



**LOWER MEDWAY
INTERNAL DRAINAGE BOARD**

And



**UPPER MEDWAY
INTERNAL DRAINAGE BOARD**

**FINANCE REGENERATION AND PROPERTY SCRUTINY SELECT
COMMITTEE**

TUESDAY 25 FEBRUARY 2025

**TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL (TMBC) SPECIAL
LEVY CONTRIBUTION AND IDB ACTIVITIES**

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Executive Summary

This paper provides an overview of the activities undertaken by the Lower Medway Internal Drainage Board (LMIDB) and the Upper Medway Internal Drainage Board (UMIDB) in relation to the Special Levy contribution from Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council (TMBC). It outlines the key work areas, including maintenance, flood risk management, and biodiversity initiatives.

1 Introduction

Both the Lower Medway Internal Drainage Board (LMIDB) and the Upper Medway Internal Drainage Board (UMIDB) are responsible for land drainage, flood risk management, and environmental stewardship within their operational area. The Boards are funded by a combination of drainage rates paid by landowners and a Special Levy collected by councils, including TMBC, to reflect the contribution to managing water levels across urban and rural areas. The LMIDB and UMIDB were previously jointly administered but are now managed individually as separate authorities covering different areas within the catchment. Both boards share common objectives but have distinct operational responsibilities within their respective jurisdictions. Despite these differences they continue to work together, where possible, to improve and deliver efficiencies for the public purse.

For 2024-25, TMBC collected £238,412 in Special Levy for the LMIDB, and £264,717 for the UMIDB. While the Special Levy funds maintenance activities within TMBC's area, as with many public funding models, the Special Levy is pooled to ensure efficiency and sustainability, rather than being allocated on a pound-for-pound basis within each area or watercourse.

2 Practical works undertaken within TMBC Area (2024-25)

The following maintenance and improvement works have been carried out within TMBC's area by the LMIDB.

- **Watercourse maintenance:**
 - Routine flail cutting, desilting, and biodiversity improvements to enhance water flow and habitat health.
 - Regular trash screen checks and clearance to mitigate flood risk in urban areas.
 - Collaborative work within Leybourne Lakes, including tree surgery and clearance to improve water flow and biodiversity.
- **Flood risk management:**
 - Regular inspections and clearance of key trash screens to prevent blockages and mitigate urban flooding risks.
 - Proactive monitoring of non-IDB assets where residents have raised concerns about flooding.
- **Biodiversity and environmental benefits:**
 - Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) work, including planting to support local ecological enhancement.
 - Identification of Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS) and habitat monitoring for future strategic planning.
 - Engagement with landowners on channel improvements and sustainable land drainage management.

The following maintenance and improvement works have been carried out within TMBC's area by the UMIDB.

- **Watercourse maintenance:**
 - Routine flail cutting on 17,257m across 7 watercourses.
 - Routine weed cutting on 7,544m across 5 watercourses.
 - Routine pioneering on 9,652m across 4 watercourses.
 - Regular trash screen checks and clearance to mitigate flood risk in urban areas.
- **Flood risk management:**
 - Regular inspections and clearance of key trash screens to prevent blockages and mitigate urban flooding risks.
 - Proactive monitoring of non-IDB assets where residents have raised concerns about flooding.
- **Consenting and Planning**
 - 14 comments made within IDD
 - 2 consents provided within IDD
- **Biodiversity and environmental benefits:**
 - Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) work, including year 2 of a district wide scheme to determine enhancement opportunities both in and around channels.
 - Identification and eradication of Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS) and habitat monitoring for future strategic planning particularly along the main River Medway, in partnership with the EA.
 - Collaborative work with the EA to establish removal of redundant water control structures on the Penn Stream.

The IDB's activities extend beyond direct maintenance, delivering intangible benefits that are difficult to quantify in financial terms but are nonetheless crucial to flood resilience and environmental sustainability:

- **Critical infrastructure protection:** Preventing flood risk to homes, businesses, and transport networks.
- **Environmental enhancement:** Supporting biodiversity, habitat creation, and improving water quality.
- **Climate resilience:** Proactive planning for extreme weather events and long-term sustainability.
- **Main River management:** works completed on behalf of the Board by the EA on main / critical watercourses using money from the Water Resources Act S141 precept, including works on or related to the Leigh Barrier.

3 Lower Medway IDB Specific Update

Board amalgamation

As part of ongoing improvements and efficiency measures, the Lower Medway IDB and North Kent Marshes IDB will be amalgamating in 2024 to form the North Kent Marshes Water Level Management Board. This change will bring several benefits, including:

- Greater efficiency: Streamlining governance and operations to reduce administrative burdens and duplication of effort.
- Enhanced resilience: Strengthening our ability to respond to climate change, extreme weather events, and evolving flood risk challenges.
- Improved service delivery: Providing more cohesive and strategic management of water levels across a broader geographic area.
- Increased transparency and accountability: Ensuring a clearer and more accessible structure for stakeholders, including funding authorities and landowners.

4 Upper Medway IDB Specific Update

District Catchment Pilot Scheme

The Upper Medway Board has created a pilot scheme in conjunction with the Flood and Water team at Kent County Council to explore the way that IDBs can work within the watershed catchment of some of its critical watercourses to address:

- surface water issues, particularly those that are of similar scale and characteristics that would typically only occur within the IDB.
- improve the management of water and nature-based solutions in the upland areas through collaboration with KCC, local authorities, and NGO partners.
- and to better establish the impacts and control of planning and development through increased scrutiny, inclusion (at both pre and current stages for planning and consenting applications), and advising on the use of sustainable solutions and surface water schemes.

5 Governance and Accountability

The IDB operates as an independent statutory authority, with accountability resting with its Board, which includes representatives appointed by TMBC. These representatives ensure that local authority interests are considered in IDB decision-making and serve as the formal link between TMBC and the Board. While the Lower Medway IDB and the Upper Medway IDB values transparency and engagement, it is not subject to direct scrutiny by local authority committees. Instead, governance is exercised through the IDB's established decision-making framework.

We encourage TMBC to continue engaging through its appointed representatives at Board meetings, where key decisions are made. The Board meets several times per year, with full details of meetings and minutes available on our respective websites:

Lower Medway IDB – Minutes - <https://lowermedwayidb.co.uk/lower-medway-idb/minutes/>

Upper Medway IDB – Minutes - <https://medwayidb.co.uk/governance/>

6 Next steps and collaborative opportunities

Recognising TMBC's interest in drainage and flood risk management, both IDBs welcome opportunities to work collaboratively within its statutory remit. However, to ensure clarity in roles and responsibilities, it is important to note that the IDB's accountability remains with its Board rather than any external scrutiny process.

Areas for potential collaboration include:

- Identifying at-risk areas for future joint initiatives.
- Exploring external funding opportunities to enhance local flood resilience.
- Maintaining an open dialogue through TMBC's Board representative.
- Localised working with parishes within the borough that might have surface water managements needs.

7 Conclusion

Both IDBs remain committed to effective land drainage and flood risk management across TMBC's area. While the Special Levy funds a broad range of activities, the benefits—both direct and indirect—contribute significantly to the borough's resilience.

The IDBs value engagement with TMBC and welcomes constructive dialogue through its Board structure and appointed representatives. We look forward to continued collaboration through established governance channels and welcome discussions on shared priorities within our statutory remit. The upcoming amalgamation of the North Kent Marshes and Lower Medway IDB's into the North Kent Marshes Water Level Management Board will further strengthen our ability to deliver these essential services.