

# BLACK SLUICE INTERNAL DRAINAGE BOARD

## MINUTES

of the proceedings of a meeting of the Executive Committee

held at the offices of the Board on  
21<sup>st</sup> January 2026 at 14.00pm

### Members

Chairperson - \* Mr P Holmes

\* Cllr P Bedford  
\* Mr M Leggott  
\* Mr R Needham

\* Mr M Rollinson (**arrived 14:47**)  
\* Mr C Wray

\* Member Present

In attendance: Mr D Withnall (Chief Executive)  
Mr P Nicholson (Projects Director)  
Mr S Harrison (Maintenance Director)

#### 2574 Recording the Meeting - Agenda Item 1

Committee members were informed that the meeting would be recorded.

#### 2575 Apologies for absence - Agenda Item 2

There was one apology from Mrs A Chamberlain. Due to a road closure Mr M Rollinson would arrive late.

#### 2576 Declarations of Interest - Agenda Item 3

There were no declarations of interest.

#### 2577 Minutes of the Meeting - Agenda Item 4

Minutes of the meeting held on 16<sup>th</sup> September 2025, copies of which had been circulated, were considered and it was AGREED that they should be signed as a true record.

#### 2578 Confidential Minutes of the meeting - Agenda Item 5

Confidential Minutes of the meeting held on 16<sup>th</sup> September 2025, copies of which had been circulated, were considered and it was AGREED that they should be signed as a true record.

#### 2579 Matters Arising - Agenda Item 6

##### Minute 2517 Cooks Lock Investigation Summary

The Chief Executive updated, for completeness, how the Health & Safety inspection concluded. The masks used for the PPE had filtered out the particulates but created a vapour which then caused the rashes to appear. The

matter is now closed, additional training has been put in place and the Health & Safety elements of any future projects will be investigated more robustly.

We have been working with the HSE and they have confirmed they do not intend to pursue any further action, at this time.

#### Minute 2518 Management Accounts

The Chief Executive updated we are almost complete with the cutting and flailing programme. Once there is more information from the Site Engineer, investigations can be done into the unfinished work and the reasons behind them, then the work can be completed, where possible

#### Minute 2520 Cliff Beck Maintenance

The CEO reported that earlier optimism regarding funding for works on Cliff Beck had changed following confirmation from the Environment Agency that the watercourse is classified as low consequence, not medium consequence, and therefore does not qualify for future funding. Despite this, Cliff Beck serves a significant and growing residential area, with 1,500 additional homes planned at its upper end and existing flows from Silk Willoughby and Quarrington. Members noted that increasing the consequence category is unlikely under current Environment Agency policy. The CEO also highlighted that five attenuation ponds being constructed at Hadley Chase may provide some mitigation, though their effectiveness cannot be guaranteed once they reach capacity. An assessment of recent performance following maintenance works is awaited.

Mr R Needham noted the Helpringham Eau has now been fully de-bushed from the bridge down to the South Forty Foot, improving flow and accessibility. This work was completed and fully funded by the riparian owners.

#### Minute 2021 - 10 year Plant Budget

##### Evergreen Alpha

The Projects Director provided an update on the delivery of the new Evergreen Alpha machine, confirming that delays were due to the late arrival of the flail head, which had only recently been received. A further delay has arisen while awaiting delivery of a required hydraulic valve, now reported to be in transit. The machine is expected imminently, potentially within the week. During discussions with the supplier, it was noted that both existing machines have already been removed to their yard, with the 15-plate model sold and a prospective buyer identified for the 17-plate model, although the board retains ownership until the new machine is delivered and all agreements are finalised. The combined trade-in value for the two outgoing machines is £75,000.

##### Ride on Mower

The Projects Director reported on options for replacing the ride-on mower, confirming that although John Deere is the more expensive of the two diesel models considered, it remains the preferred option. The committee discussed dealership history, trade-in values and timing, noting the aim to have the new machine in place ahead of the incoming caretaker's start date. Following discussion, the committee approved the purchase of a new John Deere mower at the best achievable price and trade-in value, and the Projects Director will proceed with negotiations accordingly.

