

NORTH KENT MARSHES INTERNAL DRAINAGE BOARD



**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE BOARD
HELD AT 13 CONQUEROR COURT, SITTINGBOURNE
ON MONDAY 9 JUNE 2025 AT 1PM**

Members of the Board Present

Chairman: Cllr S Curry
A Bates (remotely)
Cllr H Browne
Cllr G Etheridge
J Nash (remotely)
J Nottage (remotely)
Cllr J Wallace (remotely – most of the meeting)
B Wright (remotely)

In attendance

P Haselhurst – Clerk
C Longden – Finance Officer
L Rowland – Office Manager
A Soloman – Sustainable Development Officer
J Horner – Technical Officer
W Smith – Works Manager

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies received from D Long and L Pearton. No response received from L Croxton.

3. ITEMS OF INTEREST DECLARATION

An interest was declared for J Nash for the Wise User of Water Project.

H Browne confirmed she was about to become a member of an independent scrutiny group with the water industry, which hasn't been formally constituted.

4. MINUTES

RECEIVED (Appendix 1) the Minutes of the Meeting of the Board held on 20 January 2025.

These minutes were circulated to Members via email on 14 February 2025 with a request for any amendments to be advised by 7 March 2025. They were then added to the website.

The Chairman asked Members if they had any comments/changes they wished to make to the minutes.

No comments/changes made.

All Members were in favour of considering the Minutes from 20 January 2025 as approved.

5. ACTION LIST & MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES

RECEIVED (Appendix 2) a copy of the Action List as of the meeting held on 20 January 2025.

The Clerk talked through the following items:

Environment Day – looking to go ahead with this after amalgamation.

Supporting Education – arranging a student for an internship is currently on hold. We have someone coming in for work experience later in the month.

The Chairman commented that once we get going with the Wise Use of Water and biodiversity projects, there will be more scope for a student to get engaged with, particularly on the wildlife studies.

Minister Letter – still on the radar, not completed yet due to the upcoming Defra Flood Funding Formula consultation which will provide the opportunity to feed back in a meaningful way. Will update further under the Clerks Update item.

Corporate Strategy – will check this has been sent out.

6. CLERKS UPDATE

The Clerk confirmed that she attended the Flood and Coast Conference last week in Telford with the Technical Assistant. She said that Emma Hardy gave a ministerial briefing about funding, and there's going to be some consultation on it, which has now gone live. She confirmed details will be sent to Members requesting comments by the end of June, so we can collate a response as a Board/team.

The Clerk gave an update on amalgamation, confirming the Environment Agency has advised her that they have now signed off the scheme. The scheme has to be advertised for a month to see if there are any objections. Then this has to go through DEFRA's legal process. She said that she has been advised that typically amalgamations occur either on 1 April or 1 October, and she is hoping for an October 2025 amalgamation. If this is the case, the Members Day in October will become the first Board meeting for the amalgamated Board to deal with any priority items.

The Clerk confirmed in terms of a general update, lots of work has been done internally progressing works and our biodiversity action plan, details of which will come later in the agenda.

The Chairman added that Medway Council's Local Plan's final draft will be submitted to the Secretary of State for sign-off at the end of the month, and any organisations, including the IDB are welcome to comment on the draft, which will be published on the 18 of June. It will then be reviewed and submitted to the Government Inspectorate in the Autumn. He said he expects this will take about a year before final approval, and once the draft has been fully approved, it then carries weight in planning terms. He said there are a lot of environmental issues that have been put in there.

The Chairman also raised the issue of local government reorganisation, and said we don't know all the answers yet, but the likelihood is there'll be some sort of North Kent unitary authority and this will come into effect within the next three years with a shadow authority being set up in a couple of years. Then, moving into a brand new local authority for the area, exact timescales are to be confirmed. He said this shouldn't change the IDB's programme of work in any way, it will just change the representation.

The Clerk added that the devolution process is a completely separate process from how an IDB is constituted, and in terms of what will change for us it will be for example the proportion of what we are paid as a special levy will change and representation on the IDB might be a bit different, but we will continue as an IDB.

