

WEST MENDIP INTERNAL DRAINAGE BOARD

POLICY DELIVERY STATEMENT

POLICY DELIVERY STATEMENT ON FLOOD RISK AND WATER LEVEL MANAGEMENT WITHIN THE WEST MENDIP INTERNAL DRAINAGE BOARD AREA

1. Introduction

Purpose

This Policy Delivery Statement has been prepared by the West Mendip Internal Drainage Board to provide a public statement of the Board's approach to its management of flood risk and water levels in its area.

Background

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) has policy responsibility for flood and coastal defence in England. However, delivery is the responsibility of a number of flood and coastal defence 'operating authorities', which include the West Mendip Internal Drainage Board.

The Government has published a policy aim and objectives for flood and coastal defence¹. To ensure a more certain delivery of the aim and objectives by the individual operating authorities the Government has also published a series of High Level Targets (HLTs)^{2,3}. The first Target requires each operating authority to publish a Policy Delivery Statement setting out their plans for delivering the Government policy aim and objectives in their area. This will include an assessment of the risk of flooding in their area and what plans they have to reduce that risk.

This Policy Delivery Statement fulfils that requirement.

We are providing copies of this Statement to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), the Department for Communities and Local Government, the Environment Agency, North Somerset Council and to the Parish Councils within the Board's Drainage District. Copies are also available from the Board's office at:

Col-Pax House, Winterstoke Road, Weston-super-Mare, Somerset BS23 3YS

The Statement can also be downloaded from the Board's website: www.wmidb.org

2. How The Board Will Deliver the Government's Policy Aim and Objectives

The West Mendip Internal Drainage Board supports the Government's aim and objectives for flood and coastal defence. Our policy and approach will be consistent with them.

Policy Aim

The Government's policy aim is:

To reduce the risk to people and the developed and natural environment from flooding and coastal erosion by encouraging the provision of technically, environmentally and economically sound and sustainable defence measures.

Section 3 below sets out our plans for managing and, where possible, reducing the flood risk in the Board's Drainage District.

Government Objectives

a. *To encourage the provision of adequate and cost effective flood warning systems.*

The Board will assist the Environment Agency (the operating authority with responsibility for flood warning) wherever possible in its provision of adequate and cost effective flood warning systems. The Board will cooperate with the Agency in responses to flood emergencies and will participate, as necessary, in exercises to develop and test emergency response procedures.

b. *To encourage the provisions of adequate, economically, technically and environmentally sound and sustainable flood and coastal defence measures.*

- Within the Board's Drainage District all the area is, potentially, at some risk of flooding and the Board will seek to manage this risk at acceptable levels, through appropriate improvement works to flood defences and by the implementation of a sound maintenance strategy. The Board will also seek to ensure that the Environment Agency's flood defences, which also afford protection to the Drainage District, are maintained to a satisfactory standard.
- Maintenance and improvement works undertaken by the Board will be carried out in accordance with best practice and will seek to deliver best value, taking due regard of technical and other guidance available from Defra, the Environment Agency and other sources. In carrying out these works, the Board will access appropriate professional advice when considered necessary.
- Wherever possible, the Board will seek the provision of adequate, economically, technically, and environmentally sound and sustainable flood and water level management measures. The Board also recognises that new or improved flood defence measures should not be considered in isolation and that their potential effect on other watercourses will need to be assessed in the decision-making process.
- The Board will seek to regulate, as necessary and using available powers, the actions of others to ensure that their works do not increase flood risk. The Board will also ensure that riparian owners are aware of, and accept, their responsibilities for the maintenance of watercourses under their control.
- The Board will play a positive role in fulfilling its statutory and other responsibilities for nature conservation, including the achievement of the Government's environmental targets and objectives for favourable condition of priority Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs).
- When carrying out maintenance and improvement works the Board will, wherever possible, seek to avoid damage to environmental interests and will aim to ensure no net loss to habitats covered by Biodiversity Action Plans. The Board will seek opportunities to enhance the aquatic environment when new works or improvements are being planned or consented.

- The Board will ensure that for those Water Level Management Plans (WLMPs) where it is the lead authority, it will work in partnership with English Nature to complete, implement where appropriate, and review Plans in accordance with previously published guidance on plan completion and the timetables set out in the High Level Targets.
- The Board will cooperate with the other operating authorities, and with other bodies as appropriate, in providing input to the development of Catchment Flood Management Plans, Shoreline Management Plans, Coastal Habitat Plans and Local Environment Agency Plans.
- The Board will comply with the Government's stated policies on sustainability.

c. *To discourage inappropriate development in areas at risk from flooding.*

- The potential impact on flood risk through future development in the Drainage District, or in the wider catchment draining into the District, is fully recognised by the Board and it will take an active role in the assessment of structure planning, local plans and individual planning applications to ensure that flood risk is not increased.
- Where appropriate the Board will secure from developers, and other direct beneficiaries, contributions to cover the cost of both immediate and longer term works necessary in ensuring that any potential increase in flood risk is removed. Such contributions will be recorded in accordance with Planning Policy Statement Note 25 'Development and Flood Risk'. (PPS25).

