

**BEDFORD GROUP OF DRAINAGE BOARDS**

# **CAPITAL FINANCING AND RESERVES POLICY**

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## **DRAINAGE RATES AND SPECIAL LEVIES**

**BEDFORD GROUP OF DRAINAGE BOARDS**

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**Reviewed by: Joint Management Committee**

### **Adopted by:**

Alconbury & Ellington Internal Drainage Board  
Bedfordshire & River Ivel Internal Drainage Board  
Buckingham & River Ouzel Internal Drainage Board

The Capital Financing and Reserves Policy sets out in detail how the Board will finance capital improvement work and asset refurbishment/replacement, and, how it will respond to/recover from emergency events without significantly increasing drainage rates and special levies at the time.



# Capital Financing and Reserves Policy

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## Capital Financing and Reserves Policy

### 1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Board's Reserves are inadequate to fund capital improvement work and asset replacement/refurbishment by themselves. Other sources of funding will therefore be needed, access to which cannot be guaranteed.
- 1.2 Capital improvement work and asset replacement/refurbishment will be financed from a combination of public works loans (subject to a number of conditions), flood defence grant in aid, third party contributions from partners and/or other beneficiaries, the Board's Reserves and from today's ratepayer by way of drainage rates and special levies.
- 1.3 The Board will seek to collect contributions and commuted sums from developers and will aim to build up a Development Reserve (net of the expenditure incurred in collecting this income and regulating development) to part fund future improvement work.
- 1.4 The Board will aim to capitalise and depreciate new and refurbished assets, to spread the cost of capital expenditure over their estimated useful economic life, so as not to over burden today's ratepayer with the full capital cost, when economic benefits will clearly extend into the future.
- 1.5 The Pensions Reserve deficit and the Consortium's shared Pensions Reserve deficit may seriously impact on the Board's ability to operate as a going concern, if it continues to increase as fast as it has been doing. The Board will continue to work closely with the administering authority to reduce these deficits and minimise the increases in pension contributions that will be required in future.

### 2. Capital Financing: Capital Work

- 2.1 Capital work may be required to increase or sustain the productive capacity of agricultural land and to cope with the additional surface water that arises from the development of land over time, the costs of which are likely to be significant and can run over a number of financial years. Climate change is another important driver, which may lead to the need for improvement work. Capital work may also be required to deliver environmental improvements that have usually been brought about by the introduction of new legislation and/or regulation. Capital work may include the creation of additional on-line and off-line storage or increasing capacity e.g. widening and/or deepening watercourses and building flood storage areas or building new and/or improving/refurbishing existing infrastructure.
- 2.2 Today the demand for capital improvement work is largely driven by development, new environmental legislation/regulation and from deficiencies that have been identified in the Board's system by local knowledge and from flooding events and the catchment modelling. Hence it is important that developers contribute towards the cost of this work and pre-fund any additional maintenance liabilities arising therefrom. The Board will seek to identify and secure environmental improvement grants to maximise betterment in the Drainage District. This will reduce the impact on drainage ratepayers and constituent billing authorities, in terms of the drainage rates and special levies that are required today and in future.

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- 2.3 Typically SuDS are used rather than directly discharging surface water into the drainage network at an un-attenuated rate. The Board will seek a commuted sum from the developer if it decides to take on the future maintenance liability, and, may also charge a surface water development contribution if the volume of water entering the network is greater as a result of the development. All additional maintenance liabilities that arise directly from development will be pre-funded from commuted sums, in accordance with the Board's Planning/Byelaw Policy. The Board will review its position regularly to ensure it keeps in line with legislation.
- 2.4 Sometimes development will take place in a catchment before any capital improvement work is actually required. Hence it is important to collect a fair contribution from each developer up front, so that the work can be paid for in part when it is needed. The Board will therefore continue to charge developers a rate per impermeable square metre for increasing the flow or volume of water into any of its drainage/flood risk management infrastructure (a surface water development contribution), unless the cost of taking the additional flows is greater. In these circumstances the Board will charge developers the full cost of carrying out improvement works, to specifically cater for the additional flows arising from the development. This surface water development contribution/impermeable square metre will be reviewed by the Board periodically.
- 2.5 The Board will always apply for flood defence grant in aid and EA local levy when economic to do so (both individually and jointly with other Risk Management Authorities, when appropriate) and seek third party contributions from its partners and/or other beneficiaries, to help fund capital improvement work and asset replacement/refurbishment. All grant applications must be approved by the Environment Agency's Area Flood Risk Manager, Project Appraisal Board or Large Projects Review Group (depending on the estimated cost of the project) to access flood defence grant in aid and local levy
- 2.6 Drainage ratepayers and constituent billing authorities will aim to collectively contribute towards the cost of the Board's capital improvement programme (Revenue Contribution to Capital Outlay).
- 2.7 Drainage ratepayers and constituent billing authorities will also aim to collectively fund an annual refurbishment provision (should this be necessary), which will provide for the future replacement/refurbishment of the key components within existing structures (see section 6 below).
- 2.8 The Board will consider applying to the Public Works Loan Board for a loan to fund or part fund capital work when the following conditions are met:
- 2.8.1 When the scheme will deliver a multitude of socio-environmental-economic benefits to a number of beneficiaries and a positive cost/benefit ratio arises, and
- 2.8.2 The economic benefits of the scheme and the asset(s) arising therefrom are expected to extend well into the future for at least the term of the loan, and