Action – The Clerk to add the upcoming devolution process to the Risk Register.

7. HEALTH & SAFETY UPDATES

The Clerk gave thanks to the Works Manager, and this time of year, they both review our health and safety system. She said this means that risk assessments have all been updated, and that the Works Manager in particular has done a huge amount of work to make sure everything is covered. She said the COSHH (Control of Substances Hazardous to Health) assessments are also being undertaken and that Lisa, in her role as Office Manager is managing the Health and Safety of the office.

The Clerk confirmed that at the time of reports being written, there hadn't been any near misses or accidents, but since then, a workforce member was stung by bee, this has been logged as an incident and he is fine.

8. ENVIRONMENT AGENCY UPDATE

RECEIVED (Appendix 3) NKMIDB Annual Precept Report 2024/25.

The Clerk said that P Britten was unable to attend the meeting today. She gave a summary of the EA report that was previously received by the Board in the January 2025 Board meeting. This included the contracting works carried out under PSCA at Snakey Lane, Cliffe and Cooling for desilting main river.

The Clerk confirmed that she will be requesting a document from the EA that we can put on our website to demonstrate how the precept is being spent for public transparency.

The Clerk confirmed we're waiting on costs from the EA for the proposed 2025-2026 works. These works include the Millmarsh Pump Station refurbishment, PSCA contribution to us, which should be around 50%, and potentially a contribution towards our Wise Use of Water project.

The Clerk explained that the EA is currently investigating ways to use IDB precept funding more effectively, and there is a potential for it to be capitalised by utilising part of it towards capital projects in IDB areas. She explained this is something that we already do for Lower Medway IDB in terms of the contributions that go towards the capital projects for the Medway Estuary Swale strategy projects.

The Clerk asked B Wright for his thoughts on the work that has been done at Snakey Lane.

B Wright confirmed that it looked a lot better, but the water level is frighteningly low for this time of year.

The Chairman confirmed that Medway Council were aware of lower water levels, and that's part of an emergency planning process.

H Browne commented that an end-of-year factual report from the EA would be useful for the website.

9. PSCA WORKS

The Clerk confirmed that our Public Sector Corporation agreement will need to be renewed with the Environment Agency once we amalgamate because we'll be a new legal entity.

She said we have done some work already, and we're looking at further work to do under PSCA for this coming maintenance year. She said we do quite a bit of PSCA work across the Lower Medway district, including main river maintenance, but we have also done some coastal works on Elmley and some other land where some of the flood defences are being undercut. She explained that for Elmley, lots of rock riprap was placed at the toe of the concrete wall to increase resilience there. She said we're also looking at using resin, and she's been in contact with a company about this.

The Chairman asked for information on the resin to be shared with him.

10. BIODIVERSITY UPDATE

RECEIVED (Appendix 4) the Technical Officer's Biodiversity Update report.

The Technical Officer gave a summary of her report as follows:

Biodiversity Action Plan and Assent

A key step this year was completing a comparative review of both boards' Biodiversity Action Plans to ensure that we have a single, clear set of priorities and objectives going forward. Our renewed Natural England Assent is also now in place for the next five years, covering both Boards' operational areas. Alongside that, we've completed a Habitats Regulations

Assessment to make sure our works do not adversely impact protected sites. This provides a sound legal framework that protects both the Board and the environment.

Environmental Impact Assessment

We are also in the process of updating our Environmental Impact Assessment procedures. These will now be structured around our four core maintenance activities—grass cutting, weed cutting, desilting, and pioneering, with a tailored audit process to ensure that environmental risks are considered and documented at every stage.

A key part of this is improved in-channel monitoring. We have purchased Dissolved Oxygen probes, which also measure temperature and conductivity. This allows us to monitor conditions before, during, and after work to help us avoid triggering low oxygen events, which can be harmful to fish and invertebrates. Temperature monitoring is particularly important in low flow and drought conditions and will also inform decisions such as avoiding desilting when eels may be vulnerable in cooler weather.

