

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRMEN

Once again we have been challenged with some extreme weather events this year, having had both some of the driest and wettest periods on record.

Despite this we are pleased that we have been able provide the most effective service that we can for the rate payers and have worked with our professional partners to manage water levels and flooding as effectively as possible.

We have carried out extensive watercourse maintenance work again this year, and would like to thank all rate payers who have cooperated with us to ensure access for maintenance has been possible. We are also pleased to have awarded new maintenance contracts this year in parts of the Parrett and Axe Brue Boards. With our growing workload, we are always on the lookout for suitable contractors who are interested in working with us, so get in touch if you know of someone who may be suitable.

We remain committed to influencing policy and process, locally and nationally, and we play an active part in the Association of Drainage Authorities where we are represented on the Board of Directors and their Committees.

This year we are hoping for a period of stability in terms of weather conditions, operations and policy but we are prepared should that not be the case. In the meantime, our thanks go to everyone who has worked with us over the last year and please do get in touch if you need our service.

We hope you find this newsletter interesting and helpful.

LAND DRAINAGE CONSENTS - Building in or adjacent to a watercourse

Please be aware that it is an offence under the Land Drainage Act to build anything in or close to a watercourse without consent from the Board. The Board can prosecute, and has done so in the past where this has happened. However, we want to be helpful and ensure that if you plan to build anything close to a watercourse, it is acceptable to the Boards, and is consented. If you are considering building/planting in or within 9m of any watercourse please speak to the Board's Development Control Team who will be able to advise you what will and will not be acceptable.

ANNUAL MAINTENANCE

The annual routine maintenance of the Viewed Rhynes runs from May to February each year, we maintain 1492km of watercourses across the Boards' areas and unimpeded machine access is required to enable contractors to undertake this important maintenance work. Please ensure that you do not place any obstructions within 9m from the top of the bank of the rhyne and inform us of any locked access gates.

MAIZE: Growing of Maize is on the increase and where crops are planted up to the edge of the watercourse machine access becomes difficult and unsafe, at these locations it may not be possible to undertake the routine maintenance at the scheduled time.

Where suitable access has **NOT** been provided the following options may be implemented:

- Track through/flailing of crops to gain access to the viewed rhyne and undertake the maintenance as programmed.
- Not undertake the maintenance and return at a later date to complete works: additional costs incurred and return trips may not always be possible due to contractor availability and/or budget constraints
- Where sections of viewed rhynes are left unmaintained this may reduce conveyance and increase flood risk to properties and business within an area.
- Where maintenance is obstructed, we may require the land owner to undertake the maintenance work themselves.

Please be considerate and provide tracking routes to and from the viewed rhynes and leave a minimum 4m maintenance strip that enables our contractors to undertake maintenance safely and efficiently on all viewed rhynes.

If you are planning on planting crops adjacent to viewed rhynes but are uncertain of our access requirements please contact the Board's Office on the number provided to arrange for your local Area Supervisor to contact you to discuss access requirements within your area.

RIPARIAN WATERCOURSES/CULVERTED WATERCOURSES: the IDBs have jurisdiction over all watercourses within each Board's area, the annual maintenance of the viewed rhyne system is undertaken using permissive powers within the Land Drainage Act 1991. As a riparian owner you have a legal obligation to ensure your watercourse(s) are maintained to a sufficient standard so that the free flow of water is not impeded. The Board(s) may, when required, instruct riparian owners to undertake works where necessary, this is normally done by agreement but may result in a formal notice being served if riparian owner(s) are unwilling to comply with requested works.

PEAT PROJECTS

The Parrett IDB and North Somerset Levels IDB have both been awarded grants by Defra to upgrade our water level monitoring capabilities in areas with peaty soils. A network of gauge boards and water level sensors will be installed in both Board areas. In addition, some minor improvements will be made to the feed routes in the Kings Sedgemoor area that are essential for maintaining and improving the supply water in summer. This work will enable us to manage water levels better in areas with lowland peat soils. Careful and sensitive water level management is needed in these areas during the hot summer months, when peat can become too dry and emits CO₂ to the atmosphere. When peat dries out, it can damage soil structure, causing compaction and land shrinkage, making it harder to farm in the future. More sensitive water management in lowland peat areas is a priority for the government's net zero policy and ambitions for reducing carbon emissions from land management. The IDB peat projects are one year pilot projects that, if successful, will hopefully lead to further funding in future years. They are a small part of a much wider initiative, which includes major changes to farm stewardship payments and other projects that will be working directly with farmers and local communities.