In meeting these obligations, the Board will consider its activities within the wider natural and developed environment and will seek to ensure the avoidance of any adverse impact.

3. **Flood Risk in the Board's Area**

As mentioned in Section 2, the entire Drainage District is at some risk of flooding, but whilst that risk is substantially controlled, some variation of standards of protection will apply. The following are the key details of the Drainage District:

Catchment Area draining to and including the District	10,209 ha
Total Area of the District	5,859 ha
Area of Agricultural Land (Principally Grade 3)	4,107 ha
Areas of Residential, Industrial and Commercial Property	1,752 ha
Major Infrastructure:	
Motorways (M5 - Bristol to Exeter Motorway)	3.9 km
Classified Roads	
Class A	21.4 km
Class B	7.2 km
Main railway lines (Bristol to Exeter)	16.5 km
Sites of Environmental Interest (SSSIs)	
Wetland SSSIs (3No.)	50.0 ha
Nature Reserves (Local)	1No.

The Board's area covers a substantial part of the town of Weston-super-Mare and, in particular, the land to the south and east of the town zoned for a further major expansion of residential and commercial development, together with the rural hinterland extending some 10 - 12km from the coastline to the lower slopes of the Mendip Hills.

This rural hinterland includes the low-lying Banwell and Puxton Moors [parts of Puxton Moor are designated a Wetland SSSI], where ground levels are typically 5m AOD (Above Ordnance Datum) and are thus below the level of Mean High Water Spring Tides.

The Board has provided the Environment Agency with information on the flood defence assets for which the Board is responsible and will up-date this information as required under HLT2. This information is available from the Board's office and from the Environment Agency at:

Rivers House, East Quay, Bridgwater, Somerset TA6 4YS

Assets for which the Board has operational responsibility:

Pumping Stations	
For Flood Defence purposes	None
For Irrigation purposes	1 No.
Sea Outfalls	2 No.
Other Water Level Control Structures	
Operational	36 No.
Not in Use	3 No.
Watercourses	94.7 km
Critical Ordinary Watercourses *	0.0 km
Raised Embankments	0.7 km

* Critical Ordinary Watercourses are those from which overspilling has the potential to put at risk of flooding a significant number of properties. The only Critical Ordinary Watercourse in the Board's District, the lowest reach of Cross Rhyne, in Weston-super-Mare, was transferred to the Environment Agency and became 'main river' on 1st November 2004.

Enmained former Critical Ordinary Watercourses:

Cross Rhyne (Uphill Great Rhyne to Winterstoke Road, Weston-super-Mare)	1.3 km
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Passing through or adjacent to the Board's District are the following assets maintained by the Environment Agency:

Main Rivers (Congresbury Yeo, River Banwell, Uphill Great Rhyne and Cross Rhyne [part])	25.6 km
River Raised Embankments	11.4 km
Coastal Flood Defences	7.8 km

Within the Drainage District there are 4 motorway culverts for which the Highways Agency is the responsible authority; 8 bridges and 72 culverts for which North Somerset Council is responsible; plus 1 bridge and 5 culverts the responsibility of the Strategic Rail Authority.

The Board is responsible for 25 culverts and an inverted syphon.

In addition there are numerous bridges and culverts that are the responsibility of private landowners.

Flood Risk from these Watercourses

This section sets out the Board's assessment of flood risk taking into account the following:

- Assets in place considering design standard and design life
- Environment Agency flood risk maps
- Other information available to the Board, including the history of flooding in the area, the proposals for major new development and other changes in land use.

Standards of Protection

Through the operation and maintenance of the watercourse system the Board seeks to maintain a general standard capable of providing flood protection to agricultural land of between 1 in 10 and 1 in 20 years, and of between 1 in 50 and 1 in 100 years for developed areas.

These likely return periods cannot be taken literally and should be considered as the chance of some overflowing from the system taking place each year as being between 10% and 5% for agricultural land, and between 2% and 1% for developed land.

Areas that are more vulnerable to flooding due to the particular local circumstances include:

- The Millennium Field, Congresbury - designated as active floodplain of the river Congresbury Yeo
- Parts of Banwell Moor - particularly low-lying areas of wet grassland adjacent to the River Banwell. Here the flood risk, from overflowing of the River Banwell, is judged to be approximately 1-year in 2 (i.e. a 50% chance of flooding in any one year).
- Parts of the former Weston Airfield - flood risk judged to be 1-year in 2

The Board will work with the Environment Agency to ensure that the flood risk to Banwell Moor is not worsened as a result of development further downstream (predominately from the West Wick and Moor Lane developments at Weston-super-Mare) and will seek to ensure that developer contributions secured through planning agreements are used to fund appropriate flood defence improvements.

The Board will work actively with the Environment Agency and North Somerset Council to ensure that the agreed options arising from the Weston-super-Mare Flood Management Study are implemented and will seek to ensure that the surface water drainage of future development areas achieves the Study objectives.

