

Middle Level Commissioners

Proudly managing water levels in the Fens since 1862

All Party Parliamentary Group for Sustainable Flood & Drought Management

Future cost implications for IDBs

Paul Burrows, Chief Executive
26th February 2025

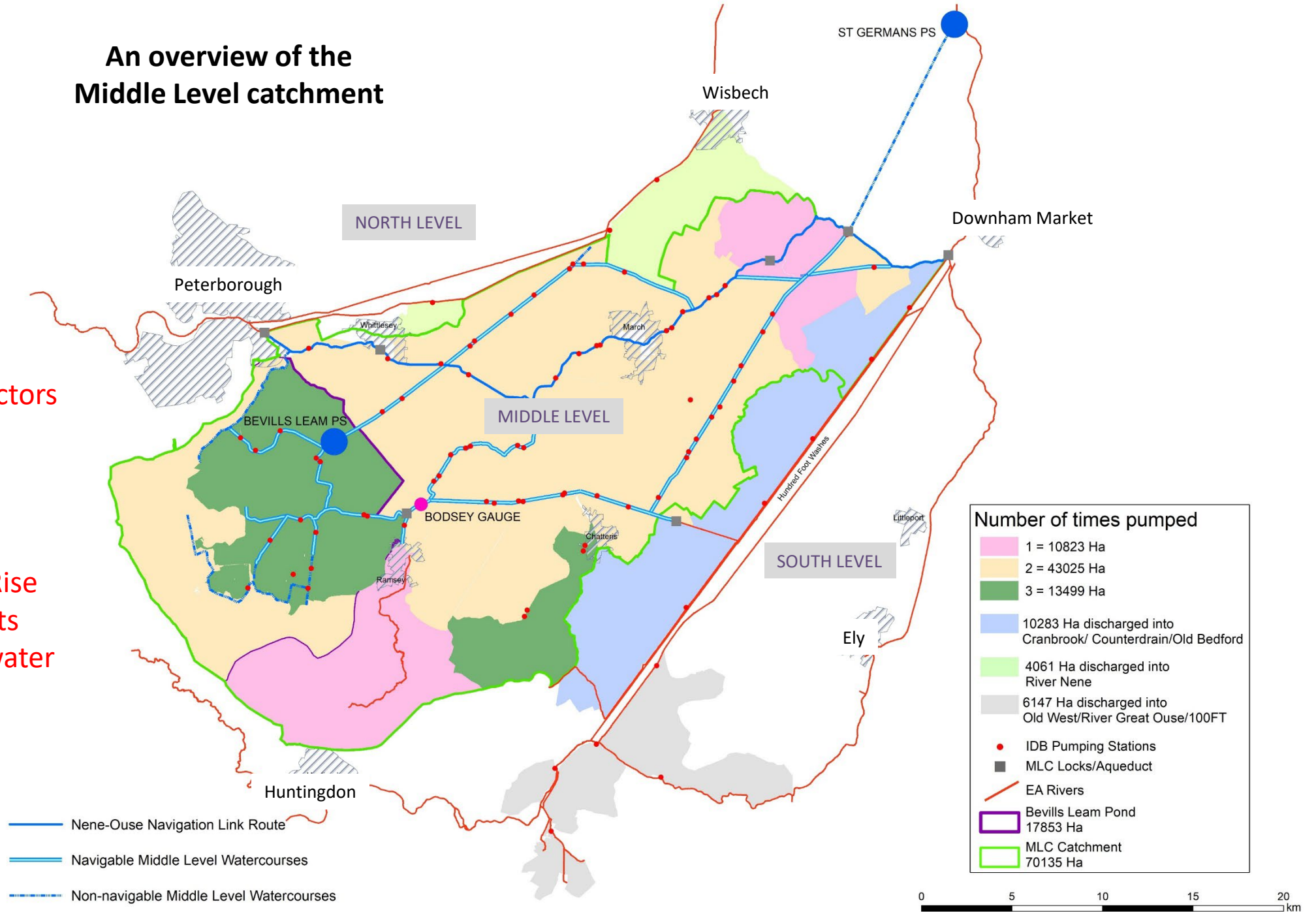


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An overview of the Middle Level catchment

