

ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY

Introduction

This Environmental Policy has been adopted by all the Internal Drainage Boards (IDBs) in the Shire Group of IDBs. The general principles of environmental and conservation protection and enhancement are contained in this document and apply equally to all the IDBs within the Group. The basic policy framework has been added to for each District by completing the information in the boxes throughout the text.

Each Board has adopted this Environmental Policy to set out the basis by which the Board's activities meet the obligations relating to environmental protection and management under the Land Drainage Act 1991 and other legislation to undertake watercourse and water level management in a way that is compatible with nature conservation and environmental protection interests.

The Board recognises the need to positively demonstrate that its watercourse maintenance and capital operations and water management operations are undertaken in a manner that, whilst appropriately managing flood risk and other issues, also safeguards the nature conservation interests, and wherever possible, makes a positive contribution to the environment.

This policy statement was adopted on 27th June 2006 and reviewed in September 2011.



Yellow Iris
Iris pseudacorus

The Drainage District

Sow and Penk Internal Drainage Board is the relevant authority charged with the provision of flood defence and land drainage for the Sow and Penk Internal Drainage District that covers 2335 hectares (5524 acres) of low-lying land in the valleys of the Rivers Sow and Penk, around Stafford. The Drainage District stretches from Cranberry in the north, through Stafford, to Stretton Mill in the south.

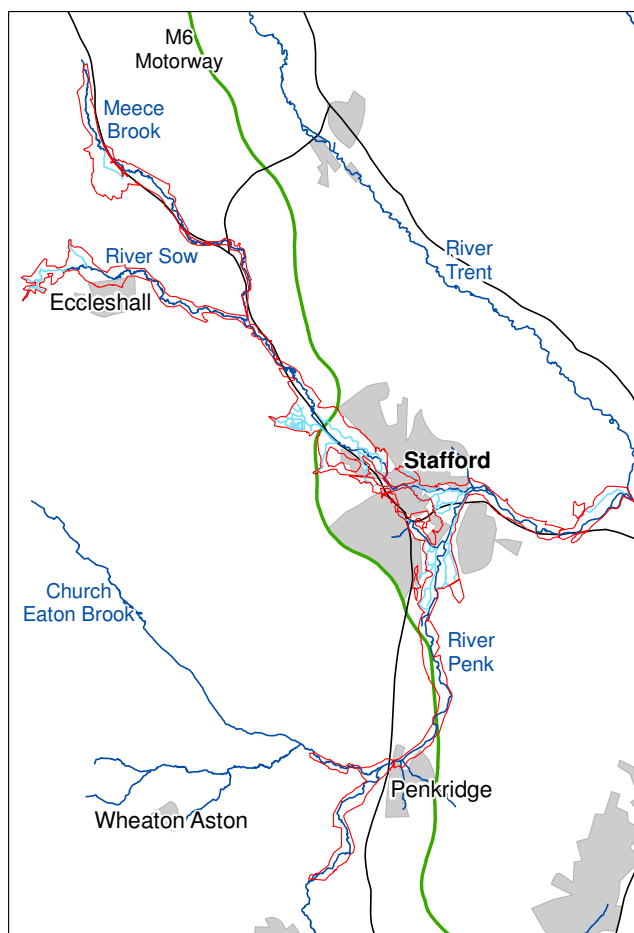
The District is protected from fluvial flooding by some raised flood defences along the Rivers Sow and Penk and a network of drains and other interconnecting ditches.

These predominantly man made, or heavily modified natural features, demonstrate the significance over one hundred years of water control has made in creating the present landscape from a marshy floodplain.

Within this area the Board has a supervisory role in respect of all matters relating to the drainage of land.

The Board has powers to undertake works on any non main river watercourse within the Drainage District. Despite this, direct maintenance is limited to the adopted watercourses which form the strategic arterial drainage system. These adopted watercourses extend to 40.27km in length. There are no pumping stations in this District.

Water levels are managed within the main arterial drainage system to provide an adequate water supply for agricultural purposes during the summer months and in winter provide land drainage and flood defence to the Drainage District. In appropriate places, special control of the water is exercised under local agreements – Water



Sow & Penk Internal Drainage District

- | | |
|---|--|
| IDB Catchment Boundary | Railway |
| IDB Watercourse | Motorway |
| Main River | Urban Area |

Level Management Plans – to manage water levels for nature conservation purposes.

The balance between these, sometimes conflicting, functions can be very fine and present management practices have evolved from close co-operation between the Board, agricultural occupiers and the needs of those living in the urban areas, over many years.

With the exception of “main rivers”, which are watercourses under the control of the Environment Agency and the watercourses under the control of the IDB, the responsibility for maintenance of all other watercourses and field ditches rests with the adjoining landowner, known in law as the “riparian owner”.



