

HUNDRED FOOT WASHES INTERNAL DRAINAGE BOARD

POLICY STATEMENT ON FLOOD PROTECTION AND WATER LEVEL MANAGEMENT

1. INTRODUCTION

Purpose

- 1.1 This policy statement has been prepared by Hundred Foot Washes Internal Drainage Board to provide a public statement of the Board's approach to their management of flood risk and water levels in their District.

Background

- 1.2 The Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has policy responsibility for flood risk management and coast protection in England. However, delivery is the responsibility of a number of flood and coastal defence "operating authorities" which includes the Hundred Foot Washes Internal Drainage Board. The Board maintained infrastructure is shown in para 3.8 below and on the plan attached to this Statement.
- 1.3 The Government is taking forward a new strategy for flood and coastal erosion risk management in England called "Making Space for Water". It has published a consultation document¹ and response² with a new policy aim for flood and coastal erosion risk management. The Government has also published a new series of High Level Targets³ to ensure delivery of this aim by individual operating authorities and the transition from its earlier strategy and policy aims.

- 1.4 The first target requires each operating authority to review its policy statement setting out its plans for delivering the Government's policy aim in its area. The review includes updating the assessment of the risk of flooding in the area, and its approach to reducing or managing that risk.
- 1.5 This policy statement fulfils that requirement. It may need further revision following the introduction by Defra of new output and performance measures in 2006/7 to replace the High Level Targets.
- 1.6 Copies of this Statement are available from the Board's office at Middle Level Offices March Cambridgeshire PE15 8AF and on its website (www.middlelevel.co.uk). Copies will also be sent to the Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, the Environment Agency and to local authorities in the Board's District.

2. HOW THE BOARD WILL DELIVER THE GOVERNMENT'S POLICY AIM

- 2.1 Hundred Foot Washes IDB acknowledge and support the Government's new aim for flood risk management. The Board's policy and approach will be consistent with this aim, taking into account the resources of the Board and the nature of the District. The Government's new strategy aims:-

To manage the risks from flooding and coastal erosion by employing an integrated portfolio of approaches which reflect both national and local priorities so as:

- to reduce the threat to people and their property, and
- to deliver the greatest environmental, social and economic benefits, consistent with the Government's sustainable development principles

To secure efficient and reliable funding mechanisms that deliver the levels of investment required to achieve the vision of this strategy.

2.2 The Board will adopt a strategic approach to flood risk management. This approach should provide economic, environmental and social benefits to the District. It should also take account of natural processes, use resources wisely and avoid, as far as possible, committing future generations to inappropriate options for flood risk management. However, the Board's District is also utilised as an Environment Agency flood storage area and the Board's functions in this respect are limited by this use.

2.3 The Board will assist the Environment Agency wherever possible in their provision of adequate and cost effective flood warning systems, integrating with the Agency so far as may be possible or appropriate given the special circumstances of the District, in response to flood emergencies and participating as necessary in exercises to develop and test emergency response procedures. The Board will in particular look to the Agency to co-ordinate the operation of Earith Sluice, Welches Dam Pumping Station and the Welney Gate. The Board will also encourage Norfolk County Council to give adequate warning of likely closures due to flooding of the A1101 road across the District.

2.4 Development Control/development planning

The Board will seek to prevent inappropriate development and land use that could increase flood risk. It will encourage well planned development by working to influence policy planning and decisions. It will do this by:

- Liaising with appropriate bodies to influence long-term development through Regional Spatial Strategies and Local Development Frameworks.
- Using the Board's role in the town and country planning process to seek to ensure that:

- development does not take place which has an unacceptable risk of flooding leading to danger to life, damage to property and wasteful expenditure on remedial works
- development does not create or exacerbate flooding elsewhere
- development does not take place which prejudices possible works to reduce flood risk
- development does not cause unacceptable detriment to the environment.
- Requiring applicants for consent from the Board, whether under the Land Drainage Act 1991 or the Board's byelaws, to provide appropriate flood risk assessments as part of their application.

The potential impact on the flood regime of the District through future development in the wider catchment draining to the District, is fully recognised by the Board and it will liaise with the Environment Agency in the assessment of structure planning, local plans and individual applications to seek to ensure that no adverse effect on the present flood regime of the District occurs.