##### Four in One Bucket

The Maintenance Director updated this has been purchased.

(c) 2026/27 Budget & 10 year Estimates

The CEO reported that the CPIH inflation figure for December 2025 was confirmed at 3.6%. Although this represents a slight reduction from the 4.2% figure used when formulating the budget, it does not constitute a significant decrease and therefore has limited impact on previously assumed budgetary projections.

Minute 2524 (c) Electricity Renewal

The CEO confirmed that the Board had agreed to renew the electricity contract with NPower via Woldmarsh, as this provided the most favourable overall offer. SSE's proposal was discounted as it did not include the required transmission charges, making it a less competitive option.

Minutes 2524 (g) Earning Statistics

The CEO reported that the Pay and Conditions Committee, along with the Unison branch and the Lincolnshire ADA branch, had confirmed a 5% pay award for 2026/27.

2580 To consider Period 09 Management Accounts - Agenda Item 7

In presenting the management accounts, the CEO reported that although £39,742 in drainage rates remained outstanding, £19,000 of this total was subject to agreed instalment plans, bringing the actual position broadly in line with expectations for the time of year.

Several cases had progressed to the Magistrates' Court; however, distress warrants were not granted due to legislative changes introduced in 2014, meaning future enforcement must proceed via liability orders before escalation to bailiffs. The CEO confirmed that documentation will be updated to reflect current legal requirements.

He further highlighted favourable variances of £51,000 in pumping station maintenance and £86,000 in electricity costs, totalling £136,000, with drain maintenance also showing a £60,000 underspend while all programmed works remain on track for completion. Environmental schemes were underspent by £8,623, with proposals to be considered later in the meeting.

The CEO also noted one outstanding sales invoice over three months old relating to a residential development at Claydyke Bank, which will continue to be pursued.

2581 To consider a report on the 2026/27 Budget and Ten-Year Estimates - Agenda Item 8

The CEO presented the budget overview, explaining that rates and levies are the final element to be entered due to the requirement to base them on the position as at 31 December; therefore, a 4.2% CPIH figure had been used to model income. As a result of 34 acres of agricultural land being reclassified as developed land, the 10-year financial balance increased from £1.8m to £2m, with the income split now comprising 47.42% drainage rates and 52.58% special levy, reflecting the ongoing shift toward a levy-dominated base.

The CEO reported issues with the mobile mast power supply. EE were due to attend on 8 January to fit a meter but have not yet done so. The CEO confirmed that EE will continue to be pressed to install the meter, after which the Board will be able to determine the mast's actual electricity usage and apply backdated charges to EE to 2016.

Budget allocations for depot improvements were reviewed, with initial estimates proving significantly lower than quotations received—concreting alone being costed at £462,000 and full development approaching £900,000—requiring a return to the drawing board, though funds of £15–18k were required urgently for a replacement gate.

Options for expanding solar income were noted.

The CEO advised that electricity costs were projected to rise by 4.32%, while changes within pumping station staffing and project allocations were reflected in a 7.57% budget increase.

Drain maintenance showed a planned 4.61% increase, restrained through culvert survey reductions. Updates were provided regarding culvert surveys and environmental budgets, with confirmation that the Environment Agency precept was not expected to increase.

Significant savings arising from the pension triennial valuation were highlighted, with employer contributions reducing from 23.6% to 18.2%, generating £72,000 of annual savings across the workforce, which would be reinvested into digital and operational improvements.

Replacement of the franking machine was confirmed as necessary following equipment failure.

The CEO concluded by noting that 10-year financial modelling meets all reserve targets, including maintaining general reserves between 3 and 12 months of expenditure and funding two consecutive wet years of electricity, with the final six years of the estimates delivering a near-balanced position within £30,000 either way.