Critical Risk Factors
– Beyond IDB control

1. Weather
2. Sea Level Rise
3. Energy costs
4. Highland water



Middle Level Catchment

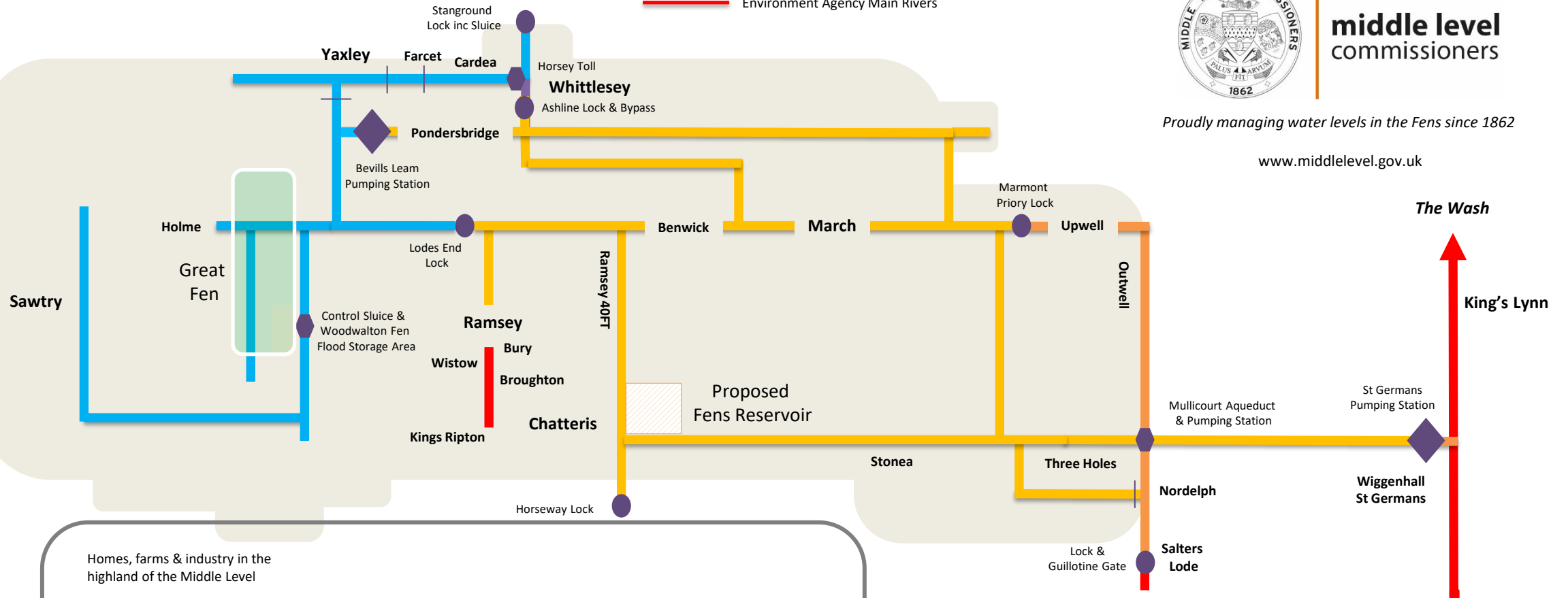
-  Middle Level Commissioners' Watercourses in Bevills Leam Pond
-  Middle Level Commissioners' Watercourses in St Germans Pond
-  Middle Level Commissioners' Watercourses outside both ponds
-  Environment Agency Main Rivers



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Homes, farms & industry in the highland of the Middle Level