3. THE BOARD'S ASSESSMENT OF THE RISK OF FLOODING IN ITS DISTRICT AND WHAT IT WILL DO TO REDUCE OR MANAGE THAT RISK

- 3.1 Within the District all the area is at flood risk, since the District is also a flood storage area under the jurisdiction of the Environment Agency. The Board accept that during the winter period, November - March inclusive, flooding of the District will usually occur. However, the Board wish for flooding of the District during the period April to October inclusive to be avoided wherever practicable and possible and the Board will continue to work with Defra, the Environment Agency and other relevant parties to take steps to reduce the risk of flooding during this period as far as is possible and to lower water levels each Spring in accordance with the provisions of the Water Level Management Plan for the District.⁴ The

Board look to the Agency to ensure that Welmore Lake Sluice can be and is used to its full capacity and that bed levels in the tidal river are reduced so that the maximum possible gravity drainage facility for the District is restored. They will also seek to ensure that the Agency maintain their flood defence assets which form part of the flood regime of the District at a satisfactory standard.

3.2 The Board will raise appropriate drainage rates and special levies to fund their flood risk management works, which will be based on knowledge of need.

3.3 The Board's powers to carry out flood risk management works are permissive (ie the Board are not obliged to carry out works) and their resources limited. The Board's policy is therefore to designate what the Board consider the most important watercourses in the District as "District Drains" and apply their resources primarily to the proper maintenance and, where necessary, improvement of such channels and associated structures. The watercourses and structures so designated will change to meet changing needs over time as necessary but the watercourses and structures at present so designated are shown on the plan attached to this Statement. Other watercourses usually are the responsibility of other bodies or the adjoining owners and the Board will only take action in respect of these latter watercourses where resources are available and where it is in all the circumstances appropriate for the Board to become involved, bearing in mind the powers available to other persons or bodies. The Board has a supervisory duty, under section 1(2)(d) of the Land Drainage Act 1991 over all matters relating to the drainage of land in their District and will, under this duty where appropriate advise others regarding the undertaking of works when it is not appropriate for the Board to exercise their own powers.

- 3.4 The Board's District is a Site of Special Scientific Interest, Ramsar site and Special Protection Area for Birds and the adjoining river Old Bedford/Delph (main river) is a candidate Special Area of Conservation. In carrying out their functions therefore, the Board will consider their activities within the wider environment, seeking to ensure the avoidance of any adverse impact bearing in mind the citations and designations applicable to the District. The Board will equally co-operate with other drainage authorities and organisations in seeking to ensure that adverse impacts on the District do not arise as a result of other activities. The Board are represented on the Ouse Washes Management Strategy Group chaired by English Nature, where issues relating to the management of the Washes are discussed.
- 3.5 The Board will carry out their maintenance and improvement works in an efficient and cost effective way using best practice and accessing appropriate specialist advice when necessary.
- 3.6 The Board will so far as is practicable and appropriate undertake and encourage the provision of adequate, economically, technically and environmentally sound and sustainable flood protection and water level management measures and so far as their powers permit seek to control development which could increase the risk of flooding.
- 3.7 As mentioned in this Section, the entire District is a flood storage area and intentionally flooded from time to time for that purpose. The Board's role is to seek to ensure that, as far as it lies within the Board's powers to do so, the traditional management practices of the Washes are enabled to continue and that the Washes remain in a suitable condition to fulfil their flood defence and conservation roles. In particular and within the constraints of the primary flood defence role, the Board would seek to mitigate the detrimental effects of

flooding of the District between April and October (inclusive). The following are the key details of the District:

Catchment Area draining to and including the District	1700 square miles
Total area of the District	2043 ha
Area of Agricultural Land	2038 ha
Other land including property, highways, etc	5 ha
Sites of Designated Environmental Interest	
Wetland SSSI	2043 ha
(Ouse Washes SSSI)	

(NB – Culverts under roads are generally the responsibility of the relevant Highway Authority ie the County Council or the Highways Agency)

3.8 Board Maintained Infrastructure

Other Water level Control Structures	17
Watercourses	19 km

Passing through or adjacent to the District are the following assets maintained by the Environment Agency