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- 2.8.3 There is insufficient flood defence grant in aid or third party contributions from partners and/or other beneficiaries available and there are insufficient Reserves held internally for that purpose, to collectively fully fund the work, and
- 2.8.4 When permission to borrow money for this purpose has been given by the Secretary of State, as required by section 55(3) of the Land Drainage Act 1991, and
- 2.8.5 When the Board have approved the scheme in the usual manner and there is sufficient headroom in the budget to service the loan, so as not to pass on unacceptable increases in drainage rates and special levies.
- 2.9 For example, the Board may decide to apply for a public works loan where capital improvement work is considered necessary prior to any substantive development having taken place in a catchment and there are insufficient funds in reserve and no flood defence grant in aid is available to pay for the improvement work. The scheme cost may, subject to the aforementioned conditions, be financed from a public works loan, with the expectation that this loan will be re-paid from net development contributions and commuted sums (either received from developers directly or via the SAB and/or CIL), as and when the land benefiting is developed.
- 2.10 The ability to access most sources of funding will therefore depend on the agreement of others. Hence the importance of maintaining adequate Reserves.

### 3. Capital Financing: Spreading the capital cost of new, improved and refurbished Fixed Assets

- 3.1 Where new Flood Risk Management Infrastructure, attenuation reservoir, in-line storage, pumping stations, or other assets are created as part of any capital improvement scheme, the cost of creating these assets (net of any flood defence grant in aid or third party contributions) will be capitalised and depreciated thereafter in accordance with the Board's Financial Regulations and depreciation policy. These assets will be recorded in the Fixed Assets Register.
- 3.2 Where a public works loan is used to finance or part finance improvement work the estimated economic useful life of the asset(s) arising therefrom will determine the maximum period over which the loan is to be repaid and the annual depreciation charge will be no less than the annual loan repayments.
- 3.3 Where the historic costs of existing structures that are owned and recorded have not previously been capitalised and shown in the Fixed Assets Register the components of each structure will be re-valued at their estimated reinstatement cost (their Insured Value) and recorded in the Fixed Assets Register, in accordance with proper accounting practices for small bodies set out in the Practitioners' Guide.
- 3.4 When existing structures are refurbished or partially refurbished the cost of refurbishment (net of any flood defence grant in aid and third party contributions from partners and/or other beneficiaries,



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which may be available at the time) will be capitalised and depreciated thereafter in accordance with the Board's Financial Regulations and depreciation policy, subject always to there being sufficient headroom in the budget.

- 3.5 The cost of purchasing mobile plant will continue to be capitalised and depreciated in accordance with the Board's Financial Regulations and depreciation policy.
- 3.6 Net profits on disposal of fixed and mobile plant may be transferred to the Plant Reserve at the end of every financial year as and when they arise, in accordance with the Board's Financial Regulations.

### 4. Capital Financing: Reserves

- 4.1 The Board's Reserves exist to protect drainage ratepayers and constituent billing authorities from significant increases in drainage rates and special levies that would otherwise be needed to fund or part fund capital work, mobile plant replacement and when responding to/recovering from emergency events.
- 4.2 It is important that the Board is able to fund or part fund this type of work when it is needed without having to either pass on significant increases in drainage rates and special levies to drainage ratepayers and constituent billing authorities at the time, or leave a legacy of crippling debt for future generations to cope with. However it is equally important that the Board does not build up unacceptably high levels of Reserve to part fund capital expenditure that may not be needed imminently, at a time when significant cuts are being made to other public services and when the real value of cash reserves is being eroded by low interest rates and high inflation.
- 4.3 A balance therefore needs to be achieved when determining an appropriate level of Reserves: between being sufficiently robust financially and therefore able to fund or part fund capital work and mobile plant replacement when it is needed without significantly increasing drainage rates and special levies at the time, and, taking on too much long term debt in an attempt to minimise what has previously been collected from drainage rate and council tax payers, in terms of Reserves.
- 4.4 The Board has a number of Earmarked Reserves that are each held (or ring-fenced) for a specific purpose, which form a critical part of the capital financing strategy (Development Reserve, Plant Reserve and Capital Works Reserve). Reliance on these Reserves and other sources of capital is demonstrated by the significant difference between the gross cost of capital improvement works and the revenue contribution to capital outlay, as shown in the capital programme.
- 4.5 The Group has a Revaluation Reserve which records surpluses arising from the revaluation of fixed assets on the balance sheet.

