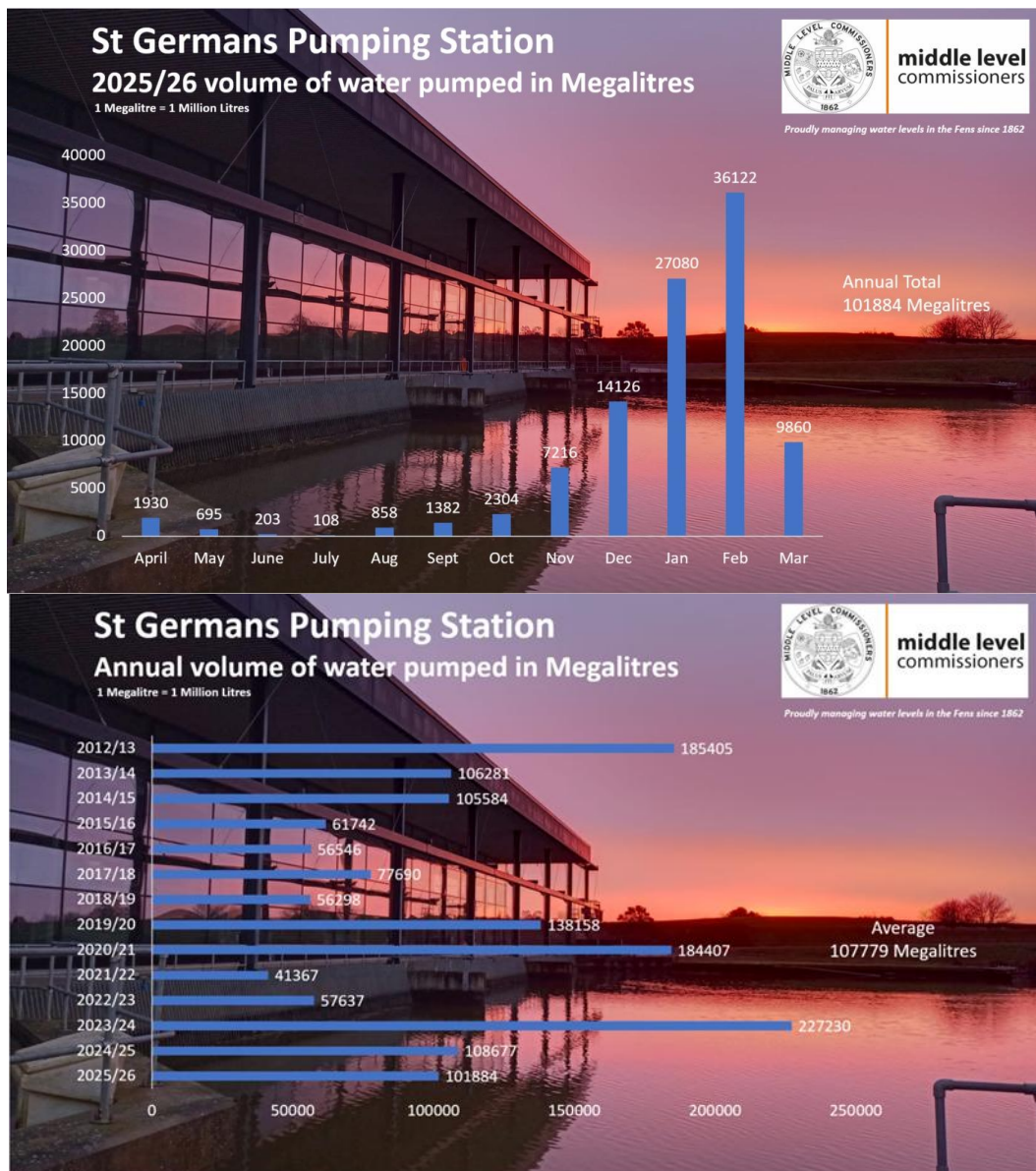
Optimising St Germans Pumping Station

St Germans Pumping Station has represented between 9-27% of our overall annual expenditure. Our overall budget performance is largely determined by the volume and cost of pumping at St Germans which is influenced by the cost of power, the weather and the tide.

We have now adopted a hands-on approach to operations at St Germans Pumping Station with a superintendent permanently employed at the Station during the working week. The Head of Operations & Water Level Management and Superintendent are actively manually intervening to 'pump tomorrow's water today' and maximise the operations when solar generated electricity has been available. We have also modified the control system to introduce several semi-automatic modes to further optimise the Station. Although quantifying the reduction in kWh per ML is difficult due to the vast number of variables, the early indications are that we are achieving savings of between 1.5 to 3 Kwh per megalitre over the last 2 months. Which means the electricity consumption for pumping is reducing between 20-30% in this period.

