

# **BLACK SLUICE INTERNAL DRAINAGE BOARD**

## **MINUTES**

of the proceedings of a meeting of the Executive Committee

held at the offices of the Board on  
16<sup>th</sup> September 2025 at 2pm

### **Members**

Chairperson - \* Mr P Holmes

\* Cllr P Bedford  
\* Mr M Leggott  
\* Cllr D Middleton

\* Mr R Needham  
\* Mr M Rollinson  
\* Mr C Wray

\* Member Present

In attendance: Mr D Withnall (Chief Executive)  
Mr P Nicholson (Projects Director)  
Mr James Scott (Brewin Dolphin)

#### 2510 Recording the Meeting - Agenda Item 1

Committee members were informed that the meeting would be recorded.

#### 2511 Apologies for absence - Agenda Item 2

There were no apologies for absence.

#### 2512 Declarations of Interest - Agenda Item 3

There were no declarations of interest.

#### 2513 Minutes of the Meeting - Agenda Item 4

Minutes of the meeting held on 4<sup>th</sup> June 2025, copies of which had been circulated, were considered and it was AGREED that they should be signed as a true record.

#### 2514 Confidential Minutes of the meeting - Agenda Item 5

Confidential Minutes of the meeting held on 4<sup>th</sup> June 2025, copies of which had been circulated, were considered and it was AGREED that they should be signed as a true record.

The Chief Executive noted there is just a typing error the Finance & Admin Officer should be Finance & Admin Director.

2515 Matters Arising - Agenda Item 6

Minute 2488 (d) Page 2 Felling of Trees on the Aswarby Estate

The company has not responded to the insurance company in relation to the trees that had been mistakenly felled, so now the case has been closed.

Minute 2496 (e) Page 11 Rookfields Farm

The Chief Executive has viewed this job, and it is complete, it is a very tidy job.

Mr M Rollinson agreed it was a very good job.

Minute 2496 (f) Office Carpark

The Chief Executive reported that the drainage works have been completed in conjunction with the gravel change and when we had the rain last week there was not a single puddle.

2516 Receive a report on the Board's Brewin Dolphin portfolios - Agenda Item 7

Mr. J. Scott of Brewin Dolphin circulated a presentation to update the meeting on the two investment portfolios held with Brewin Dolphin by Black Sluice IDB, the Board funds and Bourne Fen Farm funds. He confirmed the total fund values for each and noted that both portfolios currently yield 3% before charges.

Mr. Scott explained that the investments have underperformed since 2022, which was the most financially challenging year in the past 50 years. He attributed this to the lasting effects of COVID-19 and the Ukraine War, which have made the past five years particularly difficult. However, he noted that the last couple of years have seen a return to more conventional market conditions.

An open discussion followed regarding the Black Sluice IDB investments, focusing on the balance between risk and potential gains. The Chairperson agreed that maintaining the Black Sluice IDB fund was a matter of due diligence.

It was AGREED that the fund should be moved to Risk Score 5, increasing the level of risk with the aim of improving the fund's valuation over time. Mr. Scott confirmed that this change would incur transaction charges, as the investments would need to be realigned to achieve the appropriate spread. However, he noted that these costs should be offset by potential gains in valuation.

The Chairperson thanked Mr. Scott for his attendance and for delivering a clear and concise presentation

**Mr J Scott left the meeting at this point.**

2517 Health & Safety Investigation Summary - Agenda Item 8

The Chief Executive presented details regarding a recent Health & Safety incident. The initial symptoms reported by the workforce resembled an irritant or rash, later described by employees as similar to severe sunburn. For most affected individuals, the symptoms subsided within 24 hours. However, the exact cause remains unknown.

Several employees sought medical attention at Pilgrim Hospital A&E, where they were initially diagnosed with chemical burns—an outcome that is RIDDOR reportable. Accordingly, the incident was reported under RIDDOR. A subsequent follow-up at Queens Medical Centre revealed that the condition was not chemical burns. This update was communicated to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), who have yet to provide a full response. However, it was confirmed that an employee had independently reported the incident to the HSE, who indicated they were satisfied for the matter to be handled through the ongoing internal investigation.

Samples of the dust from the site were sent for chemical analysis. Initial results confirmed that the substance was not asbestos. Further testing is underway, and results are pending.