Lowland homes, farms & industry



Lowland homes, farms & industry



MLC High Level Carrier

IDB drain IDB drain

High Level Embanked Water Carriers



Resilience to climate change

Environmental enhancement

Optimising pumping at St Germans

Sea level rise & Tidal River silt – impact on pumping and navigation

Tidal defence at Salters Lode

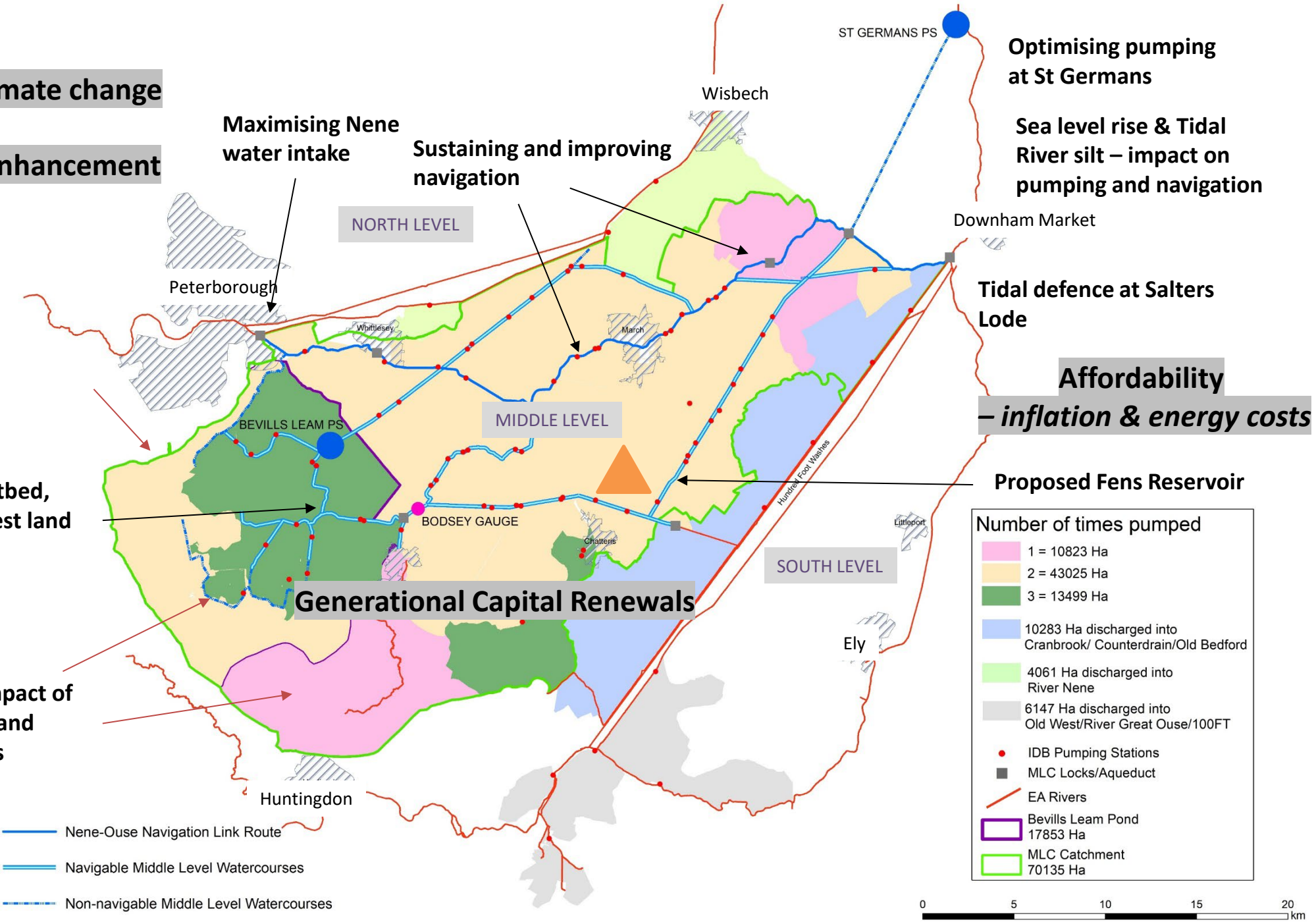
Affordability – inflation & energy costs