St Germans Pumping Volumes.

During the 12-month period (April 2025 to March 2026) 101844 and 35176 megalitres (million litres) of water were pumped at St Germans and Bevill's Leam respectively.



St Germans Pumping Station – Issues, faults and fixes

All of the Air Circuit Breakers have now been stripped, cleaned, lubricated and tested onsite by a specialist contractor. Further work was required on eighteen of the twenty-three units as cracks were found within their charging mechanisms.

All six pump inverters have now been refurbished by ABB the original equipment manufacturer (OEM). We have had issues with inverter charging circuits on pumps 1 and 4 which have now been rectified, and the components will be replaced on the remaining inverters to ensure their reliability.

The weedscreen cleaner controller had to be replaced as the old system was failing and obsolete. The control system has been brought up to the same standard as the Master Station PLC and the weedscreen integrated into the SCADA system for improved monitoring and resilience. The weedscreen has required some small mechanical repairs this year which highlights that at 15 years old it is close to needing a full refurbishment.

The SCADA system has been updated with improvements made to allow more efficient pumping and improved display and recording of pump efficiency. This is an ongoing process of modifying the controls and trending the information so we can identify further areas for improvement. We continue to monitor electricity use at the Station in line with the solar installations.

St Germans Solar Installations

Rooftop

There has been 160kWp of rooftop solar installed under Tranche 2a of the IDB Fund. This installation is forecast to produce 138,000 kWh of electricity annually, of this it is forecast that 75% will be used onsite. Due to problems with the distribution system that were identified during commissioning, the rooftop solar did not come fully online until July 2025. We also needed a full site HV shutdown to allow the installation of an HV power meter to enable the system to display and record data accurately. The system is now working very well and current figures show 80% of energy produced is being used onsite.

Ground Mount (Array)

The planning approval for the ground mount system was received, and construction started late November 2025. The ground array is now complete. The array comprises of 600kWp of panels and will be the largest of our solar installations so far and means we will exceed our first Electricity Net Zero goal of producing more in a year than the baseload of our operations uses.

Bevill's Leam Pumping Station

The refurbishment of Pump 1 was successfully completed in September 2025. The pump was removed, stripped, cleaned, inspected and the necessary bearings and bolts replaced. The motor was fully overhauled with new bearings and heaters fitted. The removal and refitting required the level on Bevill's Pond to be reduced to allow safe access to the discharge flange. The works went very well, and the pump is now back in operation and has completed in excess of 1100 hours since fitting. The overhaul of Pump 1 was originally to be funded with a £100k loan, but with the release of the additional IDB Fund we have been able to deliver it as part of Tranche 2b works. This has effectively become the start of a capital refurbishment programme, extending the design life of the Station, reducing the immediate need for grant in aid, and providing 10-15 years of extra service, during which time a considered plan for major refurbishment/replacement of the station can be developed in line with other schemes within the Bevill's Pond.

Pump 2 was removed for overhaul on 31 March 2026 and is due to be refitted during April, Pump 3 will be removed for overhaul with refitting due in May 2026. That will complete the overhaul of the 3 duty pumps. Subject to budget approval, we are currently planning for overhaul of pump 4 including gearbox and engine during spring 2027. Timing of the works is a fine balance between flood resilience, water resources and ecological impacts; it is imperative that this work is properly planned, and budgets are in place to allow the work to start as soon as is practicable.

The gearbox on Pump 6 had to be taken out of service during a high rainfall event in January 2026 due to rapid increase in temperature. The MLC M&E Team quickly diagnosed the fault, removed the gearbox and arranged for a full gearbox overhaul which was completed, and the gearbox refitted and back in operation within 10 days.

Oil analysis has highlighted that the engine of Pump 4 is showing the worse signs of wear, and this should be the first of the diesel driven sets to be refurbished.

The Board is asked to allocate budget for the refurbishment of Pump 4 along with gearbox and engine starting late March 2027, estimated cost £165k.

In addition, there has been significant investment and improvements on site at Bevill's Leam as part of IDB Fund Delivery which improve the security and overall resilience of the Station.

Woodwalton Fen Reservoir

The Inspecting Engineer's report was received in May 2025 and a copy lodged with the Environment Agency's Reservoir Safety Team. There were no recommendations in the Interests of safety.