Old Bedford River/Counter Drain (adjacent to the western boundary)

River Delph/Old Bedford River (on the western and north western boundaries)

Hundred Foot River (on the eastern boundary)

Cradge Bank (on the eastern boundary)

Middle Level Barrier Bank (adjacent to the western boundary)

South Level Barrier Bank (adjacent to the eastern boundary)

Old Bedford Bank (adjacent to the western boundary)

Welches Dam Pumping Station

Earith Sluice

John Martin Sluice at Welmore Lake

Welney Gate

Black Sluice

- 3.9 The Board will exercise as required its powers under the Land Drainage Act 1991 and its Byelaws to seek to ensure that activities in and alongside its drainage system are compatible with the needs and purposes of the District.
- 3.10 The Board's District is a designated Washland and Flood Storage area. It is therefore designed to flood whenever the designated levels at Earith Sluice are exceeded.
- 3.11 The Board monitor the condition of their watercourses and structures and undertake management of water levels within the District through the proper operation of those structures. Consistent with this, a routine maintenance programme is in place to ensure that these assets are maintained to an appropriate standard. Where such standards are not at the appropriate level, improvement works will be considered and undertaken where it is appropriate to do so.

The Board welcome from their agricultural ratepayers, special levy councils and members of the public any comments on the condition of their system which could lead to any increased flood risk.

- 3.12 The Board will in conjunction with the Environment Agency seek to promote the need for works in the District and an understanding of the special needs and purposes of the District. They will also seek to achieve directly and through local councils a culture within which the watercourses are seen as vital to controlling flood risk, whilst providing an interesting

aquatic habit and dissuade abuse of them through dumping waste or obstructing flows in other ways. Individuals have an important part to play in recognising and understanding their role in helping to protect themselves from flooding and its impacts. People need to recognise and appreciate

- the vital role of watercourses in controlling flood risk
- the need to avoid blockages whether by dumping rubbish or obstructing flows in other ways

The Board will publish their proposed annual programme of capital and maintenance work at their offices and in such other ways as from time to time may be deemed appropriate.

4. ENVIRONMENTAL MEASURES

4.1 The Hundred Foot Washes IDB have nature conservation duties under the Land Drainage Act 1991, the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and as a competent authority under the Conservation (Natural Habitats etc) Regulations 1994. The Board will fulfil these in a positive way.

The Board's District is, as stated in section 3.4 above, a Site of Special Scientific Interest, a Ramsar site and a Special Protection Area for Birds and adjoins a candidate Special Area of Conservation. The Board therefore liaise closely with English Nature and other environmental organisations over the carrying out of their work. As mentioned earlier in this statement the Board are represented on the Ouse Washes Management Strategy Group. Much of the Board's watercourse maintenance work constitutes de-silting and is a vital and routine requirement to maintain the diverse habitat in the District. The Board maintain only a small proportion of the total watercourse length in the District, the significant majority being the responsibility of the Wash land owners.

When carrying out works, be it maintenance or improvement, the Board will aim to

- avoid any unnecessary or long term damage to natural habitats
- ensure no net loss of habitats covered by Biodiversity Action Plans, monitoring any gains and losses and reporting annually to the Environment Agency
- take appropriate opportunities to enhance habitats.

4.2 The Board will play its full role in implementing and sustaining the Water Level Management Plan⁴ prepared by the Environment Agency for the SSSI which constitutes the District and, in conjunction with English Nature and other interested parties, assist the Agency in reviewing the plan in accordance with DEFRA guidance.

5. REVIEW OF POLICY STATEMENT

Hundred Foot Washes IDB will review this Policy Statement following any significant changes in Government policy aims or targets for flood risk management.

References

- ¹ Making Space for Water; developing a new Government strategy for flood and coastal erosion risk management in England: a consultation exercise PB 9792 Defra July 2004
- ² First Government Response to the autumn 2004 'Making Space for Water' consultation exercise PB 10516 Defra March 2005
- ³ New High Level Targets for Flood and Coastal erosion risk management for Operating Authorities Defra March 2005
- ⁴ Ouse Washes Water Level Management Plan 1998