All employees involved were wearing appropriate PPE, including FP2 filter masks, which are now quarantined. These masks came from two separate batches. While FP2 masks offer substantial protection, FP3 filter masks—capable of filtering out asbestos and lead—could have provided an additional layer of safety. Nonetheless, it is believed that all reasonable precautions were taken at the time.

At present, it is considered unlikely that the incident will escalate further.

Mr. M. Leggott confirmed that the mask provided full coverage and no part of the face was exposed.

Mr. M. Rollinson questioned whether the masks were new and suggested that the reaction could have been caused by them. It was acknowledged that such reactions can be widespread. It was confirmed that 5 out of 8 employees were affected.

The Chief Executive reported that the masks are currently in quarantine pending the results of the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) investigation.

Cllr D. Middleton noted that it appears all reasonable steps were taken.

The Chairperson emphasised the importance of maintaining high standards, stating that “we have to be squeaky clean” and that all necessary actions were taken, therefore the organisation should be exonerated.

The Chief Executive added that the incident was openly discussed at the Health & Safety Committee meeting, which includes employee representatives.

The Projects Director expressed regret over the situation, noting that the respirators were selected specifically for offering the highest level of protection.

The Chairperson confirmed that this item will be brought to the Board Meeting later this year. The Chief Executive suggested that the matter could be included as an appendix to this meeting, with the summary updated once the HSE results are available, expected by November.

2518 To consider Period 04 Management Accounts & narrative - Agenda Item 9

The Chief Executive provided an update in response to a recurring question from committee members regarding non-payment of drainage rates. In the current climate, there have been only two cases of refusal to pay.

Case 1 – Bicker: The individual claimed that only specific drains were present on their property and therefore insisted on paying only for those.

Case 2 – Frampton Fen: The landowner stated that only one of the three drains had been cut. However, this was due to the fact that our team had been removed from the property, preventing completion of the work.

Both cases will be monitored more closely over the coming year to ensure appropriate follow-up and resolution.

2519 To consider the Quarter 1 Forecast – Agenda Item 10

The Chief Executive presented the Quarter 1 Forecast. The overall effect on the outturn being a £200,000 extra surplus for the general reserve.

2520 To receive a report on future maintenance of the Cliff Beck EA main River - Agenda Item 11

The Chief Executive provided an update following a request from the Board to obtain drone footage of the Cliff Beck upstream, from Mareham Lane. The footage was shared with the Executive Committee to help inform a decision on whether to undertake maintenance work at the request of the Environment Agency (EA).

The footage revealed extensive vegetation growth, to the extent that the watercourse was barely visible. The Black Sluice Internal Drainage Board (BSIDB) has not maintained this section of the river for the past two years. Although Cliff Beck is classified as an EA watercourse, it receives drainage from BSIDB-managed areas south of Sleaford, including the Handley Chase development near Quarrington.

The Projects Director noted that the EA has ceased maintenance on low consequence waterways and is now shifting focus to some medium consequence ones. The Cliff Beck has recently been downgraded to medium consequence, and no funding is currently available for its maintenance. Concerns were raised about setting a precedent if BSIDB were to undertake the work, especially if the EA subsequently withdraws from maintaining other watercourses such as North Beck.

The Maintenance Director estimated that restoring Cliff Beck to the standard expected of an IDB drain would cost approximately £577,000. Annual flailing and cutting would cost between £4,000 and £5,000 based on 2025/26 prices.

Cllr D. Middleton suggested that funding would be necessary to challenge the EA on this issue and asked whether an appeal to Defra could be made. Mr M. Rollinson acknowledged the complexity of the decision, noting that upstream ratepayers have previously experienced flooding issues. Undertaking work could exacerbate these problems and potentially lead to flooding in Helpringham.

Mr C. Wray proposed exploring flood mitigation measures that could benefit ratepayers and potentially attract funding. It was noted that water backing up in the system could lead to flooding and, in the long term, an alternative watercourse may be needed to manage flow.