Enhanced maintenance of the reservoir embankments has been, and will continue to be, undertaken by contractors to ensure compliance with the Engineer's directions. Badger activity is being monitored and statutory surveillance and record keeping is being done.

The onsite flood plan has been prepared and was certified by the Supervising Engineer in December 2025, in accordance with Section 12A of the Reservoirs Act. He has directed that elements of the plan be reviewed annually, that the entire plan is reviewed in 5 years, and a full incident simulation exercise be undertaken at least once every ten years.

The Supervising Engineer undertook his annual visit in February 2026 and we are awaiting his Annual Statement as required under Section 12 of the Reservoirs Act.

Alternative Flood Storage (Woodwalton Fen)

These next stages have been added to the Asset Investment Programme. This is a complex and potentially novel project that will require considered resourcing to move forward confidently and efficiently.

The hydraulic study identified a number of suitable locations for future potential storage. These will be investigated further in collaboration with key partners. Agreements in principle will be required with landowners to enable the next stage of surveys, ground investigations and outline design to be progressed. Given the potential for a range of benefits this project could bring to the Bevill's Pond there are many partners and funders that we should work with to make this project a success.

A new storage facility could be in place within 10-15 years if significant tasks and risks are properly managed (e.g. land availability, funding availability, planning permission etc).

Catchment Conditions

Water Resources and Control of Water Levels

Spring/Summer 2025

Rainfall

The well publicised extreme summer weather made headline news throughout the local region and entire UK last summer. With the hottest June since records began in 1884, the warmest and joint equal driest spring on record and four separate heatwaves, it is little surprise that the Met Office announced the average temperature for the summer of 2025 to have been 1.5 degrees above average. This, combined with half the East Anglian region average rainfall, has been extremely challenging for farmers and growers in the Middle Level system to manage, with many crops not reaching their full harvest potential due to a lack of natural precipitation and excessive heat during the spring and summer months.

Autumn/Winter 2025/26

The autumn passed without notable incident in terms of water level management. Named storms Amy, Benjamin and Claudia were dealt with relatively comfortably with reactive pumping during the autumn months. December and the Christmas period proved to be quiet and gave MLC Staff and Workforce members a welcome break. The

New Year brought with it a short cold snap which was abruptly ended with a return to milder, wetter conditions. SMD values fell to notably low levels at this time, intensifying pumping requirements and reactive activities at Bevill's Leam and St Germans pumping stations.

Further successive rainfall events were experienced throughout the remainder of January into February. This led to the Middle level catchment being saturated, with the SMD value at or close to zero. Significant daily pumping was required to maintain winter retention levels in both ponds. When and where possible, 'subtle tweaks' were made to operational pumping parameters and timings to optimise both pump and energy efficiencies at St Germans. This proved to be a very useful operational learning tool and will assist with optimisation of efficiencies during future events.

Drier conditions during the first week of March provided welcome relief from pumping activity. At the time of reporting, focus and attention is now turning to the early summer level transition, as and when weather conditions and SMD values allow.

Met Office data indicates the recent winter weather has been generally warmer and wetter than average, with strong UK regional variations. This pattern closely aligns to predictions around global climate change. The Met Office stated the main influence on the winter weather pattern was a stronger than normal jet stream and a blocking high over Scandinavia causing an unusual rainfall pattern.

Data taken from the Environment Agency's monthly situation reports and Met Office data backs up the conditions experienced in the Middle Level catchment. The weather headlines of note for the reporting period:

- The combined months of March and April 2025 as the fifth driest since 1871.
- March to May rainfall totals being the lowest since 1871.
- March to June being the fourth driest on record.
- 113% of average winter rainfall.
- Eighth wettest winter period in East Anglia since records began in 1836.

The Soil Moisture Deficit (SMD) value throughout last summer was reflected by the weather conditions experienced, rising rapidly during May to 99mm by the month end and remaining consistently high throughout the summer. Peak values of 157mm were recorded for four consecutive weeks during August, which is unprecedented. This illustrates and reflects both the intensity and severity of drought conditions experienced.

Water Resources

2025 proved to be another challenging and elongated abstraction season. Unsurprisingly the Environment Agency controlled Lower Nene experienced low/minimal flows for much of the summer season. During this time abstraction restrictions were imposed on both the Middle Level Commissioners and other Environment Agency Lower Nene abstractors for the majority of this time. The Environment Agency hosted Lower Nene Abstractors group has been operational for the past eight seasons. However numerous changes in Environment Agency staffing and evidence of the lack of experience related to the complexities and vagaries of operating this system has led to some difficult conversations. An end of season review meeting was attended by the MLC Head of Operations & Water Level Management. It was acknowledged by all in attendance that shortfalls within Environment Agency resource and operational experience were apparent last season. This we were reassured was to be addressed. Leadership changes within the Lower Nene Abstractors group were also announced by the Environment Agency. It is hoped that moving forward to the 2026 season, the necessary step changes and improvements will become apparent.

