

The River Stour (Kent) Internal Drainage Board

Annual Update – April 2017

Board Membership

The River Stour (Kent) Internal Drainage Board is a local flood risk management authority. Its primary functions are land drainage, flood risk and water level management. However, it also has a duty to conserve and promote biodiversity. The Board is funded by Drainage Rates paid by agricultural landowners within the Board's drainage district, and Special Levies on Local Councils (Ashford BC, Canterbury CC, Dover DC, Shepway DC & Thanet DC). The Board is made up of Elected Members and Appointed Members, currently as follows:

Elected Members

Mr P S Dunn – Ash Levels
Mr P N Howard – Ashford
Mrs G Wyant – Canterbury, Fordwich & Ickham
Mr M J G Tapp (**Chairman**) – Chislet North
Mr M P Wilkinson – Chislet South
Mr D M Botting – General Valleys
Mr G R Steed – Lydden
Mr P E Dyas – Minster
Mr J F E Smith – Wye

Appointed Members

Cllr M J Burgess – ABC
Cllr A Hicks – ABC
Cllr M Martin – ABC
Cllr P J F Sims – ABC
Cllr D O Smith – ABC
Mr A D Linfoot OBE (**Vice Chairman**) - CCC
Cllr S Walker – CCC
Cllr M D Conolly – DDC
Cllr M Ovenden – DDC
Cllr H Stummer-Schmertzling – TDC
Mr P Williams (Co-opted Member) – Natural England

Mr Peter Dowling is the Board's Clerk & Engineer and can be contacted at pete.dowling@riverstouridb.org.uk, Ms Ana Eastwood is the Board's Finance & Rating Officer (ana.eastwood@riverstouridb.org.uk) and James Dilnot is the Engineering Assistant (james.dilnot@riverstouridb.org.uk) who delivers the Board's routine maintenance activities. The Board is keen to be made aware of drainage and flooding issues throughout its district and Board Members and staff can be contacted via the Board's office (34 Gordon Road, Canterbury CT1 3PW, 01227 462377) or at enquiries@riverstouridb.org.uk.

The Board meets 4 times each year. This year's meeting dates and locations are as follows:

- 25 May 2017 – 2pm at Ashford Borough Council's offices
- 3 August 2017 – 2pm at Environment Agency's Plucks Gutter Depot
- 9 November 2017 – 2pm at Canterbury City Council's offices
- 1 February 2018 – 2pm at Dover District Council's offices (*provisional*)

The above meetings are open to the public, but prior notice of attendance to the Board's Clerk & Engineer is always appreciated to ensure adequate seating etc.

Operational Activities

The IDB's main activity is the routine maintenance of IDB designated watercourses to maintain channel flow capacities for the purpose of reducing local flood risk and to enable appropriate water level management. In 2016 approx. 180km of in-channel weed cutting was carried out; 14km of watercourses de-silted; spoil from the 2015 de-silting programme was levelled; and tree maintenance was carried out on a number of watercourses. In addition to this the Board has continued to manage water levels across its district, maintaining water level management structures and clearing obstructions as necessary, particularly prior to and during periods of heavy rainfall. To improve the efficiency of water level management a number of new gauge-boards have been installed on the Lower Stour marshes and more are planned for other areas across the district. Mr Shaun Revell is the Board's Water Level Controller, who can be contacted at shaun.revell@riverstouridb.org.uk.

Public Sector Cooperation Agreements

The IDB entered into a Public Sector Cooperation Agreement (PSCA) with the Environment Agency in 2014 and has continued to carry out a substantial amount of river maintenance work on its behalf each year. In 2016 approx. 56km of Main Rivers were weed cut under this agreement and approx. 10km of Main Rivers de-silted. The IDB has continued to manage all water levels (on Main River and IDB watercourses) under the PSCA and in close cooperation with local EA staff. This arrangement continues to provide a much improved service (previously the EA and IDB managed their systems separately) along with substantial cost savings to both organisations, which allows for more maintenance work to be delivered overall.

