

NEWARK AREA INTERNAL DRAINAGE BOARD

A Statutory Authority concerned with Land Drainage, Flood Defence and Conservation
www.naidb.co.uk

Environmental Policy

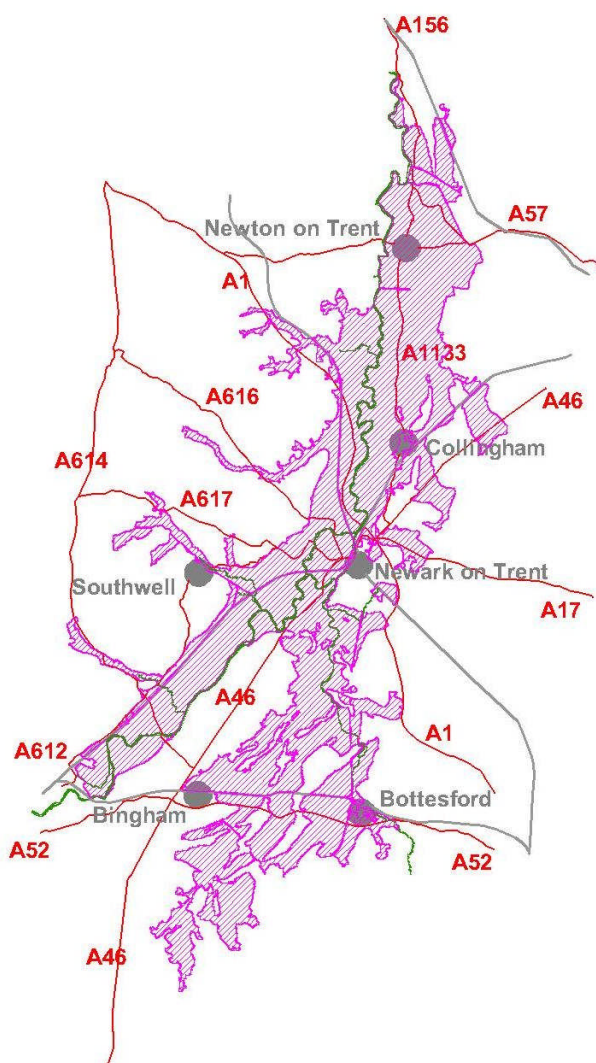
1. Introduction

This is the Environmental Policy of the Newark Area Internal Drainage Board. Whilst land drainage and flood risk management are the primary considerations for the Board environmental issues play an important role as the Boards' watercourses are a vital habitat for a range of fauna and flora, some of which are legally protected. This policy has been prepared to state the Board's policy in relation to its land drainage duties and environmental issues. This policy statement was adopted on 13th September, 2007 and will be reviewed as and when necessary. This policy will complement the Biodiversity Action Plan that the Board will develop in response to the latest Defra guidance.



Water Vole
A protected species which is widespread in the Board's watercourses

2. Description of the District



2.1 Drainage

The Board's District extends through the Trent Valley from Nottingham to Gainsborough and part of the Vale of Belvoir. The area is 35530 hectares (87800 acres) and is defined as land within 2.4 m (8 ft.) of the highest known flood level. This land is considered to benefit from drainage operations. The Board's area was defined by the Trent River Authority (now the Environment Agency). The Board maintains a network of watercourses within the district to provide drainage. The Board operates 8 pumping stations; the remainder of the area is drained by gravity.

The Board's watercourses vary from semi-natural streams such as the Caunton Beck to artificial pumped drainage channels such as the Marton Drain near Gainsborough. Machinery operated by the Board

includes 4 excavators for dredging and weedcutting and 3 tractor-mounted flailmowers for bank and hedge maintenance.

2.2 Land Use

The great majority of the district is agricultural land, most of which is arable. Newark is situated at the centre of the district with Collingham, Bingham and Southwell situated to the north, south and west respectively. There is industry in the larger urban areas but the district is mostly rural.