Brocton
Brook

Statutory Obligations

Internal Drainage Boards are subject to general environmental and related duties, requiring them to exercise their functions in such a way that minimises harm to interests of recognised importance or enhances those interests. Most specifically, general duties are provided for under the Land Drainage Act 1991 which was amended by the Land Drainage Act 1994. This expands upon the duties formerly contained in the 1991 Act and covers duties with respect to the environment, and recreation in respect of the natural and built environment and public access.

This requires IDBs, only where this meets their water management function, to further the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty and the conservation of flora, fauna and geological or physiographical features of special interest, and to have regard to the desirability of protecting and conserving buildings, sites and objects of archaeological, architectural or historic interest.

Internal Drainage Boards should also take into account the effect that any proposals they wish to promote could have on the beauty or amenity of any rural urban area, or in any such flora, fauna, features, buildings, sites and objects of archaeological, architectural or historic interest.

The Environmental Impact Assessment (Land Drainage Improvements Works) Regulations 1999 as amended, require IDBs to undertake an assessment of the impact on the environment of projects likely to have significant effects. The general duties have been strengthened by amendments to conservation legislation, specifically by the amendment to the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. The effect of the amendment is to impose additional conservation duties on drainage boards in relation to sites of special scientific interest.

Sites of Environmental and Conservation Interest

Within, or immediately adjacent to, the Sow and Penk Internal Drainage District, the following sites have been designated for their environmental and conservation interest:-

Special Area of Conservation (SAC)

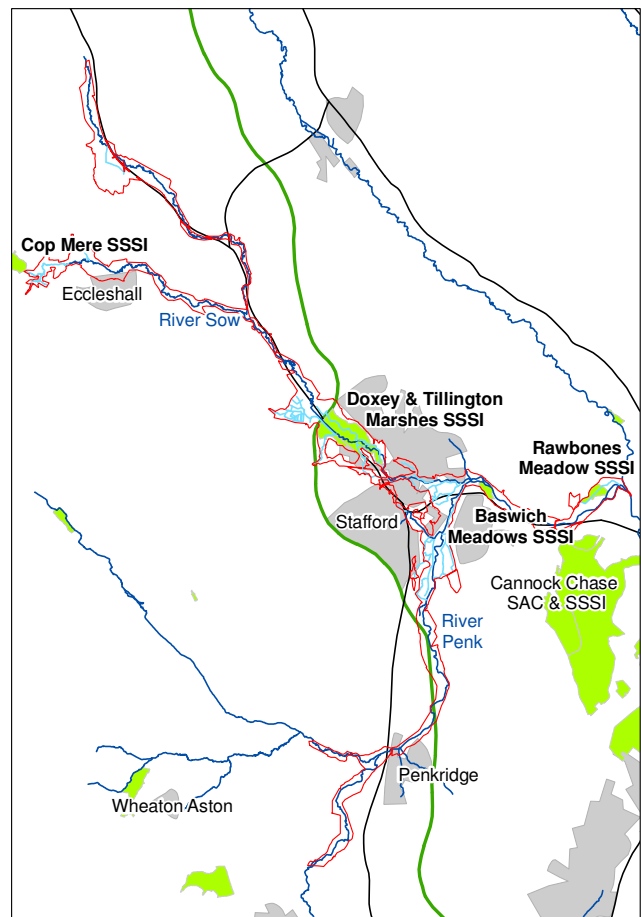
- Cannock Chase

Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)

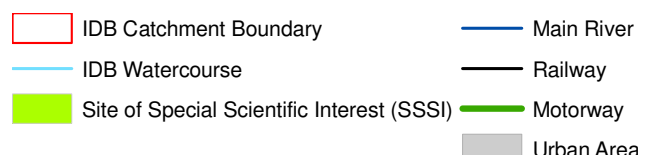
- Baswich Meadow
- Doxey & Tillington Marshes
- Cop Mere
- Rawbones Meadow

Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM)

- Roman camp, Kinvaston
- Essex Bridge, Great Haywood
- Two Roman camps, north of Water Eaton
- Anglo-Scandinavian cross, All Saints' Churchyard
- Eccleshall Castle
- St. Thomas' Priory



SSSI in Sow & Penk Internal Drainage District



Environmental Strategy

Routine Maintenance Operations

Regular maintenance of the Board's adopted watercourses is essential for land drainage and flood defence but will also take into consideration nature conservation interests particularly with regards to protected species and enhancements to the bank, marginal and aquatic biodiversity. Maintenance will be undertaken in a manner sympathetic to biodiversity.

Maintenance specifications provide guidance on the appropriate standards to be achieved, taking into consideration the operational needs of the catchment served, the impact of the work on the conservation interest of the watercourses and the adjacent environment and the natural habitats provided by the watercourse.

Watercourses in rural catchments serving primarily agricultural needs offer the greatest scope for effecting environmental gain and the specifications adopted for these watercourses reflect the advantage to the environment, to conservation interests and to the Board, in reducing the maintenance costs here.