The Earmarked Reserves and General Reserve should also be sufficient for the Board to be able to continue as a going concern after netting-off the bulk of its Pensions Reserve deficit, which is calculated



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annually by Bedfordshire Pension Fund Actuary. As a minimum, the Board's Reserves should not fall below one year's expenditure (net of grant), as set out in ADA's Guide to Good Governance.

4.6 Each Reserve is now considered in turn.

### 5. Earmarked Reserves: Development Reserve

- 5.1 Development contributions and commuted sums that have been collected from developers net of the expenditure incurred in collecting this income and regulating development are usually held in a Development Reserve and can be used to fund or part fund future capital improvement work and any additional maintenance liabilities that the Board may agree to take on arising from such developments.
- 5.2 These sums are treated as revenue income and are therefore shown on the face of the Income and Expenditure Account. At the end of every financial year the Board will review the adequacy of its Development Reserve and consider transferring any operating surpluses from the General Reserve to the Development Reserve.
- 5.3 Commuted sums are also recorded in the Commuted Obligations Register (within the capital works register) because the receipt of this income places a duty on the Board to maintain the respective infrastructure assets in perpetuity, which is distinctly different from maintaining adopted infrastructure using permissive statutory powers. It is important that the Board is able to identify these obligations today and in future.
- 5.4 It would be unreasonable to expect developers today to pre-fund the full cost of improvement works that are driven by development, when these improvements are also planned to cope with the additional surface water arising from future development and to deliver environmental enhancement and a degree of climate change proofing.

### 6. Earmarked Reserves: Plant Reserve

- 6.1 Specifically this Reserve should be able to fund the purchase and replacement of mobile plant and vehicles and the refurbishment/replacement or improvement of the following components:
- 6.2 The Plant Reserve is financed from approved transfers that may come from the General Reserve at the end of every financial year.

### 7. Earmarked Reserves: Capital Works Reserve

- 7.1 The purpose of the Capital Works Reserve is to ensure that there are sufficient resources in place to part fund previously agreed capital improvement and asset replacement/refurbishment work that

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takes longer than planned to deliver. Ideally this Reserve should be zero because capital work would always be delivered in the year that it was planned; however this is often unrealistic for a number of reasons, such as the weather.

- 7.2 This Reserve should generally remain static or reduce from year to year. If it continues to build year-on-year then this would indicate that the capital programme is either overly reliant on flood defence grant in aid to deliver, given that the availability of grant can disappear at the drop of a hat and therefore prevent planned work from happening, or that the programme is too ambitious, given the technical support resources that are available to the Board.
- 7.3 When capital work is not completed in the financial year that it is planned, the difference between what has been budgeted for those schemes that are being funded or part funded from drainage rates and special levies, and what has been expended on those schemes is transferred from the General Reserve to the Capital Works Reserve at the end of the financial year. Funds from the Capital Works Reserve are then applied to the General Reserve as and when the planned capital improvement work is delivered. When such schemes have been completed, any under spend is then removed from the Capital Works Reserve and reapplied to the General Reserve at the end of the financial year.
- 7.4 This Reserve is considered to be adequate to fund or part fund capital work that has previously been approved by the Board, but not yet delivered. This position will continue to be monitored annually.

## 8. General Reserve

- 8.1 Responding to and recovering from emergency events can be very expensive and it is important that the Board has the means to fulfil its role as a 'honorary Category 2 Responder' in emergency situations and is able to promptly instigate recovery/reinstatement work to its own infrastructure following an event.
- 8.2 The extent of the Board's role and how it will respond in an emergency is set out in the Emergency Plan. Such responses and recovery operations will be financed or part financed from the General Reserve, however it is envisaged that national funding will be provided to assist in the recovery phase following any significant emergency event, but there are no guarantees.
- 8.3 As a general rule of thumb the Board's level of General Reserve should aim to be not less than 25% of net expenditure to finance responding to/recovering from emergencies, resolving legacy issues which may emerge from time to time when appropriate and addressing any contingent liabilities. The Board will therefore aim to maintain a General Reserve of no less than £100k at the end of every financial year.
- 8.4 If national funding is not provided to assist in the recovery phase following a significant emergency event, the Board may need to consider taking out a public works loan to fund the reinstatement work. If this situation ever arises the Board will apply for consent from the Secretary of State at the time to borrow the money to fund this work, as required by section 55(3) of the Land Drainage Act 1991.





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- 8.5 The General Reserve is considered to be adequate, in conjunction with the Board's insurances. This position will continue to be monitored annually.