2.3 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs)

There are 8 Sites of Special Scientific Interest within the Board's district ranging from the sand land of Spalford Warren to the grasslands of Hoveringham Pastures and Besthorpe Meadows. Only one site adjoins one of the Board's watercourses at Eakring and Maplebeck Meadows. This site is managed by Notts Wildlife Trust and the Board have been involved with works to the site over the years to improve habitat. As the Board do not artificially control the water level at any of these sites there are no formal Water Level Management Plans in place.

The Sites of Special Scientific Interest are listed below;

	Area (ha)	Grid Ref
Spalford Warren	35.90	SK 833 680
Besthorpe Warren	8.83	SK 829 654
Muston Meadows	8.74	SK 824 367
Besthorpe Meadows	8.34	SK 818 643
Orston Plaster Pits	4.72	SK 763 402
Barnstone Railway Cutting	1.52	SK 741 356
Hoveringham Pastures	10.81	SK 707 466
Eakring and Maplebeck Meadows	<u>16.03</u>	SK 705 622
Total	94.89	

3. Statutory Powers and Duties

The Board operates under the Land Drainage Act 1991. This act confers powers to adopt and maintain watercourses for the benefit of drainage. In practice the Board maintains approximately 550 km of watercourse but the Board has powers over all watercourses within the district to ensure proper drainage.

The Environment Agency is responsible for certain 'Main River' watercourses in the Board's district such as the Rivers Trent and Devon. Other watercourses are under the control of the Internal Drainage Board (IDB) but the responsibility for maintenance of all other watercourses and field ditches rests with the adjoining landowner, known in law as the "riparian owner".

Statutory Obligations

IDBs are subject to general environmental and related duties, requiring them to exercise their functions in such a way that minimises harm to interests of recognised importance or enhances those interests. These duties are provided for

under the Land Drainage Act 1991 which was amended by the Land Drainage Act 1994. This expands upon the duties formerly contained in the 1991 Act and covers duties with respect to the environment, and recreation in respect of the natural and built environment and public access.

This requires IDBs, only where this meets their water management function, to further the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty and the conservation of flora, fauna and geological or physiographical features of special interest, and to have regard to the desirability of protecting and conserving buildings, sites and objects of archaeological, architectural or historical interest.

IDBs should also take into account the effect that their works could have on the beauty or amenity of any rural urban area, or in any such flora, fauna, features, buildings, sites and objects of archaeological, architectural or historic interest.

Other Legislation

3.1 The Environmental Impact Assessment (Land Drainage Improvements Works) Regulations 1999 as amended require IDBs to undertake an assessment of the impact on the environment of projects likely to have significant effects.

3.2 The amendment to the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. The effect of the amendment is to impose additional conservation duties on IDBs in relation to sites of special scientific interest.

3.3 The Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 extends the duty to conserve biodiversity for public bodies in the CROW Act to Local Authorities and bodies established by statute in all aspects of their work.

3.4 Defra have also produced guidance on the protection of Local Wildlife Sites (known as SINCs in Nottinghamshire), several watercourses in the Board's area have this designation.

4. Environmental Strategy

4.1 Routine Maintenance Operations

Regular maintenance of the Board's adopted watercourses is essential for land drainage and flood defence. Nature conservation interests will also be taken into account particularly with regard to protected species and the safeguarding of bank, marginal and aquatic biodiversity.

Maintenance methods will include leaving a fringe of uncut vegetation at the waters edge in watercourses of an appropriate size to help stabilise the toe of the banks and to provide over wintering shelter for invertebrates and small mammals.

The Board undertakes routine maintenance operations on all of its adopted watercourses and these generally include the control of bank-side vegetation, weedcutting in the channel, dredging, tree works and removal of blockages for the following primary reasons:

- Provision of a clear passage for flows within the watercourse
- Stimulation of bank-side vegetation to maximise bank protection
- Control of woody vegetation such as scrub
- Allow inspection of watercourses and associated structures
- Nature conservation interests

Bank-side vegetation is normally controlled between August and February and includes cutting and flailing of vegetation growing on the banks of adopted watercourses using hand-held and machine mounted mechanical equipment. It is usual to use a tractor mounted flailmower, cutting the bank-side vegetation on one full bank and the lower half of the opposite bank, leaving an average sward height of 75-100 mm. All material from the cutting and mowing of the banks will usually be left on the bank side. Care is taken to avoid damage to the entrance of water vole burrows, which are protected by law. In stretches of watercourse where water vole burrows are known to be present, alternate stretches of bank may be cut in rotation to reduce disturbance to these protected mammals whilst still enabling the free flow of water.

