

Minutes of a meeting of the East Midlands Freeport Board

Held on 27 November 2025, at 9am, at Maritime Transport, Maritime House, Bainbridge Road, Kegworth, Derbyshire DE74 2BP.

**PRESENT**

**Directors**

Nora Senior – Independent Chair

Phil Canning – Uniper

Councillor Neil Clarke – Rushcliffe Borough Council (RBC)

Councillor Harrison Fowler – Leicestershire County Council (LCC) (from 9.42am)

Ioan Reed-Aspley – East Midlands Airport (EMA)

Councillor Keith Merrie – North West Leicestershire District Council (NWLDC)

Ben Green – SEGRO (Via Microsoft Teams)

Peter Ralston – Goodman

Councillor Robert Reaney – Derbyshire County Council (DCC)

Frank Robotham – Maritime Transport

Julie Rossiter – Etwall Land Limited (ELL)

Councillor Stephen Taylor – South Derbyshire District Council (SDDC)

**Accountable Body Officers**

Zafar Saleem – Assistant Chief Executive

**Executive Delivery Team**

Dan Cooper – Head of Communications and Inward Investment

Katie Greenhalgh – Head of Green Growth and Inclusion

Naomi Kwasa – Governance and Committees Lead

Paul Miller – Head of Operations and Programmes

Tom Newman-Taylor – Chief Executive

**Also present**

Leanne Ashmore – Rushcliffe Borough Council

Joe Batty – Derbyshire County Council

Derek Higton – Nottinghamshire County Council (via Microsoft Teams)

Edward Highfield – East Midlands Combined County Authority (EMCCA)

Chris Lewis – Maritime Transport

Mike Roylance – South Derbyshire District Council (Via Microsoft Teams)

Allison Thomas – North West Leicestershire District Council (Via Microsoft Teams)

MHCLG Representative (Via Microsoft Teams)

1.	<b><u>Apologies for Absence</u></b>
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	<p>Apologies were received from Steve Griffiths, who was represented by Ioan Reed-Aspley and Andrew Pilsworth, who was represented by Ben Green. Apologies were also received from Cllr James Walker-Gurley.</p>
2.	<p><b><u>Declarations of Interest</u></b></p> <p>The Chair invited members who wished to do so to declare an actual or perceived interest in respect of items on the agenda. No declarations were made.</p>
3.	<p><b><u>Minutes of the Board Meeting held on 23 October 2025</u></b></p> <p>The Board discussed the minute for Items 11 and 12 in relation to the Board meeting in October.</p> <p>Some private sector Directors suggested that the minute did not reflect the robustness of the discussion around the process for seed capital and investment decisions. It was requested that the minutes item to be amended to reflect these discussions, as well as public sector support for private sector input at a strategic level.</p> <p>AGREED the minute would be re-drafted, noting the points made and would be recirculated to the full Board for approval by correspondence.</p>
4.	<p><b><u>PSDG Decision Note, 23 October 2025</u></b></p> <p>The Chair noted that this had been circulated previously and was for information only.</p>
5.	<p><b><u>Chair's Update</u></b></p> <p>The Chair provided an update to the Board.</p> <p>The Chair also updated the Board on recent meetings with local MPs, including Lilian Greenwood MP. These had been productive, and the MPs were generally supportive of the Freeport and of the work being undertaken. She noted there would be a Parliamentary Reception in Spring 2026 and further information would be shared on this in the Communications Update later on in the meeting.</p>
6.	<p><b><u>Chief Executive's Update</u></b></p> <p>EMF CEO advised the Board that a written update had been provided in the agenda pack. He congratulated Maritime Transport as the first tax site occupier to successfully secure business rates relief and thanked the team at NWLDC for the work done. He noted that while the process was robust, it took significantly longer than anticipated and there are lessons to learn from this experience. He noted that EMF and the S151 Subcommittee would undertake a formal lessons-learned review to ensure the process is improved.</p> <p>The Board asked how EMF's process compares with other Freeports in terms of timescales. EMF was thought to be slightly ahead of other Freeports in having occupiers ready to go through the process and clarified that the delay was largely due to</p>

governance and subsidy scheme setup, not the application review itself. The CEO noted that he would raise this again with other Freeport SROs.

Further discussion took place on the role of the VOA and the need to distinguish between eligibility and final relief decisions. The Board suggested that EMF should seek a clear point of contact within the VOA and explore how indicative decisions can be provided earlier without prejudice to final values. MHCLG's representative confirmed that other Freeports have experienced similar delays and committed to raising this with policy leads.

EMF CEO then reported that following the PSDG meeting in October, EMF was able to submit a Project Change Request to MHCLG before the deadline set. A letter has been received from Government recognising the need for flexibility on seed capital spend beyond this financial year.

He also provided an update on the tax sites.