Proposed Fens Reservoir

Lowland Peat hotbed, Great Fen & lowest land in country

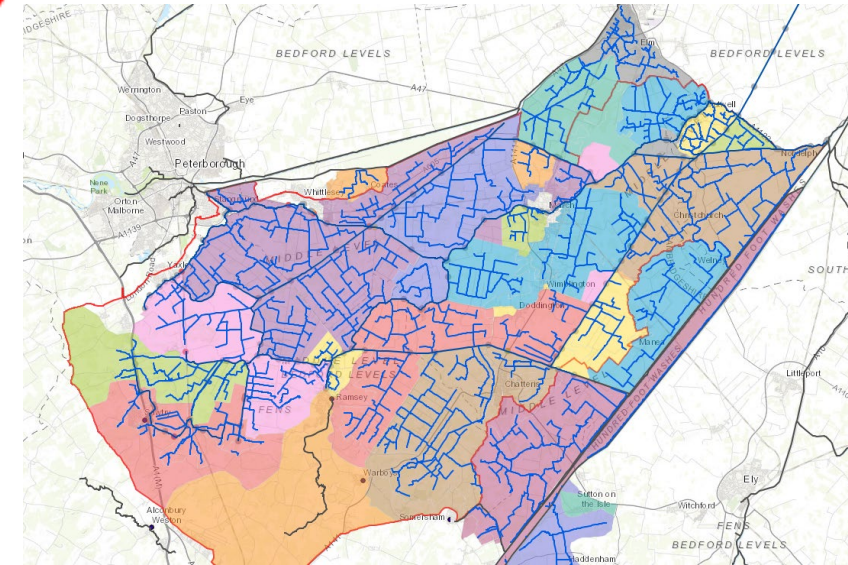
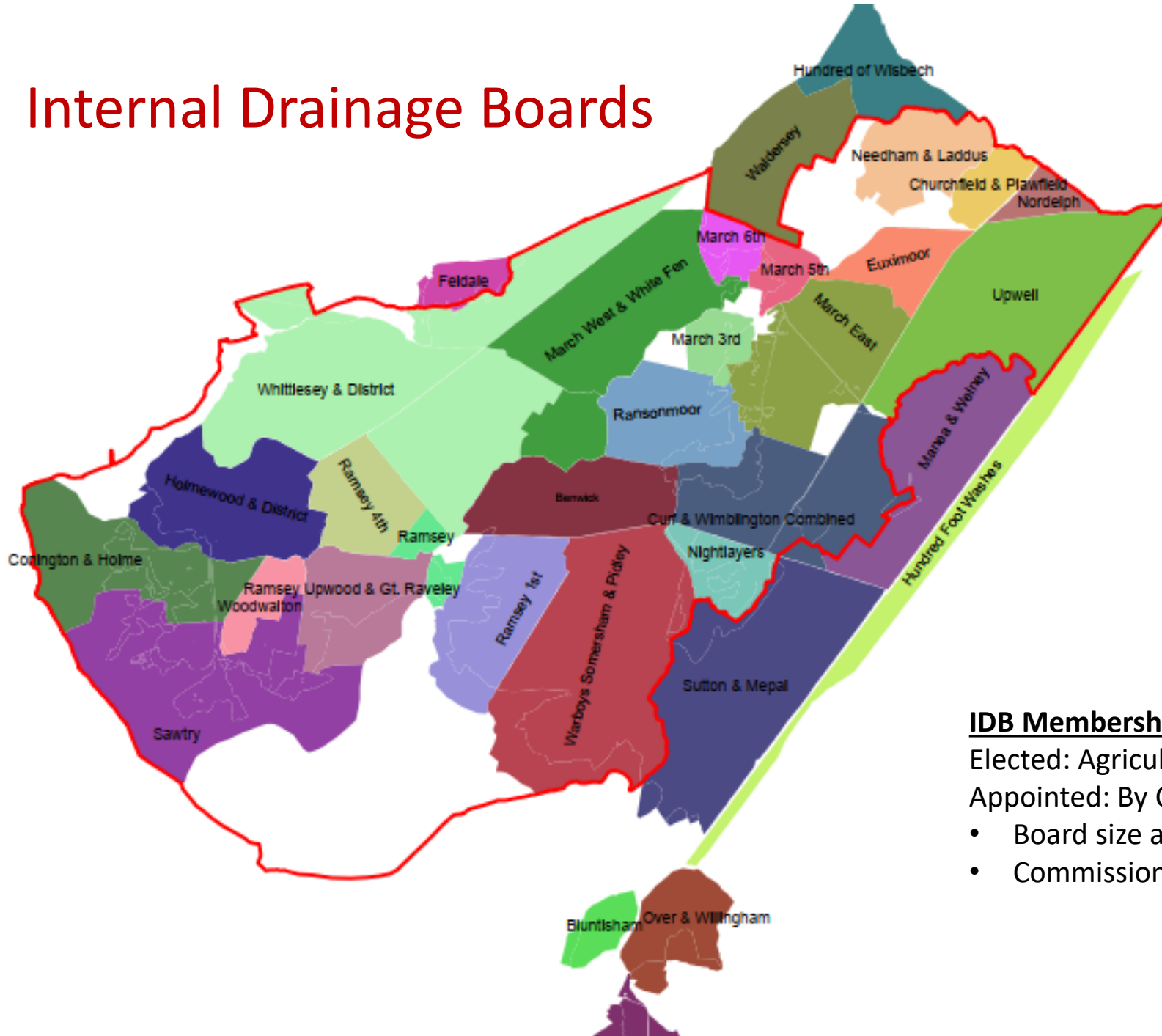
Cumulative impact of development and highland flows

