

# North Level District Internal Drainage Board

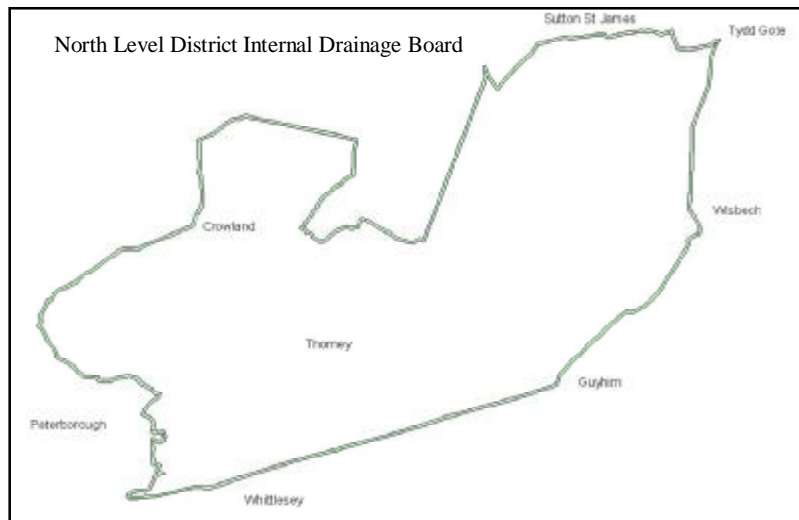


## Conservation Policy

### Introduction

North Level District Internal Drainage Board Conservation Policy sets out how the Board intends to meet the duties placed on Internal Drainage Boards under the provisions on the Land Drainage Act 1991 and other relevant legislation, to undertake maintenance and water level management in a way that is compatible with nature conservation interests.

The Board recognises the need to positively demonstrate that its water course maintenance, water level management and capital works are undertaken in a manner that, whilst reducing flood risk and managing flows, also safeguards nature conservation interests and, wherever possible, makes a positive contribution to the enhancement of the natural environment.



### The Drainage District

The North Level District Internal Drainage Board covers an area of 31,623 hectares (78,140 acres) in the heart of the Fens, to the north of the river Nene between Peterborough and Wisbech, extending up to Crowland and Tydd Gote.

The district is predominantly high grade agricultural land with some areas of urbanisation. Typically for the Fens the majority of the land is at sea level with one of the lowest points in the district being 5.2 metres below the high water in the River Nene. This means that the majority of the area is reliant on pumped drainage to evacuate surplus water from agricultural, industrial and urban properties, discharging to adjacent main rivers. The district is, therefore, divided into ten catchments which are served by twelve pumping stations and one gravity outfall to the tidal River Nene.



Within the North Level District Internal Drainage Board district the Board has a supervisory role in all matters relating to the drainage of land and while the board has powers to undertake works on any water course within its district, direct maintenance is limited to designated drains, which form the strategic arterial drainage system. These designated drains extend some 605 kilometres in length and include 40 water control structures. The strategic arterial drainage system accounts for approximately 10% of the total length of drains within the whole district.

The Board also manages water levels in the strategic arterial drainage system, particularly in the summer to maintain an adequate water supply for irrigation of agricultural crops, and in winter for land drainage and flood defence. With these purposes in mind the Board endeavours to provide for a wide range of wildlife interests within the complex of mostly man made watercourses.

## Statutory Obligations

Internal Drainage Boards have legal obligations towards conservation.

### Land Drainage Act 1991 (as amended in 1994)

Section 12 of the Land Drainage Act 1991 obliges the IDB's and Ministers to

- a) further the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty, consistent with any enactments relating to their functions;
- b) further the conservation of wildlife and geological and physiographical features of special interest consistent with any enactments relating to their functions;
- c) have regard to the desirability of
  - i) protecting and conserving buildings, sites and objects of archaeological, architectural or historic interest; and
  - ii) preserving public rights of access to areas of mountains, moor, heath, down, cliff or foreshore and other places of natural beauty; and
- d) take into account the affects of any proposals on the preservation of the rights of access and on the beauty or amenity of an area, or on wildlife, features, building, sites or objects.