Mr R. Needham highlighted that the Somerset Levels are no longer maintained, and locally, the Helpringham Eau is also neglected. The Chief Executive will attend a North Kesteven District Council Flourishing Communities Scrutiny Committee meeting this week, where questions will be raised about the Handley Chase development. It is hoped that Section 106 funding from South Kesteven District Council (SKDC) might be available to support maintenance of Cliff Beck, although Cllr P. Bedford expressed doubt, suggesting such funds are typically allocated to schools, health, or highways.

The Chief Executive queried whether cutting the vegetation would affect water flow. The Projects Director confirmed that it would improve both flow and holding capacity. Mr M. Rollinson added that flailing and cutting the drain for survey purposes would demonstrate to upstream ratepayers that action is being taken.

It was AGREED for the Board to flail and cut The Cliff Beck to enable a more detailed survey. The work is expected to take approximately one and a half weeks and cost about £5,000.

## 2521 Direction on 2026/7 Budget and Ten-Year Estimates: - Agenda Item 12

### (a) Updated 2025/26 Capital Schemes Budget

The Projects Manager reported that the Chief Executive will present a balanced 10-year budget based on the July inflation figure of 4.2%, which has also been applied to the schemes. The yellow-highlighted items in the budget documents reflect the changes generated within the schemes compared to previous projections. The Projects Director will be reviewing priorities between now and the final budget-setting process to determine where future works should be focused.

The Projects Director reported that control panel at Bicker Fen Pumping Station has been taken out of the budget, resulting in a £20,000 variance in this year's spending profile.

For the next financial year, £100,000 has been included for depot storage and hard standing improvements. With funding from the IDB Recovery Fund, the Board has acquired new pumps and fuel tanks, which has led to an increase in trailers and a shortage of storage space. Proposals are being considered to extend the existing building and create additional hard standing, ideally concreting the remainder of the yard, which becomes unusable in poor weather. The Chief Executive noted that during Winter 2023/2024, the rear of the yard was inaccessible due to ground conditions. To make this space usable, hard standing is essential. Additionally, options are being explored to build garages at the rear and redesign the yard layout to improve access, allocate dedicated machine spaces, and optimise storage.

There is also a proposal to replace the current portacabin, that is used as the workforce canteen, with a permanent canteen building, including toilets, shower facilities, and a locker room for the workforce. Funding for this structure may come from the wages on-cost reserve, which currently has a surplus.

Mr M. Rollinson raised a concern about the cost of concrete. The Chairperson commented that he had seen preliminary plans and felt they would be effective in keeping the site organised and tidy.

The Chairperson also queried the replacement schedule for the MCC at Kirton Marsh, which is listed for replacement in both 2026 and again in 2031. The Projects Director explained that there may be some duplication in the schedule due to multiple revisions of the plan.

## **(b) Updated 2025/26 10 Year Plant Budget**

### Energreen Alpha

The Projects Director provided an update confirming that the new machine is expected to be collected from the factory in Italy shortly. Once registration is complete, delivery is anticipated around mid-October. However, there is still no update on the Hitachi, and it is likely that the new machine will not arrive until sometime in November.

He went on to explain that the figures shown in red on the Plant Replacement Budget reflect updated estimates based on the expected trade-in values. These figures have been calculated using the actual costs of the new machines, providing a more accurate projection of the budget position.

### Ride on Mower

The Projects Director provided an update on the ride-on mower replacement, which was postponed last year due to funds being allocated elsewhere. The existing Kubota mower has continued to perform adequately, with only minor issues arising due to its age. Three replacement options have been considered, with the recommended choice being an electric mower from a Lincoln-based company. Although the electric model comes at a higher cost, this is expected given its technology. The supplier has already demonstrated the machine on-site, and it was noted that the Pump Groundsman had reviewed a similar model 18 months ago, with the price having since decreased.

The electric mower is comparable in power to a diesel equivalent and offers several advantages. It is quieter, produces no fumes, requires no servicing, and is generally more comfortable for the operator. It also aligns with the Board's climate change objectives. The current Kubota has a 60-inch mower deck, while the proposed electric model features a 72-inch deck, matching the size of the John Deere alternative. Mr M. Rollinson asked about the deck size comparison, and the Projects Director confirmed the electric mower also has a 72-inch deck.

