



June 2025

Consultation

Proposed Extension of the River Stour (Kent) Internal Drainage Board's Internal Drainage District

The River Stour (Kent) Internal Drainage Board (RSIDB) is responsible for managing water levels and mitigating local flood risks across its existing legally designated Internal Drainage District, which was set in 1938 in line with the Medway Letter (set at 8 foot above the highest known flood level at that time). The gradual urbanisation across the Internal Drainage District and beyond, combined with increasingly unpredictable weather patterns, presents challenges to all concerned by increasing the risk of flooding to land, property and infrastructure. It is therefore proposed that the RSIDB's Internal Drainage District be extended to cover a wider area to improve the IDB's ability to influence development and to more actively help reduce local flood risks. The existing IDB District is shown in blue on the map below, with the proposed extension shown yellow.



This report aims to summarise the potential benefits and challenges associated with the proposed extension of the IDB District.

Potential Benefits:

- **Enhanced control of runoff from new development**

The existing IDB District is a relatively narrow 'ribbon' district, containing areas of greatest flood risk and special drainage need, and as such its current boundary excludes upstream areas which drain to it. Many of these areas are undergoing significant development and therefore have an increasing impact on the downstream IDB District. This creates an increasing disconnect between the source of runoff and the responsibility for managing it. By incorporating these developing areas into the IDB District, the RSIDB will gain greater influence and control over the design and implementation of drainage systems from the outset. This will help to alleviate flood risks to land, property and infrastructure throughout the whole Stour catchment.

- **Closer collaboration with partners and avoidance of duplication**

Extending the IDB District presents an opportunity for strengthened partnerships with key stakeholders, including the Environment Agency, Water Companies, District Councils and especially Kent County Council (KCC), the Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA). Currently, the responsibility to process Land Drainage Consents is held by the IDB for works within the IDB District and KCC for areas outside of the IDB District. The Environment Agency processes Flood Risk Activity Permits for works affecting Main Rivers. As the proposed extension of the IDB District is aimed to cover the whole of the surface water network, this would put all Land Drainage Consents and enforcements in the Stour catchment under the management of the RSIDB. This would reduce confusion over which organisation to consult and would allow for applications to be processed consistently. It would also reduce duplication of effort (some works require Consent from KCC, under the Land Drainage Act and also the RSIDB under its byelaws) and would free-up time for KCC, as the LLFA, to focus on the details of on-site SuDS proposals. It must be made clear that KCC would still remain the Lead Local Flood Authority (with the responsibility to prepare strategies, maintain an asset register, investigate and report on significant local flooding and will remain the statutory consultee for planning proposals) but we can work more closely together to tackle larger-scale challenges that may otherwise go beyond individual district boundaries.

- **Climate Change Adaptation**

The frequency and intensity of extreme weather events are projected to increase under all but the most optimistic Climate Change scenarios; these will clearly pose a significant threat to drainage systems and infrastructure across the UK. Expanding the IDB District will provide an opportunity to proactively adapt to these more challenging conditions. By incorporating upstream areas as well as those areas already vulnerable to flooding, the Board will be better able to influence and actively implement long-term mitigation measures such as Natural Flood Management, wetland restoration, and climate-resilient land-use on the wider network of ordinary watercourses. This will help to safeguard downstream communities and infrastructure from the potentially devastating impacts of Climate Change, both flooding and drought.

Potential Challenges

- **Increased financial burden**

A larger IDB District would ordinarily result in the extended area being brought into rating (with agricultural land charged Drainage Rates and non-agricultural land added to District Councils' Special Levy calculations). However, it is proposed to 'zero rate' land in the extended area so existing Drainage Rates and Special Levies would remain unaltered. Any works on upstream watercourses, should the Board decide to carry out works, will be funded separately by Surface Water Development Contributions (SWDCs – which are already paid by developers as part of the RSIDB's existing consenting process).

- **Increased resource burden**

Taking on the Lead Local Flood Authority's consenting and enforcement role in the Stour Catchment will inevitably involve more IDB staff time. However, discussions with the LLFA Team have confirmed that the number of past consents and enforcements are relatively low and therefore are not considered a significant addition. Any additional works to watercourses will also need to be managed by existing operational staff and contractors, so the Board will take this into account should it decide to carry out additional works.

- **Governance and representation**

It is proposed that the Board's existing Membership should manage the extended area; Appointed Members would cover the whole of the

IDB District within the relevant Council District and Elected Members would need to consider the upstream areas draining to their existing Sub-Districts. Improved links with all relevant Parish Councils, both in the existing and extended IDB District will improve public engagement.

- **Public perception**

Recent experience, when adopting additional ordinary watercourses within the existing IDB District, has shown that expectations will need to be managed. Although the intention is to improve engagement and influence to reduce local flooding and to improve the natural environment, it must be understood that flood risks cannot be completely removed. Continued communication and joint working with Local Authorities, the LLFA and the EA will be extremely important, as will additional information on the RSIDB website.

- **Unintended consequences**

Before the RSIDB fully pursues the extension of its District, it will need to identify and consider any impacts on its finances. The proposed extension is not intended to significantly affect RSIDB finances; the proposed extension area is to be zero rated, so it is hoped that the Environment Agency Precept (which the RSIDB pays to the EA) will not be affected, and nor would the EA's Upland Water Contribution (which the EA pays to the RSIDB). Clarification has been sought in respect of these payments and assurances given.

The RSIDB District is currently subject to a Differential Rating Order (DRO), which adjusts the amount of Drainage Rates paid by taking local drainage/flood risks and benefits of RSIDB activities into account. As it is proposed that the extension area is to be zero-rated, it is not considered necessary to alter the existing DRO.

Conclusion

The proposed extension of the RSIDB District provides an opportunity for closer partnerships and allows for more seamless catchment management to help reduce the impacts of increasingly extreme weather events, both flood and drought, and should therefore be pursued. The RSIDB will need to make sure it can properly resource and fund the additional responsibilities and stakeholder expectations will need to be managed through public engagement and clear communication.

Any future decision to bring any land or property in the extended area into rating/levies would need to be taken as part of a separate process, with appropriate prior consultation with all affected parties.

The following outline process has been agreed:

1. Confirm the agreement and support of KCC (LLFA).

Discussions have taken place with KCC's Flood & Water Manager, who was supportive of the planned changes. Confirmation of KCC's formal support, via its Flood Risk & Water Management Committee, has been sought.

2. Confirm the agreement and support of the EA, including confirmation that the Precept and Upland Water Contributions will not be affected.

The EA's Area Operation's Manager has been consulted and has confirmed general support for the changes and has confirmed no changes to Precept or Upland Water Contributions as a result of the proposed extension.

3. Confirm requirements with Defra (including no change to the DRO).

Defra has been initially consulted and it has been confirmed that they have no objection to this proposal, provided there is local support for the changes, including from District Councils.

4. Consult with District Councils.
5. Consult with existing Ratepayers.
6. Consult with Water Companies.
7. Consult with Southern Regional Flood & Coastal Committee.
8. Consult with the Association of Drainage Authorities.
9. Request approval by Defra (via the EA).

Comments are invited in respect of this proposed extension. Any comments or queries you wish to make should be sent to Pete Dowling, the Board's Clerk & Engineer at: pete.dowling@rsidb.org.uk or by letter to 34 Gordon Road, Canterbury CT1 3PW.