In relation to Government engagement EMF CEO noted increasing proportionality from Government regarding Freeport security auditing – recognising Freeports' limited role in this space – the security audit has now been removed from the Annual Performance Review (APR).

MHCLG's representative confirmed that while APR requirements have been removed, commitments for the Freeport in relation to security, as agreed in the Memorandum of Understanding, remain. Further guidance would be provided.

#### **7. Communications Update**

The Head of Communications and Inward Investment provided an update on EMF's communications activity.

He reminded the Board of their obligations under the Members Agreement to uphold the reputation of the Freeport and to not undertake any action that could damage EMF or its Members. He emphasised the importance of contacting the Communications Team if approached by the media, as support and guidance can be provided on messaging along with issues to avoid.

He thanked SEGRO, Prologis and MAG for their collaborative approach to communications around the DCO and planning applications.

He noted that messaging has been circulated to the Board and the Communications Working Group to align with conversations being held with the Mayor and is intended to ensure that all Members speak with one voice when engaging with MPs, Ministers and Government. He noted that this will be provided monthly and asked that all familiarise themselves with the messaging and contact him with any queries.

He then noted that, as part of EMF's Transparency Policy, the summary of the Members' Agreement has been reviewed by the Communications Working Group. No comments were provided and therefore this was being shared with the Board for final approval before publication. The Board noted that the Members' Agreement Summary was an

	<p>accurate and concise reflection and <b>AGREED</b> to its publication on the EMF website, subject to minor grammatical errors being corrected.</p> <p>The Head of Communications and Inward Investment noted that recent communications work has focused on the Budget and confirmed that an analysis of its impact on EMF would be circulated to the Board. Future communications priorities include Junction 24, with a fuller update on J24 to be provided at the Board meeting in January.</p> <p>He noted that MPs have indicated strong support and willingness to raise questions with Ministers on EMF's behalf, and highlighted plans for a Parliamentary Reception in Spring 2026, confirming that further details will be shared with members and their communications teams in due course. He noted that this will focus on J24 as feedback from National Highways has been positive, and there was a need to make this a high priority with Government.</p> <p>The Board highlighted the need to ensure J24 is not presented in isolation and that messaging must clearly articulate the Freeport's wider vision and impact (rather than focus in on the transport angle), including the potential of Retained Business Rates for investment in communities in the East Midlands. It was requested that EMF's narrative aligns with EMCCA's regional narrative and includes a clear articulation of EMF's role and benefits. Separately, the Board suggested that a short form video for the public to explain the Freeport's benefits and address misconceptions might be helpful, and it was <b>AGREED</b> that the ongoing work the Communications Team is doing on the Communications Strategy, including community engagement, would be shared with the Board in the next Communications update.</p> <p>Preparatory meetings with partners ahead of the Spring Parliamentary Reception would be arranged, and it was <b>AGREED</b> that the Communications Team would produce a narrative on the Parliamentary event for consideration by the Board in the New Year, prior to the event taking place.</p> <p>EMCCA's Director of Place noted that Department for Transport is visiting the region in December where there will be an opportunity to reinforce the J24 message, as well as during an Away Day for Local Authority Leaders on 15 December 2025.</p>
8.	<p><b><u>Member Update</u></b></p> <p>The Board received an update from public sector partners on Local Government Reorganisation. It was noted that a variety of options were to be submitted to Government with preferred models varying between different tier Local Authorities across Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire and Derbyshire. The deadline for submission was 28<sup>th</sup> November 2025, and proposals would be available to view online. The timeline for LGR would include Government consultation on proposed changes in early 2026, with a decision Mid-2026. Elections would take place in 2027 with shadow councils in operation alongside the current councils until they are formally vested and take on relevant statutory and legal responsibilities from April 2028.</p> <p>As Local Planning Authorities, District Council partners also provided an update on the ongoing work in regard to finalising their Local Plans, which would be agreed before LGR changes take place to ensure they are operational whilst transitions occur. It was</p>

