

ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY

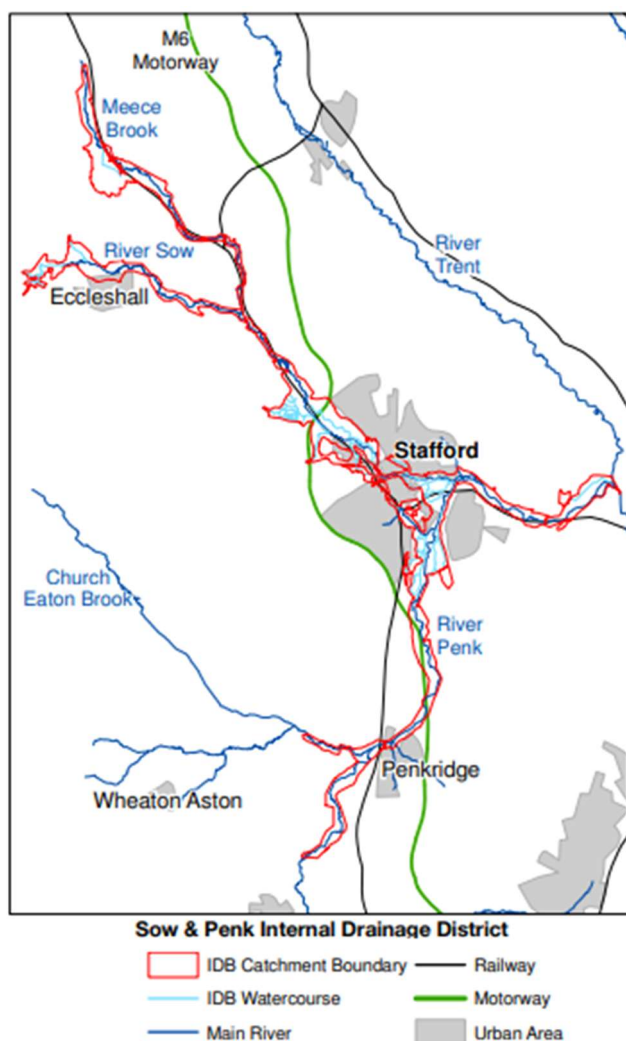
Introduction

This Environmental Policy has been adopted by Sow & Penk Internal Drainage Board 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 (as amended), other environmental legislation and European Union Directives 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 and economically viable, makes a positive contribution to the environment.

This policy statement was adopted on 25 November 2015. The Board may, from time to time, choose to make supplementary policy or review this document.

The Drainage District



Sow & Penk Internal Drainage Board is the relevant authority charged with the provision of flood defence and land drainage for the Sow & 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 had 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 watercourses which form the strategic arterial drainage system. These 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 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 River, which is under the permissive power and control of the Environment Agency, the responsibility for maintenance of all other watercourses and field ditches rests with the adjoining landowner, known in law as the "riparian owner", however the Board maintains those drains it considers to be part of the strategic arterial drainage system of the District.

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 (as amended). The amendments expand upon the duties 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.

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, the amendment to the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 and the Natural Environment & Rural Communities Act 2006. 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 & Penk Internal Drainage District, the following sites have been designated for their environmental and conservation interest:-

Special Area of Conservation (SAC)

- Cannock Chase

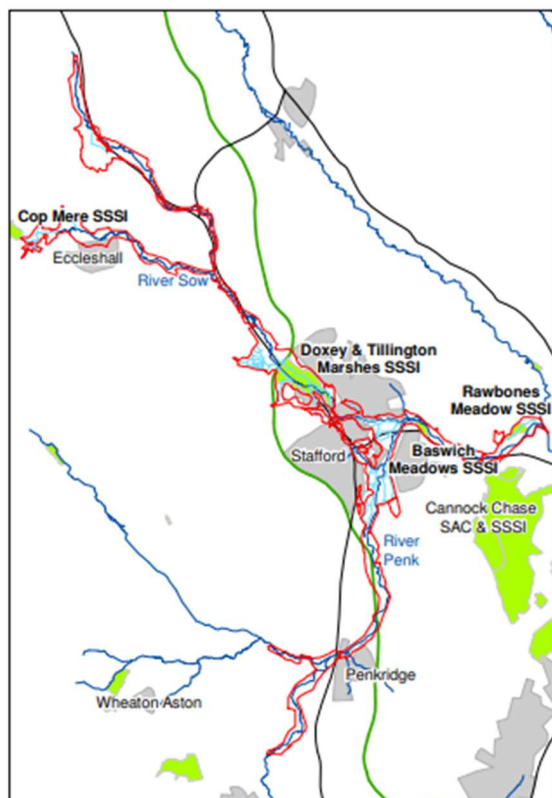
Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)

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

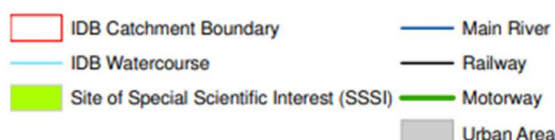
Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM)

- 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



SSSI in Sow & Penk Internal Drainage District



Environmental Strategy

Routine Maintenance Operations

Regular maintenance of the Board maintained 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. There is an advantage to the environment, to conservation interests and to the Board in reducing the maintenance costs by adopting suitable maintenance specifications for these watercourses.

Where possible, without creating additional undue risks of flooding, leaving a fringe of uncut vegetation at the water's edge in watercourses of an appropriate size helps stabilise the toe of the banks and provides overwintering shelter for insects and small mammals.



Tillington Drain

The Sow & Penk IDB undertakes routine maintenance operations on strategic watercourses and this generally includes the control of bank-side vegetation to control successional woody growth, control of aquatic vegetation in the channel where that vegetation is species that can hold the flow, and de-silting works.

This ensures clear passage for flow within the watercourse, provision for increased capacity during wetter winter months, stimulates bank side vegetation that maximises bank side protection and provides suitable food source for species such as water vole and allows inspection of Board asset structures.



Broad Meadow Drain

Bank-side vegetation is controlled between July and November and includes cutting and flailing of vegetation growing on watercourse banks 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 upper half of the opposite bank, leaving an average sward height of 75-100mm on a priority 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 drainage channel. 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 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 emergent 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 Board's Environmental Officer.

Trees and hedgerows over-hanging a watercourse can cause an obstruction for watercourse maintenance activity and the Board will inform the riparian owner of the requirement to cut the woody growth

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 and cost effective, 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 as part of a required capital work project or as part of bank stabilization work where appropriate to provide cover, shelter and food for aquatic and terrestrial species.



Common Frog *Rana temporaria*

Invasive Non-Native Species

Any Invasive Non Native Species identified on or in Board maintained watercourses will be reported to the GB Non Native Species Secretariat.



Giant Hogweed *Heracleum mantegazzianum*



Conservation Objectives

The Sow & 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.
- Take steps to remove barriers to eel passage in accordance with Eels (England and Wales) Regulations 2009 and to construct eel passes around obstructions where identified necessary.
- Through the application of Land Drainage Consents and Byelaws, seek to control the inappropriate use, alterations and culverting of drains and ditches within the Drainage District and to this end the Board operates a policy of non-culverting following that of the Environment Agency, each application judged on a case by case basis to ensure no detrimental effect on natural features of conservation interest, habitat and/or notable species.
- Endeavour where appropriate to promote the targets of the local Biodiversity Action Plan in normal operations and capital works where possible and report annually on these to the local BAP Administrator.

For Further Information Please Contact:

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