



Biodiversity Action Plan

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Prepared by: Mr. E. Johnson
Position: Chief Engineer

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1. Statement

This Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) has been prepared by the Witham Fourth District Internal Drainage Board in accordance with the commitment in the Implementation Plan of the DEFRA Internal Drainage Board Review of 2007 for internal drainage boards (IDBs) to produce their own Biodiversity Action Plans. It demonstrates the Board's commitment to fulfilling its duty as a public body to conserve and enhance biodiversity under various legislation and policy including, but not limited to, the Environment Act 2021 the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, the Environment Agency's 25 Year Environment Plan and Water Framework Directive.

Importantly, it reflects the Board's aspiration to maximise the support it provides to biodiversity, particularly UK priority species and habitats, and the wider environment in general through its day-to-day activities, by setting clear objectives, actions and targets. Many routine maintenance activities have benefits for biodiversity and the wider ecosystem in our lowland agricultural operating area in the south Lincolnshire Fens; not least our Water Level Management Plan (WLMP) and routine flood defence works on drains and sewers. This BAP will help maximise biodiversity benefits from our activities, positive management regimes, and demonstrate our contribution to the Government's UK BAP targets.

The Board has adopted this Biodiversity Action Plan as one of its policies and is committed to its implementation. It will review the plan periodically and update it as appropriate.

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Date15th June 2022.....

Name: Mr. Peter Richardson

Chairman of the Board

This Biodiversity Action Plan is a public statement by the Board of its biodiversity objectives and the methods by which it intends to achieve them. We would welcome appropriate involvement in the delivery of the Plan from interested organisations, companies, and individuals.

You can contact us about this Biodiversity Action Plan by writing to the following address:

Witham Fourth District Internal Drainage Board, 47 Norfolk Street, Boston, Lincs. PE21 6PP | 01205 310088 | drainage@w4idb.co.uk

Further information on the Board activities is available on this website: www.w4idb.co.uk

2. Executive Summary

2.1 Introduction

Assisted by other agencies, parties and partners, the Board has conducted a biodiversity audit of the drainage district and identified those species and habitats that would benefit from particular management regimes or actions. Following the audit of the Board's environmental aspects the BAP was developed using information collected from a selection of the over 700km of drains and sewers that the Board maintains. It identifies objectives set out in a Procedural Plan for the continued conservation and enhancement of biodiversity within the drainage district and goes on to describe targets and appropriate actions and outcome measures that will deliver these objectives. The BAP will be an evolving document that will be reviewed and updated regularly, and it covers the entire Witham Fourth District Internal Drainage Board (IDB) drainage district.

2.2 Species & Habitats: An Overview

Species Action Plans and Habitat Action Plans identified by the audit will uphold the biodiversity of the drainage district now and in the future. Key localised factors such as geology, topography and hydrology determine the formation of habitats and dictate their survival in the landscape today, and those species that colonise different soil types and conditions. In particular, it is hoped that implementing the BAP will contribute to the achievement of the Lincolnshire BAP (LBAP) and national targets for UK BAP priority species and habitats. Species and habitats not listed in the UK BAP that are locally significant have also been considered in the Board's BAP.

2.3 Routine & Capital Works: An Overview

An important element of the BAP is to examine the methodology of routine maintenance or capital works and to consider if there are any practical and economical alternatives to take into consideration if appropriate measures and Standard Operating Procedures are in place. Without proper environmental consideration for actions within the Board's jurisdiction and statutory powers, this may have serious consequences affecting ecology and habitat, and potentially, the wider environs beyond its boundary. However, this scenario is unlikely, given that the existing management techniques have been in place for many years without incident or criticism.