Water Quality and Farmer Engagement

In support of the BAP, we've also invested in nitrate and phosphate testing kits, helping us build a better picture of nutrient issues within the district. This work is being done in collaboration with catchment-sensitive farming. The aim is to help landowners reduce nutrient runoff (dependent on results) and improve water quality over time, delivering benefits both for drainage efficiency and for biodiversity.

Species Surveys

We also have several species-focused survey projects underway this year, again strongly linked to BAP priorities:

- European eel — Critically endangered, and a BAP priority species. We are working with the Medway Swale Estuary Partnership and eDNA Consultancy on a community-led survey across the Hoo Peninsula. We currently have some breaking news as the first interim results have been published this morning, so apologies as this was not in the official biodiversity papers sent out previously. We have found 5 out of 16 samples positive for eel presence in Lower Delph, Ham Wall, Egypt Bay, and Cooling Sewer. The data is looking good with sampling techniques robust and the total volume filtered not impacting on detection – water collected varied from 180ml – 1L due to the silty-ness of the watercourse and the inability to pass through the filter.
- Results will help us identify barriers to eel migration and guide future passage improvements.
- Water vole — Another priority species, protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act and listed as endangered in the UK. Baseline surveys are planned for August using proven raft-based techniques to detect presence. We know that water voles remain present in our district, but are vulnerable to threats such as habitat loss and North American mink. Mink detection rafts will also be deployed alongside the vole surveys to help inform future predator control decisions.
- Tubular Water-dropwort — A vulnerable wetland plant species and a priority under our BAP. It has been recorded at several sites within our district and is an important indicator of habitat quality. We will be conducting targeted surveys this summer to better understand its distribution and condition, informing future management decisions.

Training

Finally, we continue to build staff capacity through training. Staff recently undertook water vole survey training, and we will be completing bat awareness training in July. This ensures

that our operational teams can identify protected species and comply with legal requirements when working near sensitive habitats.

The Technical Officer asked if anyone had any questions.

G Etheridge thanked the Technical Officer for her report, and he said he was very interested in the eels. He also commented that there are other issues besides the eels in those areas (micro water birds, young fish etc), and they're being squeezed out of the system because we're losing salt water or salinity areas on the tidal parts. He asked if we should now start considering this. He also asked about any thoughts on how we can semi-protect some of the fisheries.

The Clerk added that the Medway estuary in particular had been highlighted by a recent study alongside other sites as the most at risk within the UK for estuarine squeeze, which refers to the loss of freshwater ecology. This is due to sea level rise but also water level management generally and it something that is poorly understood nationally. She added that the Wise Use of Water work may help us understand those risks in more detail.

11. PLANNING AND CONSENTS

RECEIVED (Appendix 5) the Sustainable Development Officer's Planning and Consenting Report.

The Clerk displayed the report on screen and confirmed that during the period of January to May 2025 there had been 3 land drainage consents, 8 planning consultations, and 4 enquiries. She confirmed there had not been any new surface water development contributions during this time, but we have some pending income of just over £15,000.

She said we are aware of quite significant development around the Lower Stoke area and she has been speaking with Gabby Bussley about this as we know that's a sensitive area drainage wise.

The Clerk invited any questions.

H Browne asked for that particular geographic area when planning applications come up do we respond every time because of the sensitivity of that area?

The Sustainable Development Officer confirmed that a response would be made.

12. WORKS MANAGER REPORT

RECEIVED (Appendix 6) the Works Manager Report.

The Works Manager gave a brief summary of his report, confirming that approximately 240m of channel had been cleared at Cliffe Fleet as well as 3 watercourses last year. He confirmed 3 watercourses were marked for de-silting works this year (St Mary Hoo, Allhallows and North Level). He asked for any suggestions for PSCA work.

The Clerk said that there was some more main river work around Cliffe, desilting in Rye Street and AllHallows had also been earmarked.

A Bates commented that the Cliffe Fleet was last done in 2002, and he has a few drones should the IDB like use of them.

13. REGISTER OF MEMBERS' INTEREST FORMS 2025/26

The Clerk confirmed we are waiting for amalgamation before sending out new forms.