### 9. Other Reserves: Pensions Reserve

- 9.1 The purpose of this Reserve is to fund the Board's pension liabilities for current, former and future employees. This Reserve is calculated by the County's Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) Fund Actuary at the end of every financial year for accounting purposes, so that it is included in the Board's Year-End Financial Statements. A note of the total WMAs Pensions Reserve deficit is also included in the Board's Year-End Financial Statements, for which the Board is liable for its share.
- 9.2 This Reserve is in deficit which means that the Board has not been contributing enough to fund the Actuary's assessment of pension commitments as at the balance sheet date. However this assessment can change significantly from year to year, depending on investment performance, mortality rates and on the number/age profile of active members that the Board employs etc. It does not therefore represent the exit cost of closing down or withdrawing from the LGPS as at the balance sheet date, the cost of which is likely to be much greater than the Pensions Reserve deficit.
- 9.3 The government has changed the LGPS from a Final Salary Pension Scheme to a Career Average Pension Scheme, to reduce the rate at which the deficit increases in future (with effect from 1 April 2014). However the rising Pensions Reserve deficit may ultimately lead to the administering authority requesting deficit recovery payments from the Board which would be calculated by the Fund Actuary and could continue for at least a 20 year period.
- 9.4 The Board is doing all that it can within its control to tackle the deficit by adopting the model discretionary policies as recommended by the administering authority, which will not by themselves cause the deficit to increase. The scheme also remains open to new entrants. If this was not the case, the administering authority would be much more likely to request significant deficit recovery payments from the Board.
- 9.5 The Pensions Reserve deficit is likely to increase over the next 20 years unless the number of employees in the scheme increases significantly, the maturity profile of employees gets younger and the number of pensioners reduces, or the Board decides to make deficit recovery payments to the administering authority. All scenarios would lead to increases in drainage rates and special levies.
- 9.6 Clearly the Pensions Reserve deficit may seriously affect the Board's ability to operate as a going concern if it continues to increase. Therefore it is vitally important that the Board work closely with the administering authority to avoid explosive increases in drainage rates and special levies being required to reduce the deficit and that the Board's Earmarked Reserves are maintained at a sufficient level to substantially offset the Pensions Reserve deficit. This position will continue to be monitored annually (and triennially when the Fund Actuary formally re-values the fund).



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### 10. Other Reserves: Revaluation Reserve (Bedford Group)

- 10.1 The purpose of this Reserve is to record surpluses arising from the revaluation of fixed assets on the balance sheet. The Board has previously re-valued its plant and machinery where reliable historic cost information was not available.

There was an accounting adjustment made in the financial year 2021-22 when the Group ceased accounting for plant through fund accounting and began accounting for all fixed assets at depreciated cost/valuation, this adjustment was recognised through the revaluation reserve.

### 11. Governance, Transparency and Assurance

- 11.1 The Board always carry out the necessary preliminary investigations and appropriate project appraisals prior to approving any major capital improvement scheme, to ensure that ratepayers are getting the best solution and value for money, and, that the affected land occupiers are all consulted.
- 11.2 Each year the Board's Joint Management Committee (JMC) scrutinises the proposed capex programmes, as drafted by the Principal Engineer and makes recommendations to the Board accordingly. The Board monitors delivery of the capex programmes, and, provides guidance and support to the Principal Engineer.
- 11.3 The Board's Principal Engineer is responsible for designing, delivering and procuring the capital improvement and asset refurbishment programmes, as set out in the Financial Regulations. The Board's Operations Manager is responsible for designing, delivering and procuring the mobile plant replacement programme and the maintenance programme, as set out in the Financial Regulations.
- 11.4 The Board has a 5 Year Indicative Forecast, which shows how capital improvement, asset replacement/refurbishment and mobile plant replacement will be financed from Drainage Rates and Special Levies, after taking into account all other anticipated sources of funding. This 5 Year Indicative Forecast is reviewed and approved by the Board every year, as part of the annual budgeting/rate setting process.
- 11.5 The Board has an Investment Policy which sets out how it will safeguard and invest cash surpluses included in the Reserves.
- 11.6 The Rate Estimates, 5 Year Indicative Forecast, Works Programmes and Investment Policy are all published on the Group's website.
- 11.7 Internal Auditor also assesses whether the Board has proper arrangements in place to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources. The Internal Auditor's Report is published on the Group's website every year.



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- 11.8 All sources of capital financing are included and reported on in the Board's audited Annual Accounts each year. The External Auditor is appointed independently and provides an opinion on whether the Accounts have been prepared in accordance with proper practices for small public bodies. The External Auditor's opinion and general observations are published on the Group's website every year.



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### Version Control

Version	Changes made	Date
Version 1	n/a	April 2022