The Chairperson raised a concern about stability, given the increase in deck width from five to six feet. The Projects Director responded that the Pump Groundsman had trialled the machine earlier that day in Heckington and found it stable. As the regular operator, the Pump Groundsman noted that the terrain is generally flat and suitable, and the machine is powerful enough for the job. The Chief Executive added that the mower would not be used intensively.

Mr R. Needham asked about trade-in values. The Projects Director reported that Irelands Farm Machinery had offered £7,000 against a new Kubota, while Ben Burgess had offered £4,500 against a new John Deere. A £5,000 figure has been included in the Plant Account budget. The electric mower is manufactured in the

UK and features a battery with a five-year lifespan, capable of delivering eight hours of continuous use per charge.

Mr C. Wray asked whether the batteries are serviceable. The Projects Director confirmed that the battery comes with a five-year warranty and is serviced annually by the supplier. Used batteries are sent to the United States for recycling. Mr M. Leggott noted that in electric vehicles, the battery often represents half the cost. Mr C. Wray added that the mower uses advanced cell batteries capable of up to 3,000 charge cycles.

The Projects Director expressed support for the electric option, noting that the daily running cost is approximately £5–£6, compared to £9–£10 for a diesel model. Mr M. Rollinson pointed out that charging costs would be minimal. The Chief Executive confirmed that charging would cost around 14–15p per kWh, with a worst-case full charge costing approximately £7. It was also noted that the operator would be satisfied with the electric model.

However, the Projects Director was unsure how many units had been sold or how well-established the product is. Mr C. Wray asked whether the purchase would contribute to environmental targets. The Projects Director confirmed that it aligns with grant funding criteria, supports the Board's transition to electric vehicles, and enhances green credentials. Additionally, service costs are negligible due to the lack of moving parts.

Although the supplier stated that the current offer is valid until the end of September, the Board may request an extended battery warranty and explore potential price negotiation. Mr C. Wray suggested that being the first drainage board to adopt an electric mower could be a valid reason to seek a price reduction.

The Chairperson invited opinions from the group. The general consensus was that, for a private purchase, members would prefer a diesel model—ideally from John Deere, given the widespread availability of dealers. However, for Black Sluice, if the trade-in value could be increased to £7,000 from the £5,000 currently budgeted, members would support the electric purchase. There was still interest in understanding how many units have been sold and are currently in use.

The discussion concluded with the Projects Director tasked with investigating potential movement on both the purchase and trade-in prices, and researching how many electric mowers have been sold and are operational in the field.

#### Four in One Bucket

The Projects Director reported that the Four-in-One Bucket, which has been used for cleaning windscreens, sweeping, and general loading, has now reached the end of its service life. Originally purchased in 2003, the bucket is now 22 years old and requires replacement. The current model is a Cherry product, which is known to be one of the more expensive options on the market. However, given its durability and the fact that it has lasted over two decades, the recommendation is to replace it with the same brand.

The committee AGREED that Cherry is a reputable manufacturer and supported the proposal to proceed with a like-for-like replacement.

The old bucket will be entered into the farm machinery sale at Bicker Bar in October, with a reserve price of £500. In addition to the bucket, the blue dump trailer and several other unused items will also be included in the sale.

**(c) 2026/27 Budget and 10 year estimates**

The Chief Executive presented an initial budget estimate to provide an indication of the Board's financial direction ahead of the October/November budget-setting period. The July 2025 inflation figure of 4.2% has been used to normalise the budget projections over the next ten years. Based on current modelling, the surplus/deficit line is expected to reach a balanced position by the 2030/31 financial year, as both income and expenditure are forecast to increase in line with the 4.2% inflation rate. This alignment suggests that a 4.2% annual increase in drainage rates is the most appropriate approach to maintain the Board's operational functions sustainably. The Chief Executive also noted that future inflation updates can be incorporated into the ten-year estimates to refine the figures as needed.

**(d) CONFIDENTIAL – Staff Salaries**

It was agreed and thereby RESOLVED to exclude the public from the next part of the meeting due to the confidential nature of the business to be transacted, in accordance with section 1(2) of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960.

**(e) CONFIDENTIAL – Director's salaries**

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**2522 Enforcement Actions - Agenda Item 13**

The Chief Executive updated The Planning and Enforcement Officer has settled in well and has provided a copy of the enforcement actions since June 2025 for the attention of the Executive Committee.

