



All Party Parliamentary Group *for* Sustainable Flood and Drought Management

Notes of APPG Meeting – 20th May 2026

DRAFT

Attendees:

Lee Pitcher MO (Chair)
Charlotte Cane MP (Officer)
Ashley Dalton MP West Lancashire
Lord Taylor of Holbeach
Ben Marrett (representing Joy Morrissey MP, Beaconsfield)
Tim Davies (representing Simon Opher MP, Stroud)

Cat Moncrieff, CIWEM (Joint Secretariat)
Robert Caudwell, chair of ADA (Joint Secretariat)

Invited Presenters

Andrew Newton
Christian Kielinger

Apologies

Jo Platt
Dr Neil Hudson

Purpose

The purpose of the meeting was to hear about the importance of water level management for areas of lowland peat.

Speaker – Christian Kielinger – Fenland Soil

Christian talked about opportunity mapping at field scale to identify areas for more sustainable lowland peat management.

Christian presented results from water level management trials, including impacts on crop yield and carbon emissions. He explained the challenge of balancing water level management, food security, carbon emissions and nutrient pollution.

Speaker – Andrew Newton – Middle Fen and Mere Internal Drainage Boards – Water Management in the Fens

Andrew highlighted how the management of land drainage and water resources is currently very siloed, creating challenges for the fens.

Andrew introduced the Lowland Agricultural Peat Small Infrastructure Pilot (LAPSIP) - a Defra grant scheme managed by ADA. He presented the Middle Fen and Mere IDB Hariemere LAPSIP project. Weirs, controls, telemetry and storage are being used to raise water levels safely - protecting farmland and reducing carbon emissions, and with no increase in flood risk. The costs for the water control kit required are significant; total cost £266k. The project has a limited timescale, so going forwards funding will need to be sought from rate payers (farmers) alongside applying for extra grants.

Andrew outlined additional challenges for water management in the fens, including:

- Lack of integration of water functions in the Environment Agency
- Paying EA for transfer licences, even if not actually using water
- Greater investment needed in water storage and pumping kit (to increase capacity).
- Contractor delivery and access

Andrew set the way forward including:

- Upgrading the Land Drainage Act 1991
- Further funding for good water management, linking with flood funding
- Water on demand: flexibility to take plentiful water (currently only possible to fill a reservoir Nov-Mar)
- Closer working between partners – a good example is the Fens 2100 project where 5 catchments working together to make a case for change

Q & A session

Lord Taylor reiterated the need for on-farm reservoirs to support food production.

Charlotte Cane MP highlighted the need for government ministers to understand the siloes and make longer term investment in water management. This is very important for food security, water security, housing and greenhouse gas emissions.

Ashley Dalton MP noted her constituency in the Lancashire plain, known as the salad bowl of England. There is no IDB there but have trying to get one for three years.

Lee Pitcher MP highlighted the recent Committee on Climate Change report which explains the impacts in 25 years now; but impacts of water scarcity are happening now.

Andrew Newton highlighted the issues around Cambridge with chalk streams and high tech requiring significant water supplies. The Fen reservoir is being built, but water should also be held in reservoirs on farms, for farmers.

Robert Caudwell expressed concerns about the forthcoming water reforms, and that water resources and flooding would end up in two separate agencies.

Cat Moncrieff highlighted that there should be opportunity with the forthcoming Clean Water Bill to make some of the necessary policy changes.

The following actions were agreed:

1. Write to Minister Emma Hardy to urge her to modify legislation to allow new drainage boards to be set up or expanded to new areas.
2. Next meeting: include a discussion around on-farm reservoirs, and approach the Environment Agency about providing an update.

Draft Letter to Minister Hardy

Dear Minister,

The APPG for Sustainable Flood & Drought management has recently held meetings on Lessons from the 2025 Drought (February 2026) and Lowland Water Management (May 2026). Items have been raised in these meetings that we would like to draw your attention to, as set out below.

Lessons from the 2025 drought. The APPG heard reflections on last year's drought from both Water UK and the Environment Agency. The APPG was concerned to hear about the nation's lack of firm plans regarding level 4 (severe) drought, specifically on a clear hierarchy for prioritising water allocation. This is not something water companies can decide; it is a political decision and it is important for everyone to have clarity on water allocation priorities well ahead of a drought. Other democracies, such as Spain and The Netherlands, have this hierarchy in place. We understand that Defra is working on this and we would be grateful for an update as we head into the summer period.

Lowland water management. The APPG heard from the Middle Fen and Mere Internal Drainage Board (IDB) about how the management of land drainage and water resources is currently very siloed, creating challenges for flood and drought management, as well as food security and carbon emissions. We are hopeful that a more integrated approach will be achieved through the integrated water regulator and regional systems planning approach, as signaled by the government's January 2026 water white paper. However, at a more local level, and particularly in lowland areas, IDBs offer a means of achieving more integrated water resources and flood risk management, tailored to local needs. However, current legislation precludes IDBs being set up or extended. We therefore call for the legislation to be updated to enable this to happen.

Please could you update the APPG on how these reforms are being progressed.

Yours sincerely

Lee Pitcher MP, Chair of the APPG for Sustainable Flood & Drought Management