Effective communication with IDB Slacker Attendants and others, remains pivotal to the success of operating the MLC system effectively and efficiently during the summer water resource season. A total of twenty-four separate text messages were sent out last summer communicating the operational requirement for changes to IDB water intakes and advising of both Environment Agency mandatory and MLC voluntary restrictions. Compliance with the

text messaging system remains very good and is a tribute to the integrity of IDB officers and the trust placed upon them within this unique relationship with the MLC team.

Micromanagement of the Middle Level system during the summer months has again been required to ensure water flows that have been offered by the Environment Agency via our Stanground Lock intake, have been taken and fully utilised within the system, whilst ensuring the Commissioners' other key functions of flood defence and navigation have not been compromised.

An early season 'Show and Tell' session was hosted by the Commissioners to give recently appointed Environment Agency colleagues an opportunity to view for themselves the various water control structures and to discuss the complexities around managing and operating the MLC system during the summer water resource season. It is hoped the early engagement and knowledge sharing exercise will pay dividends in the coming months.

Works Delivery

Bank Seepage

A further case of bank seepage has occurred following harvest along the raised south bank of the Old River Nene at Ramsey St Mary. A contractor was employed to import 'puddling' clay from the Commissioners' nearby clay store stockpile and the seepage was arrested with the clay placed in the centre of an excavated puddle trench along the centreline of the bank. Other historic seepage sites were monitored during the summer. No other remedial actions were required, however visual monitoring of these sites will be continued during the early summer months when water levels are raised for the Commissioners' water resource function.

Vegetation and Grass Control on Banks & Channels

Grass swards along the Commissioners' embankments have been maintained by mowing rounds during the spring and summer season. Early season growth during 2025 was quite prolific; however, growth slowed during the warm drier months.

A total of three rounds of 'bank top' mowing was completed to comply with ecological guidance suggesting the sward be kept to a height of no more than 300mm.

The main cut of the entire MLC system commenced in August and was completed by December last year utilising the Commissioners' fleet of three flail mower/front mounted top mower units and a tractor rear mounted mower unit.

The works generally accorded with the programme in terms of timings, being greatly assisted by good weather and ground conditions.

A contractor was employed last season to undertake regular monthly mowing rounds of the northern and western raised perimeter 'barrier banks' of Woodwalton Fen Reserve, which is now designated as a statutory reservoir. This designation requires a more robust regime of bank maintenance including regular mowing of the grass swards along the perimeter raised embankments. As the Commissioners' flail mowing plant capacity is already being stretched with our flail mowing regime, the option of contracting out this relatively small package of work to a local flail mowing contractor was preferable and cost efficient. This contract worked well and the grass sward improved significantly last season with the monthly mowing regime. The contract has recently been renewed for the 2026 season with the same contractor, with the first round due for completion by early April.

Herbicide applications were applied throughout the MLC system last season on a priority basis during late summer months. The treatments were used to control marginal growths of aquatic vegetation helping keep channels clear for water conveyance and navigation. An annual aquatic herbicide application licence has been sought and granted to the Middle Level and its constituent IDBs for the 2026 season.

The boat fleets were employed at full capacity over the busy summer months, with members of the workforce being deployed from other duties and tasks to support and operate the second weed boat fleet during peak pressure periods. The Hemos boats have worked as well as could be expected for their age. A new Conver boat was delivered in October last year, following the Board's approval of the 2025 Plant Replacement Strategy. A decision to retain the oldest Hemos boat has been taken to bolster the second boat fleet and allow both weed cutting teams to operate three craft apiece (one cutter and two attendant lifters) when required.

Flail Mowing

The main cut flail mowing round commenced in late August last year. As ground and weather conditions remained optimal into October, gains in productivity were evident, with no lost days due to inclement weather conditions. Reasonably minor issues with flail mowing plant have been experienced during this time and have been mostly repairable by the Commissioners' agricultural engineer keeping expenditure and downtime to a minimum.

Although weather and bank conditions remained dry well into October, the vegetative growth on most banks throughout the Middle Level system was heavy, dense and lignified, proving challenging to cut.

The 2026 bank mowing works commenced during mid-March, with reasonable ground and weather conditions prevailing. It is anticipated the first round (health & safety cut) will take approximately three weeks to complete.