The Board is satisfied that there are minimal risks to human life arising from any failure of flood defence assets for which it has operational responsibility or from overflowing of watercourses under its operational control.

Regulation of Activities

The Board will exercise, as required, its powers under the Land Drainage Act 1991 and under its Land Drainage Byelaws, to ensure that activities in and alongside the drainage system do not reduce flood protection standards and unnecessarily increase flood risk.

Management of Flood Risks

The Board routinely inspects and monitors the condition of its watercourses and other flood defence assets, particularly those from which overspilling could affect property. Consistent with established needs, the Board has in place a programme of routine maintenance work to ensure that the condition of the assets is commensurate with the standards of protection sought. Where standards are not at the policy level, improvement works will be considered, where these can be demonstrated to meet with Defra criteria, and undertaken as and when resources allow.

Much of the Board's watercourse maintenance work is aquatic weed control and light desilting to maintain the hydraulic efficiency of the strategic arterial watercourse system. The Board has adopted a 'Best Management Practice' approach to watercourse maintenance to minimise any adverse short-term impact resulting from its essential maintenance work. This management is, however, also essential to maintain the diverse aquatic habitat of the Drainage District.

The Board only maintains a very small proportion of the total length of watercourses within the Drainage District, the significant majority being the responsibility of riparian landowners. Their, less frequent, maintenance regimes also contribute to the diversity of aquatic habitat.

The Board welcomes from its agricultural ratepayers, special levy council and members of the public any comments on the condition of its watercourse system, which could lead to any increased flood risk.

The Board will seek to promote the need for works in its District and create a rational understanding among people who live and work in it, as to what the flood risk is and the efforts made to control it. They will also seek to achieve directly and through local councils a culture within which watercourses are seen as vital to controlling flood risk, whilst providing an interesting aquatic habitat and dissuade abuse of them through dumping waste or obstructing the flow in other ways.

The Board will publish its proposed annual programme of capital and maintenance works, by means of a Public Notice in the local press and on its website.

National Flood and Coastal Defence Database

Following from the routine inspection and monitoring of the condition of its watercourses and other flood defence assets, the Board will record on the National Flood and Coastal Defence Database (NFCDD) all required information in accordance with Environment Agency specifications.

The Board will also record on the NFCDD information on new or altered flood defences, the results of inspections of watercourses and flood defence assets, and the results of inspections of privately owned flood defence assets, all in accordance with Environment Agency specifications.

4. Biodiversity

The Board acknowledges its responsibilities under the Land Drainage Acts 1991 and 1994, the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, the European Birds and Habitat Directives, the Conservation (Natural Habitats & C) Regulations 1994, and the Wildlife and Rights of Way Act 2000.

In undertaking its land drainage and flood risk management functions the Board will seek and consider opportunities for environmental enhancement, when selecting flood defence options both at a strategic level and in the development of schemes.

The Board acknowledges its responsibility to meet its specific statutory obligations and targets.

When carrying out maintenance and improvement works, the Board will:

- Seek to avoid unnecessary damage to land, to acknowledged interests and to natural habitats
- Seek to ensure no net loss to habitats covered by Biodiversity Action Plans and seek opportunities for environmental enhancement

Through its administration of Land Drainage Act Consents, the Board will:

- Seek to limit the loss of open watercourses, by refusing to Consent unnecessary culverting
- Seek appropriate environmental gain, through new habitat creation and other means, where as a result of development, watercourses are unavoidably lost

The Board will fulfil its obligations, as 'lead authority' for the WLMPs for which it has responsibility and, in consultation with English Nature, will review these WLMPs for priority SSSIs that are in an unfavourable condition. The Board will submit to the Environment Agency a costed action plan of flood management measures to achieve 'favourable condition', in accordance with government policy.

[Note: Priority sites are those as identified in Achieving the PSA Targets for SSSI: A Review of the contribution of Water Level Management Plans Defra and English Nature, September 2004. In the case of the West Mendip IDB the only priority site is the Puxton Moor SSSI.]

The Board will report annually to the Environment Agency (i) flood risk management measures taken that have contributed to Public Service Agreement (PSA) targets for SSSIs, (ii) all losses and gains of habitats covered by UK Biodiversity Action Plans resulting from its flood risk management operations.

5. Review of Policy Delivery Statement

The West Mendip Internal Drainage Board will review this Policy Delivery Statement within a period not extending beyond 5 years.

References:

¹ Strategy for Flood and Coastal Defence in England and Wales MAFF and Welsh Office, September 1993

² High Level Targets for Flood and Coastal Defence Operating Authorities and Elaboration of the Environment Agency's Flood Defence Supervisory Duty MAFF, November 1999

³ New High Level Targets for Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Defra, March 2005

Note: These New High Level Targets supersede and replace those issued in November 1999. They are intended to operate on an interim basis from 1 April 2005 pending the introduction of new output and performance measures for the flood and coastal erosion risk management programme and other developments, which reflect the new Government Strategy for Flood and Coastal Erosion Management.