	<p>highlighted that the process will likely become more complex in the short term as some Local Plans will proceed under the old planning framework and others under the new. The new Council structures will take on the process of reviewing their relevant Local Plan after five years. Following LGR, strategic planning and housing policy will sit with the Mayoral Combined Authority, while planning functions and day-to-day operations will sit with the new councils.</p> <p>EMF CEO highlighted that reorganisation would impact which organisations are represented on the Freeport Board, and it was requested that this be added to EMF's risk register with appropriate mitigations. The Board noted implications for Freeport governance and agreed that a detailed officer-level discussion should take place in spring to consider positioning and representation as new authorities take shape.</p> <p>The Chair noted that preliminary discussions with EMCCA and LCC on Accountable Body transition will take place in December and suggested a high-level Board conversation be planned to consider the future size, shape and remit of the Freeport Board.</p> <p>DCC's Director for Economy and Regeneration advised that Derbyshire County Council is considering a report on compulsory purchase of land near EMIP to support the South Derbyshire Growth Zone, at its next Cabinet meeting. The Chair requested that the Board be kept informed as this process progresses.</p>
9.	<p><b><u>Subcommittee Update</u></b></p> <p>EMF CEO noted that an Audit, Risk and Compliance Subcommittee had been scheduled for January 2026, and that a further update on Subcommittees would be provided to a future Board meeting.</p>
10.	<p><b><u>Strategic Case for Investment</u></b></p> <p>The Chair moved this item forward in the scheduled agenda to ensure enough time for discussion.</p> <p>The Head of Green Growth and Inclusion introduced the report, the purpose of which was to present the amended process for Board input to strategic discussions, and to present the rationale for the funding allocations agreed at the Public Sector Directors Group (PSDG) in October. She confirmed that MHCLG deadlines had been met, and a Project Change Request submitted, with the Accountable Body now poised to draw down the remaining seed capital.</p> <p>She noted that, while the strategic investment context is being provided retrospectively on this occasion, future proposals will include this information in advance of decisions. The Board was shown the strengthened process around Board review, and it was confirmed that the majority of allocations (and spend) previously agreed will be subject to further gateway investment decisions and therefore will be returned to Board in due course. Items relating to Junction 24 and EMIP are already scheduled for discussion early in 2026, and the Board should expect an opportunity to discuss the strategic context ahead of those decisions. It was acknowledged that current ringfencing is based on high-level estimates, and the Head of Green Growth and Inclusion confirmed that the</p>

	<p>Infrastructure Delivery Plan has prioritised five strategic projects for which business cases are now being developed for the next stage gates.</p> <p>The Chief Executive emphasised that the PSDG requires appropriate space to take decisions safely, however, where proposals impact a site, the relevant private sector partner should have the opportunity to make representations directly to the PSDG prior to decisions being taken.</p> <p>The Board raised further points on enhanced transparency and assurance. This was to ensure balanced input and clarity on roles and responsibilities given that proposals include those put forward by the Executive Delivery Team, which are then assessed through the PSDG. They discussed the need for visibility on assumptions, particularly around private sector match funding.</p> <p>The Board agreed that decisions already taken should not be revisited. There remains scope for shaping proposals through stage gates and strengthening transparency going forward, including acknowledging Landowners' aspirations for their sites and their current appetite for development. The Board highlighted the need for assurance of the decision-making processes, as well as due diligence requirements for the EDT.</p> <p>The Chair highlighted the opportunity to improve the process around funding decisions, including development of an assurance framework, full Board discussions on strategic intent and context, and timely engagement with landowners and third parties to ensure transparency. Future discussions should clarify who is bringing projects forward and include assumptions used, to ensure the Freeport is delivering on the vision and strategic objectives agreed as a Board and with Government.</p> <p>Following discussion, the Board:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>AGREED</b> that decisions should not be revisited.</li><li>• <b>AGREED</b> that future investment proposals will include strategic context and assurance information in advance of decisions.</li><li>• <b>NOTED</b> the process for PSDG decision-making and the opportunity for private sector representation where proposals directly impact their sites.</li><li>• <b>AGREED</b> that a draft Assurance Framework will be brought to the Board in January for formal approval to provide clarity on roles and responsibilities ownership, assessment and transparency of proposals.</li></ul>
11.	<p><b><u>Draft Calendar of Meetings and Director Training Schedule 2026</u></b></p> <p>It was noted that these documents had been circulated, and Board members were asked to note that training would be scheduled to fit around Board meetings for ease.</p>
12.	<p><b><u>Board and Subcommittee Forward Look</u></b></p> <p>The Board <b>NOTED</b> the Forward Look.</p>
13.	<p><b><u>Action Log</u></b></p>

	<p>The Board <b>NOTED</b> that actions from its previous meeting(s) had been completed, overtaken or were on the agenda and <b>NOTED</b> the list of outstanding and completed actions since the last meeting.</p>
17.	<p><b><u>Any Other Business</u></b></p> <p>The Chair formally recorded the Board's thanks to John Sinnott and Lauren Haslam for their significant contribution in setting up the Freeport, taking on the legal responsibilities and securing the grant that enabled EMF to be established. The Board expressed its appreciation and wished them all the best for the future as they retire.</p> <p>The Chair confirmed that the next Board meeting will take place on 18 December, on Microsoft Teams with a paperless agenda. It was noted that the meeting will include a discussion item on future alignment with EMCCA in regard to the Accountable Body transition, and this will be kept as an open discussion space. A forward look will be circulated to cover any items for the next year, and members were invited to respond by email with any suggested items for future discussion at Board.</p> <p>The meeting ended at 11.15am.</p>

9.00am – 11.15am, 27 November 2025

Chair: Nora Senior