Access and security

The increase in unauthorised access to private land has led understandably to more landowners implementing temporary security solutions. Some of these unconsented works have resulted in damage to raised flood embankments and they also prevent our teams from accessing the banks to carry out essential maintenance (flail mowing), surveys and inspections. This results in abortive visits and future return trips once access has been arranged which is adding increased cost, time and inefficiency to our operations. We have also seen increased damage to gates and barriers which no longer inhibit illegal access.

Rather than use our enforcement powers under these circumstances, we aim to work with landowners to implement an approach that will both maintain their security and ensure we can easily and safely access banks to undertake flail mowing as the new season starts.

There is a range of barriers used by landowners (digging trenches, placing heavy agricultural machinery etc) but the most effective seems to be interlocking concrete (Lego) blocks given that gates are damaged on a regular basis and need repeated repair/replacement. Concrete Lego blocks can be easily removed and replaced by the landowners to allow our operatives access when needed.

Our proposal is to:

- identify 'protected' access points before tractor flails are sent out,
- engage with as many landowners as possible,
- bulk purchase poacher blocks and offer to provide them (and loan of accompanying lift attachment if needed) at cost to landowners,
- have a simple system in place to get the barriers moved by the landowners in advance of works and replaced afterwards.

The Board is asked to support the approach to addressing access and security issues for our maintenance access to critical land and approve associated budget. An estimated cost of £3,845 for 22 blocks has been included in the estimated budget.

Maintenance Works Spring/Summer/Autumn/Winter 2025-26

Pigwater Drain

A contractor's long reach machine fitted with a Cott basket was required to clear superfluous growths of filamentous algae (cott) from the channel during late June last season with a second round of cleansing in August to remove dense growths of Rigid Hornwort from the downstream reaches of Pigwater Drain between Farcet Overspill and Yaxley Overspill. The works were required as additional flows of water had been made available from the Environment Agency controlled Lower Nene. A proportion of the additional flows were subsequently conveyed through Pigwater for abstraction purposes in Bevill's pond.

The opportunity was taken during the winter months to clear submerged vegetation from the channel where clear bank access for the long reach machine was possible. The works should retain the conveyance capacity of the main arterial water feed into Bevill's pond for the coming season.

Catchwater Drain (Glatton Road to Great Raveley Confluence & Southern Spur)

Following the Board's approval at their last meeting, an annual programme of machine cleansing emergent, marginal and submerged vegetation from the channel on the premise of 'a lighter touch to maintain water conveyance' was embarked upon last season along the entire length of Catchwater Drain. Works along South Drain have not been possible due to the dangerous overhead power conductors along the bank. This weed clearance work is important to prevent the Bevill's Leam Pumping Station weedscreen cleaner from becoming overwhelmed during a significant rainfall event.

Great Raveley Drain

A 4x4 vehicle, which had been used by illegal hare coursers before being burnt and dumped in Great Raveley Drain, was removed recently using a contractor's excavator.

Bank Slips

Yards End Dyke

The two bank slips upstream and downstream of Wykes Bridge remain to be addressed. As reported at the last meeting the sites will require water vole mitigation measures to be undertaken at the next window of opportunity. It is envisaged that remedial revetment works along with reprofiling the affected banks to their original design will be required.

Light machine cleansing to remove vegetative growth from the channel was also undertaken successfully in Yards End Dyke last autumn-

Sixteen Foot

The final area of bank subsidence along the Sixteen Foot watercourse was completed during the spring. At the time of reporting all of the four sites requiring remedial repair works have been completed successfully and remain stable.

Old Pophams Eau

A contractor's long reach machine was utilised to remove Cott from the watercourse in an attempt to prevent the problematic weed mass from building up further. The weed mass has been placed on the adjacent grass margin and will be left to decompose over the early summer months.

Operational Services for IDBs

Routine work has been organised and co-ordinated in 14 IDB/DDC areas including Swavesey IDB/MLC PSCA. In addition, MLC operatives also undertook herbicide applications, on a rechargeable contract basis, to 12 IDBs/DDCs last season.

A priority focus during 2025/26 has been maximising the benefit to administered IDBs by delivery of Tranche 2b of the IDB Fund grant works. A considerable team effort across, in particular, Operations, M&E, Ecology & Environment and Finance has meant that approximately £1.6m of the £2m 'Pumps & Channels' package has been invested within IDBs to build on Tranche 2a and deliver a number of culvert, control panel and weedscreen replacements. In addition, the £1.3m Mobile Pumps (Phase 2) package included pump deployment enabling works at many IDB pumping stations. Works for Sawtry IDB were also delivered as part of the £330k Bevill's Pond Resilience project.