Weedcutting includes all hand and mechanical cutting of vegetation growing in the channels of adopted watercourses. This operation will normally be restricted to the later part of the year and over winter. A hydraulic excavator mounted with a slotted weed-cutting basket is used where possible. In other places vegetation is cut by hand in areas inaccessible by machine. All vegetation growing in the channel will usually be deposited on the bank tops to decompose and care will be taken not to deposit the arisings on habitats of interest or water vole burrows.

Dredging of a watercourse will usually be carried out using a mechanical excavator every 3-5 years, depending on the accumulation of silt. The removed silt is normally deposited on the bank top. The frequency of de-silting works is significantly reduced by the removal of vegetation in the channel. Wherever possible, de-silting operations will be restricted to the autumn/ winter season and care will be taken not to deposit the arisings on habitats of interest or water vole burrows.

Trees and shrubs can cause blockages and prevent access for maintenance. Tree works will normally include pruning by hand or machinery, occasionally felling and the removal of dead wood from the watercourse. Mature specimens will be pollarded where possible to encourage longevity and the maintenance of valuable invertebrate communities. Tree work will be avoided during the bird-breeding season (March to August inclusive) except for exceptional cases and after a survey for breeding birds has been completed. Trees and hedgerows over-hanging a watercourse are usually trimmed at the same time as the cutting of the bank-side vegetation. Material removed from the watercourse will be disposed of by woodchipping or burning on site depending upon the location. Work to mature trees containing cracks, fissures, rot holes or large bark flakes will be preceded by a bat survey to ensure that a bat roost is not present.

The Board will consult with the statutory nature conservation organisation in compliance with any statutory obligation and may, in addition, consult with any conservation group or similar body that may have an interest in any particular watercourse.

4.2 Maintenance Programme

The Board prepares a works programme for the maintenance of adopted watercourses, which is updated each year in February. The planning of maintenance takes account of environmental issues. Tree and bush maintenance is avoided from March to July inclusive to avoid disturbance of nesting birds. Flailmowing is also limited during this period to the sites where weedcutting in the channel is necessary. The use of herbicides to control vegetation was discontinued in 1988.

Following approval by the Board the programme is circulated to interested parties including EA, Notts Wildlife Trust and Natural England. Comments made by these parties are taken into account when scheduling the work and proposals will be amended if necessary.

4.3 Environmental Surveys

Environmental surveys are carried out by the Board for specific works. They are completed for all Defra grant aided works, usually by independent specialist consultants. Water voles are present on many of the Board's watercourses. Surveys are required before certain works are carried out that may disturb the voles' habitat. This work is carried out by three specially trained operatives of the Board and a written record of each survey is prepared. Surveys for nesting birds will also be carried out during the nesting season before carrying out any works that may disturb nesting birds. This will also be carried out by trained operatives supported by environmental consultants. In exceptional circumstances it may be necessary to survey for bats as described above and for badgers.

4.4 Conservation Budget

The Board allocates a budget for conservation works each year which currently stands at £10,000 (2007). These works are authorised on a scheme-by-scheme basis by the Board, are within the Board's district and related to land drainage. Examples include pollarding of watercourse willows and wetland improvements. The costs of environmental surveys are also charged to the conservation budget.

4.5 Defra Agri-Environmental Schemes

The new (2005) scheme by Defra to encourage environmentally friendly farming is likely to have considerable effect on the British landscape, flora and fauna. The Board is keen to work with farmers and Defra to deliver environmental improvements. To this end the Board have extended the 'closed season' for flailmowing to 5 months from March to July inclusive. The Board also works closely with farmers when requested to provide input into

preparation of their Agri-Environment Schemes where they adjoin the Board's watercourses.

5. The Future

Over recent years the environment has become a major concern for governments and conservation bodies both national and international in addition to individuals on a local level. The Board will continue to be proactive in addressing environmental issues as they affect the Board's work whilst endeavouring to provide the service of land drainage and flood protection.

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