Generational Capital Renewals



Number of times pumped	
1 = 10823 Ha	10283 Ha discharged into Cranbrook/ Counterdrain/Old Bedford
2 = 43025 Ha	4061 Ha discharged into River Nene
3 = 13499 Ha	6147 Ha discharged into Old West/River Great Ouse/100FT
	• IDB Pumping Stations
	■ MLC Locks/Aqueduct
	— EA Rivers
	▭ Bevills Leam Pond 17853 Ha
	▭ MLC Catchment 70135 Ha

Internal Drainage Boards



IDB Membership

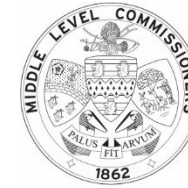
Elected: Agricultural Ratepayers

Appointed: By Councils (Non Agricultural Interests)

- Board size and membership apportionment varies
- Commissioners have bespoke rules = landownership

Not to scale. For illustrative purposes only.

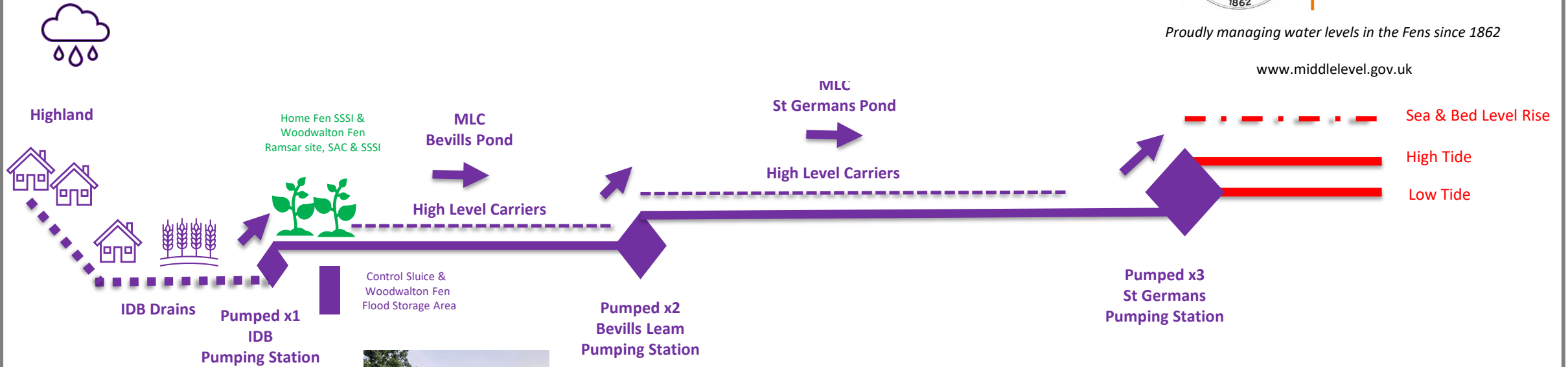
Managing water in our Fens bowl



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Core funding pressures



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- Drainage rates (agricultural land/land with agricultural potential)
- Special Levies raised on non-agricultural beneficiaries (collected by Local Authorities via Council Tax)
- Highland Water (from the Environment Agency – Revenue flood grant)
- Weak health of general fund reserves and improvement funds
- Precept (paid to the Environment Agency for main river maintenance)

- Capital flood grant – generational renewals of IDB infrastructure

- IDBs are very lean organisations and still founded on ‘volunteer’ inputs

Opportunities - Within the Middle Level:

- ‘Once in 400 year opportunity’ – Fens Reservoir – devolution settlement given role to enable Oxford-Cambridge Arc growth stifled by water scarcity
- Legislating for MLC/IDB unfunded water resources role
- Driving reform - Fitness for the future of the existing IDB model (amalgamations)
- Increasing funding from developers
- Renewables – ‘Electricity Net Zero’
- Commercial opportunities, eg Hosting BNG required by developers