Public Sector Co-operation Agreement (PSCA) Works

The Commissioners have continued to provide re-chargeable routine maintenance services to the Environment Agency at Swavesey. The works follow on from previous seasons' works, which have improved the conveyance, condition and operation of Environment Agency controlled watercourses in the Swavesey IDB catchment area.

A decision has recently been made by Swavesey IDB to curtail the Commissioners' involvement with the Swavesey/MLC PSCA from April 2027. Bedford Group of IDBs will assume responsibly for this work from this date.

Planning & Consenting

During 2025/26, 532 planning applications have been dealt with. Consenting workload as of end March 2026 is 57 ongoing Byelaw applications, 38 discharge applications and 7 soakaway applications, additional applications are due associated with the Fens Reservoir, and ongoing enforcement cases. Over the last 12 months there have been over 50 complex consents and compliance issues associated with Anglian Water and Local Authorities. For comparison and looking ahead, the Fens Reservoir may have over 200 crossings to be consented, so alongside 'business as usual' development, the scale of workload ahead is significant.

Charging for planning & consenting

Our new charging and fee model for planning and consenting is in place and has been operating successfully within the first year. In November 2025 we reported that fees received for MLC and IDB consents have increased from c£15k across 10 sites (September 24-April 25) to c£47k for 12 sites (April-August 25). These fees include one for £10.5k and one for £18.2k where we would have previously received £340 for each.

As a measure of improvement, looking back to the period May 2023 to April 2025, we issued 72 discharge consents on behalf of MLC and IDBs resulting in £91,832 in contributions. Since changes to planning and consenting charges and fees (April 2025 to date) 65 consents have been issued (an 80% increase in productivity) with contributions of £466,801 (a 463% increase). This includes resolving several contentious and enforcement cases resulting in individual contributions of £66k and £109k. The MLC 'Development Contribution Account' (being rationalised into the Asset Management Reserve) has more than doubled in value over the last 12-months, providing the Board with greater choice, flexibility and control in terms of funding and delivering its priority asset management investment needs.

As of early April 2026, we are currently finalising further cases resulting from enforcement for £58k (by instalments) and sites with estimated Surface Water Discharge Contributions of £56k and £160k+, plus a number of other major developments.

To improve the efficiency and effectiveness of our work and bring in fees and contributions earlier, we would like to reinvest approximately £16k of the additional income generated to develop interactive materials, targeted primarily at developers and their consultants, to outline and explain consenting requirements and help them navigate the process. We currently spend significant amounts of time explaining, mostly reactively, and this investment will pay back in time alone if it saves just 20 minutes of staff time per week over the next 10 years.

The significant value of contributions associated with major development will take time to unlock and we are not yet addressing and maximising the proactive and more strategic opportunity to manage our risks, opportunities and to secure income.

In addition to an increase in fees, we now have cost recovery agreements with 14 major developments with 12 in negotiation, along with the Fens Reservoir. This is resulting in an upward curve of income, and we forecast this will continue because the cost recoverable workload is increasing. Increased cost recovery means less cost for our services being billed to IDBs and therefore less cost to the MLC/IDB ratepayer.

For 'business as usual' development, the income we can generate is currently capped by the technical capacity within the Technical Services team. A realistic maximum cost recovery income is therefore approximately £180,000. Recruitment to the additional 3.5 FTEs approved by the Board in November 2025 is ongoing with one new employee started so far.

In terms of complex sites within the Middle Level, we rejected an application for surface water discharge consent from the Saxon Pit site into Kings Dyke, pending the Environment Agency's decision on an Environmental Permit application. This permit has now been granted and we await a new application for discharge consent.

We also issued one 'Stop Notice' during 2025/26.

Compliance & Enforcement

Our Compliance & Enforcement Officers (job share arrangement) started in June 2025 and are currently actively progressing sixty-five cases across MLC and eighteen IDBs.

Unconsented surface water & foul discharge	Unconsented surface water discharge	Trespass/other	Byelaw offences	Total
33	5	7	20	65

A handful of the simpler cases have been concluded and in addition there has been successful recovery of approximately £80k of debt for MLC and two IDBs for legacy issues dating back to 2016. In addition, a SWDC of £109k was paid by one developer for a single site following enforcement involvement and subsequent discharge consent and several other sites are currently in the final stages of this process following enforcement involvement (current estimate for 3 sites £200k+).

