

Community Briefing

Saxon Pit discharge permit

11 February 2026

Introduction

This briefing explains why the Environment Agency has decided to grant a permit allowing East Midlands Waste Management Ltd (EMWM), an operator at Saxon Pit near Whittlesey, to release surface water into the Kings Dyke.

Background to water management at Saxon Pit

Water from the site collects in a settlement lagoon within the pit, which is then pumped to a reedbed system that naturally filters it before it enters the Kings Dyke.

Saxon Pit is a site that contains historic industrial waste deposits.

The lagoon also receives surface water from the Snoots Road residential area and on occasion from Anglian Water's nearby pumping station.

As the ground is clay, rainwater and surface water cannot soak away naturally and without controlled drainage, the site will flood, preventing EMWM and Johnsons Aggregates Recycling Ltd (JARL) from operating safely.

A previous operator, Hanson Building Products Limited, had a Surface Water Scheme Condition 40 (agreement) dated May 2004 which allowed them to discharge this water. The Scheme was a planning consent from the Local Authority. This agreement was outdated and didn't reflect the changing needs of the operations on the site.

The Environment Agency has been working with the site operators, local authorities, Anglian Water, and the Middle Level Commissioners to address this issue and ensure that this discharge is not posing a risk to the environment. Although no environmental impact has been identified, we have worked to put in place a robust and up to date discharge permit for the operator, which will ensure that there are effective environmental controls in place.

Why a discharge permit is needed

To protect water quality a discharge activity permit is required if water is discharged to surface waters such as rivers or streams, or directly/indirectly to ground waters.

The permit is specific to the site or location and sets parameters for the discharged water, such as the maximum flow rate, temperature, pH, and chemical composition. The permit requires the operator to manage and operate their activities in a way that minimises the risk of polluting the receiving water body.

Permit Application

Our priority is to ensure that any discharge will not harm the environment. To do this, we assess water quality against Environmental Quality Water Standards (EQWS).

Over the past year, we have carried out a series of spot water samples and an ecological survey to validate the permit application, including:

- **Hazardous and Specific Substance testing:** Some elevated levels were detected in 2025, but detailed modelling confirmed the discharge still meets EQWS.
- **Ecological monitoring:** No harm to wildlife or habitats was found and the species present in the Kings Dyke were as to be expected in such a Fenland system.

Overall, all results showed compliance with EQWS, and no ecological impact has been identified from the current discharge into the Kings Dyke.

The recent UKHSA and Public Health investigation into potential concerns related to operations at Saxon Pit, included the water quality into the Kings Dyke. Their sample findings concluded that the water quality in Kings Dyke did not present any concern to public health.

Outcome

Based on evidence from our water sampling tests, the Environment Agency will grant EMWM a permit to discharge water from the settlement lagoon at Saxon Pit into the Kings Dyke via the reedbed.

There are several advantages to granting a permit in this situation:

- The site operator will now be legally bound by strict environmental rules.
- The operator pays a charge for the permit which will allow the Environment Agency to carry out more frequent and more rigorous testing.
- The Environment Agency will have stronger legal powers to take action if environmental standards are not met.
- Other organisations that discharge water into the lagoon (such as Anglian Water and local highways) will also be subject to enforceable conditions.

Middle Level Commissioners' consent

The Kings Dyke is managed by the Middle Level Commissioners (MLC), an Internal Drainage Board (IDB). As the authority responsible for flood risk management, drainage, and navigation in Whittlesey and the surrounding area, MLC must give consent for any water discharge into their network of man-made waterways. Water in this system is pumped by MLC and discharged into rivers, eventually reaching the sea.

EMWM applied to the MLC for a separate surface water discharge consent. This was refused by MLC in September 2025 because the Environment Agency discharge permit was not yet determined and as it was unconsented could be subject to enforcement action.

Furthermore, the MLC have advised the applicant of the following for any future discharge consent application:

- The Environment Agency discharge permit must be granted first.
- MLC consent is not automatic.
- The operator must apply for discharge consent within six months of the Environment Agency permit approval.
- A drainage contribution fee will apply as a condition of any consent. This provides a financial contribution that is invested in refurbishment and improvement of MLC's infrastructure and associated operations.

Next Steps

Granting this discharge permit is important as it provides a legal framework for effective environmental regulation. We will be regulating activity under this permit by:

- Carrying out both announced and unannounced site visits and water sampling.
- Requiring the operator to conduct regular water testing and, following analysis at a UK accredited laboratory, share these results with us.

This permit includes more robust regulatory compliance, ensuring that:

- We can monitor against backstop limits for substances of concern, to prevent deterioration of Environmental Quality Water Standards in Kings Dyke. These limits are precautionary.
- We can monitor both discharge volume and effluent quality. There will be a requirement for EMWM to submit a report after 12 months which we will then use to review conditions associated to the permit; known as an Improvement Condition.
- EMWM inform us within 24 hours of any breach (volume or quantity) of the discharge permit, this is more precautionary than our standard 7 days reporting period.

Additionally we will:

- Install a Sonde, an instrument which remotely gathers water quality data, within Kings Dyke providing automatic updates for monitoring and management of water every 24 hours.
- Publish any compliance failures on the Public Register (this can be accessed via: [Access the public register for environmental information - GOV.UK](#))
- Ensure the discharge permit is available on the Public Register along with the regulatory steps and controls.
- Provide updated information about our regulation of Saxon Pit operators online: [Whittlesey Quarry \(Saxon Pit\) | Engage Environment Agency](#)

We are grateful for the community's strong interest in protecting their local environment and look forward to continuing to work with residents and our partners to ensure Saxon Pit continues to be effectively regulated.

If you see or suspect any environmental problems, the public can report them via the Environment Agency's 24-hour incident hotline: **0800 80 70 60**. Or online: [Report an environmental problem - GOV.UK](#)