



## Witham First District Internal Drainage Board Conservation Policy

### 1. Introduction

The Witham First District Internal Drainage Board (DIDB) Conservation Policy outlines the ways in which the Board intends to fulfil the requirements of 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 watercourse 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.

### 2. Statutory Obligations:

**2.1. The Land Drainage Act 1991** as amended by the Land Drainage Act 1994, places a duty on Internal Drainage Boards (IDBs) to as far as is reasonably practicable:

- Further conservation and enhancement of natural beauty within the district.
- Further conservation of flora, fauna and geological or physiographical features of special interest within the district.
- Have regard to the desirability of protecting and conserving buildings, sites and objects of archaeological, architectural or historic interest within the district

**2.2. The Environment Impact Assessment (Land Drainage Improvement Works) Regulations 1999 (SI 1999 No 1783)** requires IDBs to undertake an environmental assessment where projects are likely to have significant effects.

**2.3. The Countryside & Rights of Way Act 2000** requires IDBs to consult Natural England on proposed works or operations if these impact on Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs).

**2.4. The Habitat Regulations 1994** require IDBs to consider the likely significance of their plans or projects on European designated sites.

### 3. Sites of Environmental and Conservation Interests:

Within or immediately adjacent to the Witham First DIDB District, the following sites have been designated for their environmental and conservation interest. Please note that our Biodiversity Action Plans also contain a number of biodiversity microsites including ‘Sites of Nature Conservation Importance’ and ‘Local Wildlife Sites’:

#### 3.1. Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI):

Wilsford and Rauceby Warrens	Comprised of the most extensive remaining areas of limestone grass heath in South Lincolnshire.
Potterhanworth Wood	Adjacent to the now drained fenland of the Witham Valley, Potterhanworth Wood is characterised by the dominance of small-leaved lime <i>Tilia Cordata</i> .

#### 3.2. Local Nature Reserves:

Mareham	14 acres containing several areas of new woodland, wildflower
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Pastures	meadows, hedges and open grassland.
Cross O'Cliff Orchard	At just a little under 2 acres and at least 150 years old – this orchard is now one of the largest remaining in Lincolnshire.
Lollycocks Field	Wildflower and wetlands habitats. The central pond provides a variety of wildlife

#### 4. **Maintenance Operations:**

- All maintenance operations are undertaken with minimum impact upon the environment, biodiversity and wildlife. Regular drain maintenance is essential for land drainage and flood defence, as well as maintaining the biodiversity of the watercourse.
- The Board complies with the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1991) when carrying out maintenance operations where protected habitats or species are identified as present.
- The bird nesting season is taken into strong consideration and environmental surveys are undertaken when work needs to be completed during this time.
- In the event of Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS) presence (such as Floating Pennywort, Himalayan Balsam and Japanese Knotweed) measures are taken to control growth and spread – INNS are also recorded both internally and to other concerned organisations.
- De-silting operations take place approximately every 5-10 years on a rotational basis, ensuring that the build-up of silt, mud and decaying vegetation is cleared from the drain bed. By preventing the build-up of silt, the drains are kept from drying up. This is important for those habitats and species for which the watercourse is central to their survival for example the water vole, otter and eel, along with those who use it as a hunting ground for example barn owl and bat.
- Bushing and tree coppicing operations are carried out to prevent the encroachment of plants and trees onto the Board's watercourses, allowing continued access. This is completed wherever possible before the bird nesting season begins, however if it is necessary to conduct the works prior to this time, a thorough survey will be carried out.
- Environmental surveys are carried out on the drain prior to the commencement of significant works, enabling the Board to assess the environmental status and to determine any notable species/habitats present, such as badger setts, water vole burrows or otter holts, as well as checking for presence of nesting birds. If notable species are found, mitigation for these is implemented.

#### 5. **Water Level Management Plans (WLMP):**

Witham First DIDB has no official WLMP—none of the SSSI within our district demand that a WLMP be written. The Board does however manage water levels throughout the district for the benefit of agriculture in terms of irrigation as well as for environmental measures.

#### 6. **Conservation Objectives:**

Witham First DIDB will:

- Work with others, such as Natural England and the GLNP, to promote the enhancement and protection of conservation interests, in so far as may be consistent with its operational functions.

- Through the application of Land Drainage Consents and Byelaws, seek to control the inappropriate use of the strategic arterial watercourse system, where such use could result in damage to natural features of conservation interests and habitat importance.
- Continue to work alongside the Wildlife Conservation Partnership to help ensure a growth in future Barn Owl populations.
- Continue to maintain a good record database of all biodiversity, habitats and species within the district, as well as sharing these records with other organisations, such as the GLNP.
- Consider opportunities of future habitat creation and/or enhancement works where possible.
- The ‘Check, Clean & Dry’ principle will be adhered to wherever INNS are present.
- Continue to develop operational guidelines for incorporation into future work programmes to safeguard and enhance the existing nature conservation resources, taking into account the operational needs of the Drainage District.

Version 2

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