Our officers are visible across the patch and are now starting to proactively follow up on consent compliance with applicants which will expand their caseload beyond known unconsented works, which has been their initial focus. They have also recently started supporting boat registration regulatory activities.

The result of their activity is increased consenting workload to regularise activity, as well as raising our reputation, meaning developers and consent applicants will start to engage with us more proactively.

For compliance and enforcement work for IDBs, we need to establish how the MLC overhead and upfront costs of this are recovered from fees paid to the IDBs. This will be factored into our Service Guide.

Capacity

At the November 2025 Board meeting we reported that there has been no increase in planning and consenting capacity within Technical Services for over 6 years. The team is now working more efficiently and productively, with cost recovery on the increase. However, there is:

- A significant gap between capacity, the amount of work, the risk to MLC/IDBs and the income that needs to be unlocked to re-invest into capital works development and delivery.
- A need to respond positively to the additional workload created because of our increased compliance and enforcement activity.
- No resilience for planned or unplanned leave.
- No succession for experienced officers.
- A need to reduce our reliance on expensive consultants.
- A competitive market and limited pool of technical staff in this field and in our geography.
- A very limited pool of prospective employees with existing IDB knowledge.
- A need to ensure we are timelier within our responses and meet statutory timescales.
- A stress and wellbeing issue that needs to be addressed.

There has been significant change in 'business as usual' development over the last 3 decades:

1990s	2000s	2010s	2020s
• Rural consenting issues • Small scale property developments • No complexity	• Increasing housing and commercial developments • New estates • Initial squeeze into districts and Byelaw pressure	• Major growth – including new towns • Increased complexity • Increased regulations • Increased amount and scale	• Increasing environmental standards • Continued major growth • Increase in strategic infrastructure development • Consistent squeeze on MLC/IDB Byelaws
1.5 FTEs	1.5 - 2 FTEs	2 - 3FTEs	Currently 3 FTEs

Using the proportion of rates versus special levy within the MLC district as a proxy for growth within MLC rateable area, there is the following pattern:

Year	% Rates : Special Levy
2025/26	64.84 : 35.16
2015/16	66.11 : 33.89
2005/06	67.71 : 32.29
1995/96	69.43 : 30.57

Please note that a significant proportion of development has been in the 35% of our catchment that is highland area and therefore outside of our rated district, with major developments such as Great Haddon also now bringing significant pressure on our infrastructure and operations from beyond our catchment boundary.

As an additional indicator of development pressure, Fenland District's council tax base has increased by 21% between 2013/14 and 2025/26 and the Fenland population has increased by an estimated 26% since 2001.

Our administration of cost recovery now needs maturing along with focussed technical capacity increase to tackle the ever-growing workload that we cannot control.

The Board supported a permanent increase in headcount associated with the core technical planning and consenting workload (3 FTEs in Technical Services) along with associated administration (0.5 FTE in Finance), to ensure we are maximising income generation, reducing whole-life costs on rates and levies and mitigating risks to the MLC and IDBs. Recruitment is ongoing with one new employee started so far.

The resultant realistic additional maximum cost recovery income because of this capacity growth could be £180k (100% increase).

With increased capacity and the need for the Compliance and Enforcement Officers to be out and about in the district on a daily basis, there is an increasing need for additional vehicles. We are currently managing this using the pool trucks but will consider the longer-term need for vehicles as part of the plant and vehicle strategy refresh for next year.

This capacity growth is to enable us to focus on 'business as usual' development. In terms of nationally significant development, such as the Fens Reservoir, our base capacity is an issue and presents a risk to delivery. *For example, the Fens Reservoir Habitat Design team has 15 people working on it. Our entire Technical Services department currently totals 8 FTE.*

Our cost recovery arrangements do not buy one developer priority over others. We need to be fair to all our customers. In terms of the Fens Reservoir, if Anglian Water want a priority service from us to be able to respond and give us a fighting chance of meeting Government's accelerated timescales, then they need to invest in additional technical capacity within our organisation. There is a lag time to recruit and train new people. Without a detailed programme from Anglian Water, it is difficult to model, however we estimate that we need a new mini-team of 5-6 FTE across technical disciplines to be resilient and responsive to the Fens Reservoir work ahead of us. This is a position we have made clear to Anglian Water and Ofwat.

Plant & Vehicles

Plant

Several intermittent minor faults were experienced throughout the summer months with flail mowing and weed cutting plant and machinery. As many of these items of plant are now well outside their warranty period and in some cases extended warranty periods, it has been useful to have our in-house skilled Agricultural Engineer on hand to repair whatever is required. Obviously for more specialist diagnosis and repair the relevant dealerships have to be involved, but this occurrence is being managed to a minimum.