The Projects Director provided an update on plant replacements, noting the need to consider a larger telehandler to safely lift heavier equipment, such as the 8-inch pumps that the current machine can no longer handle. While a larger model would improve capability, concerns were raised regarding manoeuvrability on certain sites. The existing telehandler, although its life has been extended with recent repairs, is due for replacement, and the yard forklift was confirmed to be no longer compliant with safety requirements. Options discussed included retaining the old telehandler for yard use, purchasing a new telehandler, or alternatively sourcing a second-hand industrial forklift alongside a new telehandler. The team will explore available models, sizes, and configurations, including vehicle requirements for the new caretaker, and will bring detailed quotations and recommendations to a future meeting.

The committee RESOLVED to recommend the 2026/27 budget to the Board for approval.

The CEO presented the Bourne Fen Alleviation Account, confirming that the rate would remain at 2.4 pence in the pound, resulting in a small projected deficit of £74 at the end of 2026/27, which was considered a stable and acceptable position. A query was raised regarding the most recent valuation of the fund; the CEO noted that the management accounts showed a slight dip in December but agreed to review the latest figures in light of indications that wider market performance had recently improved significantly.

2583 To approve the 5G Telemetry Upgrade proposal. – Agenda Item 10

The CEO explained that the Board's current telemetry network, which reports operational data from pumping stations back to the office, is based on a traditional radio-link system. Each pumping station uses a bi-directional aerial that must be precisely aligned with the aerial on the main mast at the depot. Even a slight movement — such as during high winds — can cause the aerials to misalign, interrupting the telemetry feed. This makes the system unreliable at critical times, as evidenced during the Christmas period at Wyberton Pumping Station when a minor shift in the aerial resulted in complete loss of signal. These failures typically occur during adverse weather, when telemetry is most needed to monitor water levels and pump performance.

In contrast, the CCTV system currently operates using individual SIM cards installed at each pumping station. These SIM cards provide mobile network connectivity for live video feeds at a total annual cost of just under £10,000. While functional, this arrangement is costly and limited by varying mobile signal strengths across the district. Video quality can become jerky or unstable, and access is currently restricted to a small number of staff via mobile phones rather than being fully integrated into the office-based monitoring systems.

The proposed communications upgrade would replace both the unreliable radio-based telemetry links and the SIM-card-based CCTV connections with a unified 4G/5G system (or Starlink at sites with no mobile coverage). This would significantly improve reliability, reduce manual intervention, allow office-based monitoring of both telemetry and CCTV, and provide site-wide Wi-Fi to improve staff safety and emergency communications.

Currently, there is a test site running at Holland Fen and the feedback from the Pump Engineer is the system has 'not missed a beat', plus the CCTV has improved. This system will put things in a good position going forward and provide a Wi-Fi connection at each pumping station. This proposal can be financed from the current years pumping station maintenance budget.

The Executive committee approved this proposal.

2584 **CONFIDENTIAL** – Review of Personnel Matters – Agenda Item 11

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.

2585 Any Other Business - Agenda Item 12

(a) **CONFIDENTIAL** - Holiday Entitlement.

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.

(b) Additional member due to the resignation of David Middleton.

The Committee considered the vacancy for a Boston Borough Council representative on the Executive, arising from Councillor Peter Bedford's appointment as Chair of the Structures Committee. The CEO invited views on whether the position should be filled and, if so, by whom. Councillor Stuart Evans was proposed and supported, with members noting his balanced approach, lack of political bias in decision-making, and existing service on the Board. The CEO raised a potential concern regarding overlap with the Pay and Conditions Committee, but members agreed this did not present a material conflict. It was noted that forthcoming local government reorganisation may alter future appointment arrangements, though current responsibilities remain unchanged. It was agreed that the CEO would first consult with the Council Leader, and subject to that discussion, extend an invitation to Councillor Evans to join the Executive.