The IDB has also signed up to a Public Sector Cooperation Agreement with Dover District Council, which has enabled more regular maintenance and clearance of a problematic watercourse in Middle Deal. This location has experienced repeated flooding problems over recent years, for a number of reasons, but the regular maintenance and clearance of weedscreens has helped to improve the situation during periods of heavy rainfall. The IDB has continued discussions with Ashford Borough Council and Canterbury City Council in an effort to set up similar agreements to assist them to manage watercourses under their control, and in a more consistent and cost effective manner. It is the Board's intention to eventually have agreements in place with all Councils in its district.

Planning and Consenting

As well as its operational activities, the Board comments on planning applications which could affect drainage and flood risk. Good working relationships have been developed with local planning authorities, KCC in particular which is the Lead Local Flood Authority. All landowners and developers should be aware that the Board's formal prior written consent is required for any proposed works which could affect any ordinary watercourse in its district (excluding Main River, as these are managed by the Environment Agency). This is in accordance with Section 23 of the Land Drainage Act 1991 and the Board's own Byelaws, which can be viewed on its website: www.riverstouridb.org.uk. The Board is always happy to advise on proposed works which may affect any watercourse, which helps to minimise the need for formal enforcement action.

Biodiversity Action Plan

As has been stated above, the Board's primary functions are land drainage, flood risk management and water level management on IDB watercourses. However, many of the Board's operational activities, which are carried out under permissive powers, benefit local biodiversity. Therefore, to demonstrate its commitment to fulfilling its duty as a public body the Board, with the assistance of the Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership, produced its Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) in February 2010 (a copy of which can be found on the Board's website). Ecological surveys have since been conducted on all IDB designated watercourses and individual watercourse prescription sheets have been developed, which identify issues of particular interest or concern, recommend maintenance standards and identify potential enhancements.

A review of the BAP has been carried out by Carol Donaldson Associates (a brief update of the BAP document; a review of the actions taken to date to achieve the Board's stated objectives; and suggested further actions for the future) and a revised plan detailing future actions has been agreed by the Board. A copy of the revised BAP and the review paper are also available on the Board's website.

As well as improving routine maintenance standards, the BAP has also resulted in a number of small enhancement schemes, aimed at improving local biodiversity and reducing long-term maintenance. Over the last year this included works on South Poulders Main Stream at Sandwich, Port Rill at Wingham and Sturry Road Dyke on the outskirts of Canterbury.

Main River Rationalisation Project

The Main River Network was first developed in the 1930s, primarily to improve land drainage, reduce the frequency of flooding to agricultural land and boost UK food production. Over the years political priorities and technical criteria have changed and some Main Rivers no longer receive significant management due to their low associated flood risk, limited resources, and the fact that they mainly serve only local flood risk and land drainage. The Environment Agency's aspiration is therefore to transfer (or de-main) low consequence watercourses to Local Authorities (LAs) and Internal Drainage Boards (IDBs) by 2020, where the latter wish to accept that transfer and it is agreed to be appropriate. De-maining will follow a risk-based approach, considering wider catchment flood risk management, environment management and incident management.

To achieve this aspiration, the EA has identified low-consequence rivers in five frontrunner locations where it cannot provide the level of service the local community want. The EA has stated that it is not the correct organisation to be managing these watercourses and assets, it cannot justify funding to maintain them, and cannot be confident that it would be able to in the future. The EA's preferred option is to work with IDBs and LAs, formally agree with them to de-main the watercourse, and transfer the associated assets over the next 2 years in the frontrunner locations. The Stour catchment is one of these frontrunners so the Board is working closely with the local Environment Agency team to progress this project. A consultation period, led by the Environment Agency, is planned for later this year and further updates will be placed on the Board's website.

Association of Drainage Authorities

The River Stour (Kent) Internal Drainage Board is a member of the Association of Drainage Authorities (ADA), which is the national association for water level management organisations in the UK with over 230 members. ADA continues to work closely with the Environment Agency and the Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs (Defra).

More details on ADA's activities and policies can be found on its website: www.ada.org.uk.