

THE RIVER STOUR (KENT) INTERNAL DRAINAGE BOARD

Policy Statement on Water Level and Flood Risk Management

1. Introduction

Purpose

- 1.1. This policy statement has been prepared by the River Stour (Kent) Internal Drainage Board (the Board) to provide a public statement of the Board's approach to its management of water levels and flood risk within the River Stour (Kent) Internal Drainage District (the District). The Board is constituted by order of Parliament operating under the terms of the Land Drainage Act 1991 and is designated as a flood risk and coastal erosion 'Risk Management Authority' (RMA) under the Flood & Water Management Act 2010.
- 1.2. The Board serves the local community by managing water levels in ordinary watercourses and other water infrastructure within the District to mitigate against the risks from flooding and drought. In delivering its functions the Board will meet its environmental obligations and commitments and seek opportunities to enhance the environment. The Board recognises its responsibility for good governance, local accountability and financial security, achieving value for money from all its activities. As an independent public body, the Board is committed to the pursuit of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

Background

- 1.3. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) has policy responsibility for flood and coastal erosion risk management in England. The Environment Agency is responsible for taking a strategic overview of the management of all sources of flooding and coastal erosion. Lead Local Flood Authorities (unitary authorities or county councils) are responsible for developing, maintaining and applying a strategy for local flood risk management in their areas. Delivery is the responsibility of a number of flood risk and coastal erosion Risk Management Authorities (RMAs), which includes the River Stour (Kent) IDB.
- 1.4. This Policy Statement sets out the Board's approach to meeting the national policy aims and objectives in this area, as stated in the *National Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Strategy for England 2020* (the National Strategy); the statement will be revised to reflect future revisions of the National Strategy. It summarises what plans the Board has in place to manage water levels and reduce flood risk, whilst protecting and enhancing the environment, and ensuring good governance and local accountability. Copies of this Policy Statement are available from the Board's office at: 34 Gordon Road, Canterbury CT1 3PW. Digital copies can be downloaded from the Board's website: www.rsidb.org.uk.

2. Governance and local accountability

- 2.1. The Board will ensure that its policies and procedures enable effective representation of and accountability to drainage rate payers and the occupiers of non-agricultural land within the District, including triennial elections in line with the requirements of the Land Drainage Act 1991, and timely engagement with charging authorities to fill vacancies in seats allocated to appointed members.

- 2.2. Board members must take decisions objectively in the best interests of the Board and uphold the ethical standards expected of public officeholders. Board members must adhere to the Board's Members Code of Conduct, including the seven principles of public life (Nolan Principles). The Board will make sure that there is suitable training in place for Board members and staff, including on financial and environmental matters as appropriate.
- 2.3. Board members must declare financial and other interests relevant to their function with the Board. Board members will recuse themselves as appropriate where conflicts of interest may occur in relation to procurement, contract management and decision making.

3. Delivering the National Strategy's policy aim and objectives

Aim

- 3.1. The National Strategy sets out practical measures to be implemented by risk management authorities, partners and communities, which will contribute to longer term delivery objectives and our vision: A nation ready for, and resilient to, flooding and coastal change – today, tomorrow and to the year 2100.

Objectives

- 3.2. The Strategy's long-term vision is for: a nation ready for, and resilient to, flooding and coastal change – today, tomorrow and to the year 2100. It has 3 long-term ambitions, underpinned by evidence about future risk and investment needs. They are:
 - **Climate resilient places:** working with partners to bolster resilience to flooding and coastal change across the nation, both now and in the face of climate change
 - **Today's growth and infrastructure resilient in tomorrow's climate:** making the right investment and planning decisions to secure sustainable growth and environmental improvements, as well as infrastructure resilient to flooding and coastal change
 - **A nation ready to respond and adapt to flooding and coastal change:** ensuring local people understand their risk to flooding and coastal change and know their responsibilities and how to take action.
- 3.3. The Board supports the national aims and ambitions for the management of flood risk and water levels and the Board's policy and approach will be consistent with them.

4. Climate resilient places.

The River Stour (Kent) IDB will work with partners to help:

- 4.1 deliver practical and innovative actions that help to bolster resilience to flood and coastal change in local places.
- 4.2 make greater use of nature-based solutions that take a catchment led approach to managing the flow of water to improve resilience to both floods and droughts.
- 4.3 maximise opportunities to work with farmers and land managers to help them adapt their businesses and practices to be resilient to flooding and coastal change.
- 4.4 develop adaptive pathways in local places that equip practitioners and policy makers to better plan for future flood and coastal change and adapt to future climate hazards.

5. Today's growth and infrastructure resilient in tomorrow's climate:

The River Stour (Kent) IDB will work with partners to help:

- 5.1. put greater focus on providing timely and quality planning advice that helps avoid inappropriate development in areas at risk of flooding and coastal change.
- 5.2. leave the environment in a better state by contributing to environmental net gain for new development proposals.
- 5.3. ensure that spending on flood and coastal resilience contributes to job creation and sustainable growth in local places.
- 5.4. mainstream property flood resilience measures and to 'build back better' after flooding to reduce damages and enable faster recovery for local communities.
- 5.5. provide expert advice on how infrastructure providers (road, rail, water and power supplies) can ensure their investments are more resilient to future flooding and coastal change avoiding disruption to peoples' lives and livelihoods.

