

Culverting Policy



1. Purpose

This policy sets out the Swale & Ure Drainage Board (the Board) approach to culverting within its district and to act as a guidance to developers and landowners

2. Introduction

Watercourses provide drainage for both developed and agricultural land and are vital resources not only for aquatic, emergent and terrestrial species, but for irrigation purposes. They are important features of the landscape, the watercourse and its banks providing habitat for many species of wildlife. It is important that watercourses and the associated riparian habitats are protected and enhanced for the benefit of current and future generations.

The Board considers it beneficial for watercourses to remain open wherever possible both for flood and environmental purposes. Introduction of a culvert can increase the risk of flooding and maintenance requirements. Culverting destroys wildlife habitats and interrupts the continuity of the watercourse linear habitat.

The Board recognises that watercourses within its District pass through very different land use types through rural, agriculture dominated landscapes to urban and industrialized areas. This policy accepts in some instances the use of culverts may be unavoidable.

The Board as part of its Biodiversity Action Plan is committed to delivering **Biodiversity 2025: A strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystem services** in respect of certain habitats, ecosystems, features and species found within its district. It has developed a target action of maintaining and enhancing the existing habitat and species diversity of watercourses within its drainage district.

Conservation of open watercourses is one of the Board's aims and where possible the Board will encourage and promote the removal of culverts in order to restore a more natural watercourse habitat.

3. Policy

The Board is opposed to the culverting of watercourses because of the adverse ecological impacts and the increased potential to create flooding. The Board will only approve an application to culvert a watercourse made under Section 23 of the Land Drainage Act 1991 (as amended) if there is no reasonably practicable alternative or if the detrimental effects would be so minor that they would not justify a costlier alternative. In cases where it is appropriate to do so, applicants will be asked to provide adequate mitigation measures for the damage caused.

Culverting Policy

Where practical, the Board will seek to de-culvert or daylight the watercourse, restoring open channels

4. Reasons for the Policy

The Land Drainage Act 1991 (as amended) places general and specific duties on the Board relating to the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty and the conservation of flora and fauna. The Board must consider these duties in discharging its function relating to flood defence and land drainage. The Board is generally opposed to culverting because of the likely adverse impacts which include:

- Effects on environmental features and wildlife habitat
- Increased likelihood of flooding due to blockage
- Increased impact of flooding
- Loss of floodwater storage within the watercourse
- Increased difficulty in provision of drainage connection
- Difficulties associated with repair, maintenance, and replacement
- Increased health & safety hazards
- Reduced groundwater recharge

5. Exceptions

The Board recognises there are circumstances where culverting may be unavoidable, for example short lengths for field access purposes for footpaths or by agricultural machinery or where a highway crosses a watercourse. In these cases, alternatives such as open-span bridges must have been considered. The length of the culvert restricted to the minimum necessary to meet the applicant's objective and environmental mitigation measures should be included in the proposal.

6. Certification

By Order of the Swale & Ure Drainage Board

06 February 2025

Certified by Ian A Thornton, Chief Executive Officer

This document is next scheduled for review January 2030