Leaving a fringe of uncut vegetation at the waters edge in watercourses of an appropriate size helps stabilise the toe of the banks and provides over wintering shelter for insects and small mammals.

The Sow and Penk Internal Drainage Board undertakes routine maintenance operations on all of its adopted watercourses and these generally include the control of bank-side vegetation, control of aquatic vegetation in the channel, tree works and de-silting for the following primary reasons:

- Provision of a clear passage for flows within the watercourse.
- Provision of increased capacity during winter months.
- Stimulation of bank-side vegetation to maximise bank protection from erosion.
- Control of successional vegetation such as scrub.
- Allow inspection of watercourses and associated structures.
- Nature conservation interests.



Broad Meadow Drain



Common Frog *Rana temporaria*

Bank-side vegetation is controlled between July and November and includes cutting and flailing of vegetation growing on the banks of adopted watercourses using hand-held and machine mounted mechanical equipment. It is usual to use a tractor mounted flail mower, cutting the bank-side vegetation on one full bank and the lower half of the opposite bank, leaving an average sward height of 75-100mm on a 20m length of watercourse. Where access permits each bank will have a full cut during alternate years. All arisings from the cutting/mowing of vegetation growing on the banks will be left in-situ on the bank-side.

Mechanical aquatic plant control includes all hand and mechanical cutting of vegetation growing in the channels of adopted watercourses. This operation will normally be restricted to the latter part of the year. A hydraulic excavator mounted with a slotted weed-cutting basket is used where possible. In other places vegetation is cut by hand in areas inaccessible by machine. All vegetation growing in the channel will be cut, lifted and deposited on the bank tops to rot down.

Chemical aquatic plant control involves the application of EU approved aquatic herbicides (usually glyphosate) to kill vegetation in the watercourse channel, in accordance with DEFRA approved best practice drawn up by the Centre for Aquatic Plant Management. An application of herbicide will usually be carried out in the period May to July to ensure best control and undertaken by fully trained and certified persons. All spraying operations require approval by the Environment Agency.

De-silting of a watercourse will generally have to be carried out using a mechanical excavator every 5–10 years, depending on the accumulation of silt. The removed silt is normally deposited on the bank top. The frequency of de-silting works is significantly reduced by the annual removal of vegetation in the channel. Wherever possible, de-silting operations will be restricted to the latter part of the year (August – December). Prior to any de-silting works protected species surveys will be undertaken on the relevant watercourse by the Environmental Advisor to the Board.

Trees and shrubs can create potential flood hazards and obstructions to machinery and should be managed appropriately. Tree works will normally include pruning by

hand or machinery but may include in extreme cases felling as well as the removal of fallen deadwood from the watercourse. Tree work will not normally be undertaken during the bird-breeding season (mid-March – early August) except for exceptional cases and after surveys carried out by the Board's Environmental Advisor. Trees and hedgerows over-hanging a watercourse are usually lightly trimmed at the same time as the cutting of the bank-side vegetation. Any hand cut or large material removed from the watercourse will be disposed of in an appropriate manner.

The Board will consult with the statutory nature conservation organisation in compliance with any statutory obligation and may, in addition, consult with any conservation group or similar body that may have an interest in any particular watercourse under the Board's operational control.

Habitat Improvements

All watercourses affected by engineering works will, where possible, be reinstated to a more natural form and retain features of ecological and conservation interest. Where appropriate, habitat improvements will be included in the engineering works to ensure benefits to habitats and species.

Bank-side and waters-edge planting will be undertaken where appropriate, to provide cover, shelter and food for aquatic and terrestrial species.

Non-Native Species

Wherever possible all non-native species found on the banks and within the channels of the main arterial drainage system will be managed with the ultimate aim of eradication at the site and in the minimum, control to stop spreading. In some cases, it may be financially or otherwise prohibitive to undertake this and in these cases a policy of controlling spread will be adopted.



Giant Hogweed *Heracleum mantegazzianum*



Tillington Drain

Conservation Objectives

The Sow and Penk Internal Drainage Board will:

- Continue to develop environmental operational guidelines for incorporation into future work programmes to protect and enhance existing environmental resources taking into account the operational needs of the Board's wider remit.
- Work with Natural England and others to promote the enhancement and protection of nature conservation interests, in so far as may be consistent with its operational functions.
- Implement environmental Best Practice when undertaking works or developing plans to undertake works. Such Best Practice guidance shall either be in existence or be developed by the Board for the implementation of the project.
- Through the application of Land Drainage Consents and Byelaws, seek to control the inappropriate use, alterations and piping of drains and ditches within the Drainage District where these may have a detrimental effect on natural features of conservation interest, habitat and/or notable species.
- Undertake actions within the Board's Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) and report annually on these and also endeavour to promote the targets of the local BAP.
- In association with the other IDBs in the Shire Group of IDBs, publish annually a report of the conservation interests it has promoted, supported and safeguarded through its operations.

For Further Information Please Contact:

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