14. GOVERNANCE UPDATE

RECEIVED the following policies, which were emailed separately to Members from the agenda for Members' review/information:

- Service Level Agreement
- Scheme of Delegation
- Corporate Risk Register
- Statement of Internal Control

The Clerk displayed the Service Level Agreement on screen, showing the tracked changes and confirmed that we had been picked up on the Internal Audit that there was no mention of VAT being applied, which has now been amended. She confirmed that a caveat had also been put on there that if we amalgamate, the service level agreement will come to an end, and the charge will be applied on a pro rata basis.

The Clerk moved on to the Scheme of Delegation, displaying the tracked changes and confirmed the auditors wanted us to be explicit in the delegation in accordance with JPG (Joint Practitioners Accountancy Guidance). She said that it needs to be explicitly referenced that the Chairman must not be appointed as Clerk or Responsible Financial Officer, and that these roles must remain distinct and separate, which has been added.

The Clerk moved on to the Corporate Risk Register, displaying the tracked changes, and confirmed that she had made various changes following receiving the Internal Audit Report including removing Lower Medway's depot and buildings. Two audits a year have been changed to one, and cyber insurance has also been added. She also mentioned that it had been flagged that rainfall had not been added as previously suggested, and this will be included under extreme weather, and the devolution process will also be added to the next version when it is amended for amalgamation.

The Clerk moved on to the Statement of Internal Control and confirmed there wasn't any changes on this document and we won't have this document when we amalgamate, as this will be covered with the Annual Accounts Report that we already do for the Lower Medway IDB.

On a proposition by J Nash seconded by A Bates it was **AGREED** to approve the changes to the Service Level Agreement, Scheme of Delegation, Corporate Risk Register and also the unchanged Statement of Internal Control as discussed.

All Members were in agreement.

15. END OF YEAR ACCOUNTS 2024-2025

RECEIVED (Appendix 7) End of Year Accounts for 2024-2025 including Quarter 4 outputs.

RECEIVED (Appendix 7a) Quarter 1-4 bank reconciliations for 2024-2025.

The Clerk thanked the Financial Officer for taking leadership with the accounts and auditing process.

The Clerk displayed the End of Year accounts on screen and focussed on the budget monitoring section and overspend details as follows:

- Internal Audit (£90) – yearly increase was 17.75%, we had only estimated a 10% increase.
- Bad Debt (£2,600.15) – this adjustment involved a comprehensive cleanup of the NKM Drainage Rates in our rating system, which had been neglected for a few years. It includes various modifications, such as transferring land to unrated status.

The Clerk asked the Finance Officer to explain a bit more about the bad debt.

The Finance Officer explained that when inheriting the system, the accounts and the drainage rate system did not match, and we had been correcting this by doing journals. She confirmed this has now been rectified and will match going forward.

On a proposition by H Browne seconded by J Wallace it was **AGREED** that the Board have seen and agreed with the End of Year Accounts for 2024-2025.

All Members were in agreement.

The Clerk displayed the bank reconciliations on screen and requested any questions and approval.

It was **AGREED** to approve the bank reconciliations for quarter 3 and quarter 4 of 2024-2025 (quarter 1 and 2 were approved in the last Board meeting in January).

All Members were in agreement.

16. INTERNAL AUDIT UPDATE

RECEIVED (Appendix 8) Mid Kent Audit Internal Report for 2024-2025.

The Clerk confirmed the internal audit report was really positive and thanked the Finance Officer for her work with the auditors. She also thanked Mid Kent Audit for getting the report to us in time for the Board meeting. She summarised the key outcomes and the findings are listed below:

- Update Key Financial Documents (Medium) - Errors and out of date information in key financial documents means the IDB's policies are not accurate or reflective of current practice. The Clerk confirmed we had covered a lot of this off already in the Governance section, and anything not addressed yet will be dealt with come amalgamation.