### Habitats Directive

The Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c) Regulations became law in 1994. The Regulations transpose the European Habitats Directive into UK Law, and the Boards are bound by this legislation with respect to work which may affect European wildlife sites or listed habitats and species which occur outside these sites. European sites are defined in the Regulations as Special Protection Areas (SPAs), classified under the EC Birds Directive, and Special Areas of Conservation (SACs).

### Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000

Schedule 9 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 imposes a duty on drainage boards to take reasonable steps, consistent with the proper exercise of those functions, to further conservation and enhancement of the special features on Sites of Special Scientific Interest.

### Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries Act (1975)

To comply with the Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries Act (1975) the North Level District Internal Drainage Board use the best practicable means, within a reasonable cost, to prevent from doing injury to fish or to the spawning grounds, spawn or food for fish.

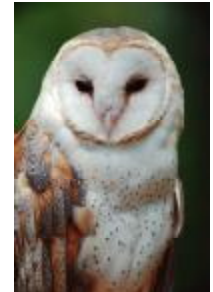
## Sites of Environmental and Conservation Interest.

The North Level District Internal Drainage Board has no Sites of Special Scientific Interest or European wildlife sites within its district and its activities do not affect any sites outside its boundary. For new projects the North Level District Internal Drainage Board will carry out an appropriate assessment, as required by the Conservation Regulations, if a listed species is likely to be affected. There are however, a number of Scheduled Ancient Monuments and County Wildlife Sites within the Boards Boundary, details of these are held on a database and the Board will take account of these when planning maintenance and capital works

## Conservation Projects

**Barn Owls** The North Level District Internal Drainage Board has been working in partnership with the Hawk and Owl Trust to help halt the decline of Barn Owls by installing nest boxes at key locations.

The Barn Owl is one of the most widespread birds in the world and is present in every continent except Antarctica. However, there has been a decline in the number of barn owls throughout Europe as barns, their traditional homes, have become less hospitable as roosting and nesting sites. The barn owl boxes are a good method of stopping the decline as they are acceptable to the owls as nesting sites.



East Anglia is one of the few areas where the Barn owl is thriving and the success of nest boxes is import in ensuring this continues. The Boards pumping stations provide safe sites for the erection of nest boxes, which are monitored annually by the Hawk and Owl Trust.

**Angling** The North Level Main Drain, the Old & the New Wryde, and the New South Eau offer good habitat for fish. The North Level District Internal Drainage Board work with the local angling club on small improvements to maintain the fishing interest, whilst not compromising the drainage function of these drains.

**Hedge Planting** The North Level District Internal Drainage Board has a programme of hedge planting and coppicing, for faggot making. As the faggots are from a local sustainable source, the Board are able to used them as a "soft engineering" option for bank stabilisation works.

## Routine Maintenance Programme

Drains in intensively farmed arable land are usually regarded as being of less ecological interest than those of grazed pastures, but the very fact they are surrounded by intensively managed land means that they may provide the richest habitats in these arable areas. Drains and ditches have the potential to provide excellent corridors and, aquatic and terrestrial, habitats for wildlife. For this reason it is imperative that North Level District Internal Drainage Board maintains their watercourses in such a way as to present the minimum impact on the wildlife within these fenland drains but ensure adequate and unimpeded drainage for the agricultural and residential interests in the catchment itself. The maintenance programme is spread throughout the year to reduce costs and ensure efficient use of the Boards machines, whilst the timing of specific works keep the impact on wildlife to a minimum. The maintenance programme is divided into three distinct operations and these are programmed for different times of the year.



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The Board take account of Water Voles and Badgers by maintaining these watercourses in such a way as to present the minimum impact on the wildlife whilst ensuring adequate drainage for the agricultural and residential interests within each catchment.