Mr M Rollinson noted a typo on the Donington Skate Park entry which it should be Flinders Founders not Flinders Foundation.

**2523 To review the draft timetable for 2026 meetings – Agenda Item 14**

The committee RESOLVED to recommend the below timetable of meeting dates for 2026:

Executive	Wednesday 21 <sup>st</sup> January 2026	2pm
Board	Tuesday 10 <sup>th</sup> February 2026	2pm
Environment	Tuesday 3 <sup>rd</sup> March 2026	2pm
Southern Works	Tuesday 24 <sup>th</sup> March 2026	2pm
Audit & Risk	Tuesday 21 <sup>st</sup> April 2026	2pm
Northern Works	Tuesday 12 <sup>th</sup> May 2026	2pm
Executive	Tuesday 2 <sup>nd</sup> June 2026	2pm
Board	Tuesday 23 <sup>rd</sup> June 2026	2pm
Executive	Tuesday 15 <sup>th</sup> September 2026	2pm
Joint Works	Tuesday 6 <sup>th</sup> October 2026	2pm
Audit & Risk	Tuesday 27 <sup>th</sup> October 2026	2pm

Structures	Tuesday 17 <sup>th</sup> November 2026	2pm
Board	Tuesday 8 <sup>th</sup> December 2026	2pm

2524 Any Other Business - Agenda Item 15

**(a) Fens 2100+** Update & Fens 2100+ Summer Newsletter.

**(b) Local Government Association Special Interest Group on Special Levy funding for councils.** The Chief Executive reported that he had recently attended a meeting in Westminster as a representative of the Internal Drainage Boards (IDBs). Unfortunately, only four IDB representatives were present.

The meeting focused on exploring future funding options for the special levy paid by councils. He noted that the current funding model is unsustainable for district and borough councils, creating a significant shortfall. This issue specifically affects councils with IDBs operating in their areas.

Despite the limited attendance, valuable networking took place. The Chief Executive emphasised the importance of being proactive rather than reactive, and believes that by staying engaged in these discussions, IDB's may be able to influence council representatives moving forward.

**(c) Electricity Renewal.** Quotes for the half hourly electric contract have been sort using VIP Communications as an alternate broker and they have achieved a quote from SSE considerably less than our renewal with Npower, through Woldmarsh. The Chief Executive recommended switching to SSE given that the quotes were circa £14,000 less than Npower based on our previous twelve months consumption.

It was AGREED to switch electricity contract, for the half hourly sites, to SSE Electricity Solutions, assuming the prices offered were honoured.

**(d) Website.** Notification has come via ADA that the JPAG and SSSA Groups who deal with our internal and external audits will be looking at the accessibility of our website from the 2025/26 audits. This was already on our radar, and we were looking at refreshing the website and updating the payment facility. We have gone to our current provider who has quoted £1,500 to put all the accessibility tools and a new payment app in place. The committee AGREED.

**(e) IT Support.** The Chief Executive informed the committee that the HBP support contract is due for renewal on 18th October. He noted that the level of support received from HBP recently has not met expectations. The renewal proposal from HBP includes a 22.6% increase from three years ago, which equates to approximately 7.5% per year. In response, the Board has gone to market and obtained alternative quotes from LCS Group and Roundworks IT. LCS Group, a Lincoln-based company that also supports the Witham and Humber IDBs, submitted a quote that was within £3 of HBP's offer. In contrast, Roundworks IT's quote represented a 28% increase and offered less support than HBP.

Given the circumstances, the Chief Executive proposed seeking assurances from HBP that their support will improve going forward, as switching providers would be time-consuming and not a productive use of resources. The committee AGREED that this approach was sensible and supported the recommendation.

**(f) Insurance.** The Insurance renewal from NFU overall is a 7.71% increase in the initial quotes. It is felt we don't need to go out to the wider market considering the timescales it is unlikely the premium could be matched let alone bettered. The overall response was that the increases reflect the wider insurance market.

**(g) Earning Statistics published by the Office of National Statistics.** This was published this morning with the figure for July being 5.1% making the 12-month average 5.0% so it is suggested that will be the starting point for negotiations of Pay and Conditions on 01 October.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 16:52