- Accounts Records (Medium) - The amount of precept recorded in AGAR line 2 was initially incorrect due to mis-posting of Drainage Rate bad debt from 23/24 carried forward. We must draw your attention to this issue, as amending line 2 may affect other figures entered on the AGAR. Our work does not require verification of lines 3 or 6 of the AGAR. The Clerk confirmed this issue has been corrected and the Finance Officer has been working with a Accountant who has been very helpful and he will be helping us transition over to a new accounts system (Xero).
- Inaccuracies in Risk Register (Low) - The publicly available Risk Register is not the most recent version and the most recent version contains out of date information, does not refer to identified risks associated with livestock/mitigating actions and refers to a Finance Committee that does not operate within this Board. The Clerk confirmed this has been dealt with, and we will have one version when we amalgamate.
- J1 and J4 Accounting Basis (Medium) - Have been able to assess sample tests under controls B & E as satisfactory on an accruals basis of accounting, as no samples transcended the financial year. However, the organisation is not able to confidently assert which accounting basis is being used. The Clerk confirmed we are confident that we are completing the accounts on an accruals basis, but we just need to work with the accountant to see where that figure has come from, and we'll get that fixed.
 - Advised that there are no debtors or creditors, however, the balance sheet shows a debtor value. The Clerk confirmed this had been covered earlier.

On a proposition by J Nash seconded by B Wright it was **AGREED** the internal audit report had been read and the Board will take the necessary recommendations.

All Members agreed.

17. **ANNUAL RETURN (AGAR)**

RECEIVED (emailed separately) the Annual Return (AGAR) for the year ending March 2025.

The Clerk displayed the AGAR on screen and read through section 1 (the internal control objectives).

The Clerk talked through the figures on Section 2 of the AGAR, which included confirming the total value of cash and short-term investments of £197,021. She reminded Members that the Board agreed to set aside £100,000 of the reserves to put towards the Wise Use of Water Project, which will leave just over £97,000, which is nearly a year's worth of operating costs. She said that she expected us to have around £100,000 by the time we amalgamate and asked Members to think about how they would like to treat that amount, whether we put it into a reserves pot or earmark it for something specific in the North Kent district.

Members discussed the expected remaining money, and the general feeling was that this was something that would need some further thought, and also a business case for any suggestion before a final decision was made on a specific project. The Clerk explained there were sufficient reserves within the Lower Medway IDB to ensure financial sustainability as an amalgamated board, especially given that the North Kent Marshes IDB do not have any assets.

On a proposition by J Nash seconded by J Wallace it was **AGREED** that the Board would like the balance of NKMIDB money at amalgamation to be allocated towards projects for the North Kent Marshes IDB area, and the projects can be agreed on at a later date.

The Clerk asked the Board if they had any questions and for their approval of the AGAR.

It was **AGREED** that the Chairman should sign and date Section 1 and 2 of the Annual Return.

All Members were in agreement.

18. WISE USE OF WATER FOR HOO PROJECT

The Clerk gave an update on the project and confirmed the tender exercise has been completed and she was pleased that we've had six good companies interested. She said the project team, will be reviewing the tenders this week and will be awarding the contract in July. She explained this will be closely followed by the same project for the Lower Medway IDB areas, we have got a little bit of funding in from the Straits Committee and we will be sharing our findings with them. She confirmed we will be working with Kent County Council, looking at climate change adaptation, etc.

19. INSURANCE UPDATE

The Office Manager confirmed that the insurance was £35 cheaper than the previous year, and we will apply for a pro-rated refund when we amalgamate.

20. ADA UPDATE

The Clerk said that Members should have received a letter/email from Ian Moodie regarding flood funding, and she would like to get their feedback on the consultation.

The Clerk confirmed that ADA have published the new Good Governance Guidance and she will circulate this to Members shortly, along with the date for the ADA Conference in November for anyone who wishes to attend.

The Clerk confirmed that ADA have recently been involved with the Environmental Audit Committee, and Ian Moodie gave evidence at the last Flood Resilience for England inquiry and said it's a really interesting watch.

21. ANY OTHER BUSINESS & CLOSE OF MEETING

There wasn't any other business to discuss on this occasion.