### January – March Mudding Out

The regular desilting, mudding out, of the Fenland drainage system is of fundamental importance to the agricultural requirements of the area. The maintenance of these ditches also prevents them becoming over silted or drying up, as



a large array of wildlife use these wet corridors. The frequency of excavation of drainage systems will depend upon the characteristics, location and accretion rate of a watercourse. The North Level District Internal Drainage Board uses hydraulic excavators which can operate through 360° to dredge watercourses. Generally the centre of the drain is dredged, though sometimes the bed and one bank is re-shaped to ensure their efficient use as land drainage channels. The North Level District Internal Drainage Boards arterial network is mudded out on a rolling

programme with mudding out taking place on average once every ten years, with the minimum time between desilting being five years and the maximum time twenty years. The silt/mud that is removed is placed on the top of the bank and spread.

### April – July Capital Works

This part of the programme is where more major schemes, such as re-profiling, are carried out on a small proportion of the district. A conservation assessment is undertaken in the planning stages to allow for phasing the works over a couple of years or appropriate mitigation, for nesting birds, water voles and other wildlife, to be budgeted for and undertaken prior to works taking place. The capital works programme also allows for the opportunities to install features that enhance the drain for wildlife without impeding its function as a drainage channel.



### August – December Weed Cutting and the Control of Bankside Vegetation



This is when vegetation is removed from the North Level District Internal Drainage Board arterial network to ensure that water can be removed from the network efficiently to ensure that people and property within the district are protected from flooding. The sides of the drain are flailed by tractor and the vegetation is removed from the drain using a weed bucket. The weed bucket has a reciprocating blade that cuts back growth on the aquatic plants and leaves their roots intact.

## Water Level Management Plans

The North Level District Internal Drainage Board has ten water level management plans, one for each catchments. These plans state how the Board manages water levels in the strategic arterial drainage system, particularly in the summer to maintain an adequate water supply for irrigation of agricultural crops, and in winter for land drainage and flood defence.

### Water Level Management Plan Aims

- To enable spray irrigation of arable crops.
- To provide sub-surface retention of water in the gravel strata.
- To provide a flow of water through Thorney Village, via Thorney River, to enhance the amenity value.
- To enhance the aquatic environment for flora fauna and water borne wildlife.
- To provide water for Borough Fen Duck Decoy.
- To provide and enhance the fishery in the Main Drain, the Old & the New Wryde, and the New South Eau.

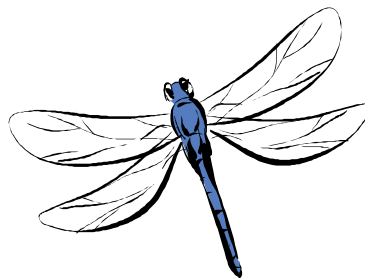


Thorney River

## Conservation Objectives

The North Level District Internal Drainage Board will:

- Continue to develop operational guidelines for incorporation into future work programmes, to safeguard and enhance existing nature conservation resources, taking into account the operational needs of the Drainage District.
- Continue to work in partnership with farmers, landowners and other stakeholders to ensure that they receive a good standard of services whilst taking into account the conservation needs of the Drainage District.
- Work with Natural England and other conservation organisations to promote the enhancement and protection of conservation interests, in so far as it is consistent with the functions of North Level District Internal Drainage Board.
- Through the application of Land Drainage Consents and Bylaws, seek to ensure that natural features of conservation interest and habitat importance are not damaged or destroyed.
- Continue to develop the Board's record base and continue to work in partnership with other organisations to ensure that we have up to date information on species to help inform future works.
- Consider opportunities for habitat improvement works, providing that there is no detrimental effect to the Drainage District.
- Continue to work in partnership with the Hawk and Owl Trust to help safeguard the future of the Barn Owl.



North Level District Internal Drainage Board, Drainage Office, Station Road, Thorney, Peterborough, PE6 0QE  
01733 270333