2.4 Preparing for the future: How the BAP Process Contributes

Inevitably, continued commercial development in the drainage district has consequences affecting land drainage, the immediate environment and possibly wider landscape and ecology. The Board's Engineering office already builds in a 20% increase in design capacity for any schemes and has done so for a number of years. Determining the detrimental affects of any potential development concerning surface and treated water discharge or culvert consent is done by conducting or recommending a full ecology survey and/or an Environmental Impact Assessment. This is crucial to minimise any potential impact by developments or during routine maintenance or heavy engineering schemes undertaken by the Board. In order to maintain a natural balance during its works, particularly as most is seasonally dependant, the work is approached with a Best Practicable Option. However,

wildlife has a seasonal cycle too and all measures are taken to ensure that programmed works limit any impact.

2.5 Drainage Ditches

A drainage ditch might not immediately be seen as an important habitat, but remember that the Fenland drainage and main river network has been artificially created and does not emulate a natural watercourse or river environment. Their main function is for land drainage and flood defence and there must always be a balance of maintaining an efficient drainage network to protect people, property and businesses, with environmental considerations. Biodiversity has its place in Board maintained watercourses and every effort is made to ensure the landscape is managed sympathetically to accommodate and promote biodiversity where possible.

Since 2008, c10 km of Board managed drain and c400m of sewer have been designated as Local Wildlife Sites following ecological surveys. These account for 6.8% of the main drain network and reflect past and present positive environmental management undertaken by the Board. It is important to highlight that these watercourses were singled out for survey, whereas many other watercourses exhibit similar diverse habitats that are seen as locally important sites to the Board and public alike. Biodiversity is thriving across the Board's drainage district and the BAP can build on the positive diversity already established. These areas are shown in Appendix A

2.6 BAP Overview

- As a partner in the Lincolnshire BAP, the Board is well placed to comment on positive or negative environmental management regimes. Furthermore, it has an Environment Committee to oversee practice and policy, and feed into the wider Lincolnshire Association of Drainage Authorities Environment Committee.
- Strong relationships developed with our BAP partners and others have led to wider connections and sources of data to add to the BAP.
- Eight Sites of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCI) are within the district and the boundaries of three abut Board maintained sewers.
- Crucial to the BAP is the present Water Level Management Plan which is fit for purpose and requires no change.
- Board maintained artificial drainage networks form connecting corridors for wildlife and habitat, and provide an effective method of flood defence.
- Water quality in the Board's district has significantly improved in the past 20 years and trends shows this to be continuing with respect to reducing nutrient and pH levels with increased dissolved oxygen. This directly reflects the overall improving health of the Board's drainage network and wider catchment.
- It is anticipated that biomass in the Board's main drains has increased by at least 40% in recent years and fish stocks and the size of specimens are increasing each year.
- It is demonstrated how geology and topography directly influences the species and habitats within the drainage district.

- Important aspects of the historic environment are maintained by the Board.
- The Board was part of the syndicate of Lincolnshire IDBs that won the Lincolnshire Environmental Award 2009 for 'Operation Barn Owl'. Owl numbers have markedly increased in the past 25 years and there remains plenty of scope to build on this success.
- In 2020 the Board introduced the use of the ESRI Arc GiS Collector tool, this allows all operatives to log sightings of target species and invasives in the field through their mobile devices.

With very few exceptions, target species and habitats already occur, so targets and Procedural Action Plan objectives recommend the Board continue to operate as it does now. While the BAP is meant to highlight any weaknesses and gaps on which to improve, there is little to comment on in detail. The Board recognises that there is always room for improving biodiversity and make every effort to ensure it meets its targets. The overall conclusion is that current environmental management regimes are maintaining and enhancing diversity, and largely being implemented by skilful and experienced operatives and staff with pride in the drainage district. Furthermore, the Board's ratepayers contribute a significant addition to this BAP being in Entry and Higher Level countryside schemes, with many proactive in the "Linking the Environment and Farming" initiative. The area today is therefore as healthy and diverse than it has ever been since land drainage. Perhaps the overwhelming success of the BAP is that for the first time in the Board's history, a near complete picture of the diversity and positive environmental initiatives and regimes the Board has in the drainage district. Hopefully it will enlighten others and encourage other partners and stakeholders to join the work of the Board.