6. A nation ready to respond and adapt to flooding and coastal change:

The River Stour (Kent) IDB will work with partners to help:

- 6.1 support communities to better prepare and respond to flooding and coastal change, including transforming how people receive flood warnings.
- 6.2 ensure people and businesses receive the support they need from all those involved in recovery so they can get back to normal quicker after flooding.
- 6.3 help support communities with managing the long-term mental health impacts from flooding and coastal change.
- 6.4 develop the skills and capabilities needed to better support communities to adapt to future flooding and coastal change.
- 6.5 become a world leader in the research and innovation of flood and coastal risk management to better protect current and future generations.

7. River Stour (Kent) Internal Drainage District

7.1 The following outlines the key details of the District:

- Total area of the drainage district: 11,909 ha
- Catchment area draining to and including the District: 39,000 ha
- Area of agricultural land: 9,479 ha
- Area of other (non-agricultural) land: 2,440 ha

7.2 Assets for which the Board has operational responsibility:

- Water level control structures: 145 number
- Watercourses (maintained): 213 km

7.3 Assets within or adjacent to the District that are maintained by the Environment Agency:

- Main Rivers: 218 km
- Raised embankments/flood walls 38 km
- Pumping Stations: 12 number

8. Communication and transparency

8.1. The Board will communicate the local risks from flooding, the reasons for managing water levels within the District and articulate the efforts being undertaken by the Board to manage water levels and flood risk as well as the steps the local community and land managers can take to assist in its management.

8.2. The Board will be open and transparent in its actions and decisions. The Board will comply with the requirements set out in the relevant Local Government transparency code.

8.3. The Board will provide an overview of the objectives and costs of its water level management operations by publishing on its website:

- A record of the watercourses it periodically maintains.
- A statement of the types of general maintenance activities it routinely undertakes and why.
- Its Annual Report to Defra (IDB1 Form).
- Approved Board minutes.

8.4. The Board will seek views and respond to enquiries from the local general public in this regard and work with local partners to build a culture within which watercourses are seen as vital to managing flood risk and enhancing habitat and amenity. Every effort will be made to dissuade abuse of watercourses.

8.5. The Board invites any comments regarding the condition of the river network, which could assist with the management of water levels.

9. Working together

9.1. The Board will co-operate and share information with other relevant authorities in the exercise of their flood and coastal erosion risk management functions. The Board will contribute to strategies, plans and consultations relevant to its catchment and functions.

9.2. The Board will assist the Environment Agency wherever possible in its operational activities and will assist Risk Management Authorities as and when required, including during flood emergencies. The Board will participate as necessary in exercises to develop and test emergency response procedures.

9.3. The Board will provide the Environment Agency and other local Risk Management Authorities with information on the flood defence assets for which the Board is responsible.

9.4. The Board will seek to work with all relevant local organisations, in carrying out its flood and coastal erosion risk management functions and environmental obligations.

10. Environmental measures

10.1. The Board has nature conservation duties under the Land Drainage Act 1991, the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, the Protection of Badgers Act 1992, the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, the Water Environment (Water Framework Directive) (England and Wales) Regulations 2003, the Eels (England and Wales) Regulations 2009, the Flood and Water Management Act 2010, the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries Act 1975, and as a competent authority under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017. The Board will fulfil these in a positive way.

10.2. Much of the Board's watercourse maintenance work constitutes vegetation control and de-silting and is often a vital and routine requirement. Whilst inevitably some short or long term impacts may arise, this management is often essential to maintain the distinct assemblage of aquatic habitat and species present in the District. Such work will be carried out in a way that manages the potential risks to the environment. The Board has access to environmental expertise from their Conservation Advisors, and has a Biodiversity Action Plan, developed according to ADA and Natural England guidelines, and has developed watercourse-specific maintenance standards, which indicate the way in which its functions can be carried out in a way appropriate to the environment and how the environment can be enhanced. The Board maintains only a small proportion of the total watercourse length in the District, the significant majority being the responsibility of the adjoining land owners or of other bodies.

10.3. When carrying out work, be it maintenance or improvement, and consistent with the need to maintain satisfactory flood protection standards, the Board will aim to:-

- Avoid any unnecessary or long-term damage to natural habitats and species.
- Carry out the monitoring of any gains and losses of biodiversity.
- Take appropriate opportunities to achieve multiple environmental outcomes and work with natural processes, wherever possible, including the enhancement of habitats and water bodies within the District.

10.4. The District is situated in an area with numerous sites of nationally and internationally designated sites, including:

International Designations:

Sandwich Bay (SAC)

Stodmarsh (SAC, SPA, Ramsar)

Thanet Coast & Sandwich Bay (SPA, Ramsar)

National Designations:

Hothfield Common SSSI

Preston Marshes SSSI

Stodmarsh SSSI & NNR

Sandwich Bay to Hacklinge Marshes SSSI

Wye and Crundale Downs SSSI

The District also includes a number of Local Nature Reserves and Local Wildlife Sites

- 10.5. The Board will continue to play its full role in sustaining the Water Level Management Plans prepared for SSSIs to maintain, or bring sites into, favourable condition, in conjunction with Natural England, the Environment Agency and other interested parties and to review the plans in accordance with guidance.

11. Approval and Review of this Policy Statement

- 11.1. This protocol was adopted by the Board on 6th February 2025.
- 11.2. The River Stour (Kent) IDB will review and update this Policy Statement as and when changes to policies are made and notwithstanding by 6th February 2030.

February 2025