Following consideration, it is recommended the Plant Replacement Policy is revised to reflect the cost of repair and downtime associated with the latter years of the current 10-year replacement policy with the flail mowing fleet. Whilst it is inevitable aging components of both the power and flail units are more likely to require extensive repairs and renewal in later years it has become apparent that we are currently overextending the anticipated serviceable and cost-effective life by a couple of seasons. The recommendation is to reduce the flail mower replacement policy from 10 years to 8 years to reduce downtime and extensive repair expenditure in line with other local IDB policies.

The Board is asked to approve the consideration of a reduced mowing fleet replacement period in the next Plant Replacement Strategy review.

Vehicles

As described previously, the Compliance & Enforcement officers are frequently using the Mitsubishi pool truck to undertake their critical activities. There is a need for a dedicated branded truck for their use. They have been recording their mileage to support the case for a dedicated vehicle for inclusion in the plant budget. They undertake site visits most days, and this equates to approximately 300 miles per week.

Plant Replacement Strategy

The Plant Replacement Strategy has recently been reviewed and adjusted considering the Commissioners' current financial position. One big ticket item, a replacement tractor and flail unit has been deferred to the 2027/28 financial year, effectively removing in the region of £265k of expenditure from 2026/27 expenditure. Whilst it is possible some larger repair bills may be incurred by operating the 2017 Massey Ferguson tractor and Herder flail mower for another season, it is hoped with careful operation these can be kept to a minimum.

The purchase of a second folding bat wing mower, which would be used to top recently seeded bank lots along Main Drain, has also been put on hold for the coming season, deferring expenditure of approximately £28k. Again, the purchase has been rolled into the 2027/28 financial year. A contractor will be sought to undertake the necessary topping works as required for the coming season.

A replacement 'Fitters' van has been included in the current financial year. This is effectively a 'mobile workshop' servicing MLC and IDB plant and assets.

Previously approved expenditure of £20k has been rolled forward to the 2026/27 budget to supplement the purchase of a 'Leguan' all terrain lift, with an additional £55k included this year (approximately £68k total cost). The proposed purchase of the spider lift represents a step change in how the Commissioners' working at height risks are controlled. It would provide a purpose-built, stable and flexible access solution that aligns with modern safety standards and reduces the reliance on high-risk methods (ladders), allowing for faster mobilisation, and safer and more efficient operations across the catchment, at both MLC and IDB sites, compared to using the less-suited telehandler. A request to the Environment Agency to include this in the IDB Fund Tranche 2B resilience project was rejected.

An allowance of £15k has been included for provision of a 4x4 vehicle for use by the Compliance and Enforcement officers. However, this could be an opportunity to investigate an electric vehicle (EV). This would provide a valuable learning tool informing the future plant strategy refresh and the next step in our Electricity Net Zero journey.

We have considered two options in outline which need further investigation:

Option 1: Purchase a used 4x4x vehicle circa £15k

Pros: Inexpensive capital cost.

Cons: Risk of potential defects and additional repair costs; lower resale value; high fuel cost.

Option 2: Lease an Electric Vehicle

- Dacia Duster Petrol Mild Hybrid (not plug-in) Yr1 cost £5,254, then 2yrs at £3,504 p/a plus balloon payment at end of lease.
- Kia EV5 Yr1 cost £11,288, then 1yr at £6,288.
- Pros: The Kia can make use of our onsite solar generated electricity; the Duster has a higher mpg compared to a truck: estimated fuel cost £1,620 p/a v. £3,087 p/a for a diesel 4x4 pickup truck.
- Cons: The Dacia is not a true EV; the Kia has a low ground clearance; lease deals vary and will need careful consideration.

A complete refresh of our Plant & Vehicle Strategy is required as we head towards 2029 when the change in tax rules will affect staff with 4x4 vehicles that will then be classed as cars not vans; and to accommodate increasing staff numbers as needed. This will be our opportunity to consider the transition to EVs.

The Board is asked to confirm their agreement to progressing a 'pilot lease' of an EV instead of purchasing a traditional vehicle outright.

A further consideration is the sale of the dump trailer, last used when desilting the Well Creek in 2022. Although not included in the Plant Strategy budget, this is considered to have a resale value of approximately £5k. Should future desilting operations require the need for a similar trailer, it would be hired specifically for that work.

The Board is asked to consider and approve the sale of the dump trailer.

Jonathan Brown
Chairman