(c) RSPB Frampton Marsh

Mr P Holmes declared an interest.

The CEO reported on a recent meeting with the manager of RSPB Frampton Marsh, where water levels in the site's reservoirs were observed to be exceptionally low. The original abstraction pumps had failed, and although replacement pumps were installed at a significant cost, these too subsequently ran dry due to the absence of a dry-run safety switch and burnt out, leaving the reserve without pumping capability since the summer. Although the repaired pump is expected to return to operation within the next few weeks, its limited capacity of around 120–140 litres per minute means that the RSPB will not be able to recover water levels to the required position before summer.

The CEO advised that the RSPB has significant long-term plans for landscape recovery and the expansion of wetland habitats, potentially supported by a large landscape recovery fund over 30 years. These plans include increasing abstraction capacity and constructing additional reservoir areas, possibly through a new purpose-built pumping station with greater capability than the existing system.

It was further noted that the reservoirs at Frampton Marsh are classified under the Reservoirs Act, which requires the RSPB to maintain an emergency discharge plan. The CEO advised that the current plan involves directing excess or emergency discharge water into the Board's system, from where it would be moved through Wyberton Marsh Pumping Station. This arrangement places a shared operational responsibility on the Board, and it was highlighted that this could strengthen the case for prioritising the refurbishment of Wyberton Marsh Pumping Station. The Environment Agency has recently asked the RSPB to review and test their emergency discharge procedures, and the Board will need to work collaboratively with the RSPB to ensure compliance.

To support the RSPB during the current critical period and strengthen long-term partnership working, the CEO proposed using up to £4,100 of underspend within the environmental budget to assist by deploying the Board's spare 6-inch mobile

pump, which is capable of moving approximately 6,000 litres per minute. This would significantly improve water transfer efficiency for a short, targeted period. Allocation of the £4,100 would cover mobilisation, demobilisation and limited operational time; if the RSPB wished the pump to operate beyond this initial period, ongoing diesel costs could be met by the RSPB. Members expressed support for the proposal in principle, recognising the environmental benefits and the potential value of a strengthened working relationship, particularly in the context of future joint funding opportunities and shared asset responsibilities.

#### **(d) Quadrant**

The Projects Director provided an update on the Quadrant development drain realignment. He confirmed that revised pricing discussions had taken place with the developer's representative, and an environmental survey had been completed. The developer has now requested a quotation for the removal of bushes and trees, which must be carried out within the next 6–8 weeks to meet ecological timing constraints. The developer intends to undertake the physical realignment in May. Members noted that only part of the originally proposed length—approximately 130–150 metres—is now being realigned, leaving around 100 metres remaining. The developer queried whether the Board would complete the remaining section; however, the Projects Director confirmed there is no operational benefit to the Board in doing so, and responsibility appropriately remains with the developer. He also reconfirmed that the Board's requirement for a two-year period of liability protection following the works, previously communicated through three formal options including the provision of a financial retainer, remains necessary. The only remaining uncertainty relates to whether sufficient excavated material will be available to backfill the redundant drain; if not, the developer will be required to supply additional soil. The Board reiterated that completing the full realignment is a planning requirement for the developer, and officers will ensure compliance.

#### **(e) Ewerby Pumping Station**

The Projects Director reported that the Ewerby Pumping Station will be out of operation for the whole of the following week, and potentially part of the week after, to allow installation of new motors and control panels under the IDB Recovery Fund.

The Chairman sought clarification on the associated National Grid works, and the Projects Director confirmed that of the four northern pumping stations requiring upgraded electricity supplies; one has been completed, another is nearing completion, and the next scheduled site is South Kyme, leaving three in total still to complete.

The Chief Executive added that all three mobile 8-inch pumps will be on site at Ewerby. The Projects Director confirmed that although a PTO gearbox remains available as a contingency for one pump, it is expected that the three 8-inch pumps will be able to undertake the required duty pumping until all works are complete.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 15:48