Engineering

Board Schemes propose for 2024/25

Axe Brue

Up to 10 new culverts are proposed as part of this years programme as well as repairs to banks and structures. These are designed to improve connectivity, water level management and access for maintenance and operation by the board. Some areas will include some channel improvement works as well as some investigative works to understand the key issues and determine the best solutions. The board has secured Somerset Rivers Authority funding to support on a number of these schemes.

Parrett

2 to 3 new culverts are proposed as part of this years programme with the remaining engineering input focused on upgrading and replacing water level control structures within the board area, including repairs to Cobbs Lease Clyce (funded by the Somerset Rivers Authority). The engineering team will also be supporting in the delivery of the remaining 2 outfalls on the Sowy/KSD scheme funded through the SRA. We will then be working towards our annual water injection dredging programme into the winter months.

North Somerset Levels

The Milleaze Outfall Rebuild at Kingston Seymour was completed in March. Also a programme of de-silting a number of Rhynes has been completed in February. The new Tilting Weir to upgrade Crossmans Hatch is programmed for this summer and also a new Tilting Weir at Hurstpool Rhyne to upgrade the existing penstock. External funding has been obtained for a NSLIDB Peatland Telemetry Project which will provide remote telemetry and gauge boards on a number of sites in the north of the boards district. A Board funded telemetry system is to be installed on the Oldbride River incorporating the main tidal penning structure Sampsons Sluice.

Contact Information

Office opening hours & Enquiries
9am to 5pm Mon-Fri
01278 789906

Email: admin@somersetdbs.co.uk

www.somersetdrainageboards.gov.uk

Clerk/CEO:	Iain Sturdy
Operations Manager:	Rob King
Maintenance/	
Contract Manager:	Matthew Wall
Finance:	Margaret Hammond
Rate Collection:	Nicky Cornish
Environment:	Philip Brewin

Emergency out of hours: 01278 789906
(You will be directed to the duty officer)

Flooding and pollution: report to the Environment Agency: 0800 80 70 60

OPERATIONS

All IDB structures are operated by our in-house team; if you think a structure may need adjusting, please contact the office staff who will be able to put you in contact with the local operators.

In 2023/4 there were many flooding issues, some of which were impacted by the condition of local ditches.



Landowners, please ensure that your own ditches are clear of debris and weed etc in order to promote the conveyance of water into our viewed rhyne systems, this will help reduce future flood water and accelerate drainage when needed.

If you are not sure whether or not the watercourse is maintained by the Drainage Board please refer to the map below which shows viewed rhyne (maintained by the IDB) as dark blue lines.

<https://somersetdrainageboards.gov.uk/boards-membership/maps-2/>

CHANGE OF LAND OWNERSHIP

Please remember to notify the Board when there is a change in land ownership. This allows the Board to keep its information up to date and provide accurate Drainage Rates. If you require a plan of land held in your ownership, please email admin@somersetdbs.co.uk

INCOME

In accordance with the Land Drainage act 1991, for the year ending 31 March 2025 the following drainage rates have been set – Axe Brue IDB 10.110p ~ Parrett IDB 9.255p ~ North Somerset Levels IDB 10.360p

Full Board Meetings Calendar 2024

Axe Brue: 15 April 2024, 17 June 2024, 4 Nov 2024
Parrett: 16 April 2024, 18 June 2024, 5 Nov 2024
NSLIDB: 17 April 2024, 19 June 2024, 6 Nov 2024

There will be an election for Membership of the North Somerset Levels IDB later this year

All meetings are subject to change. Please refer to the meetings calendar on the website for the current list of events:
www.somersetdrainageboards.gov.uk

Direct Debits



Axe Brue and Parrett IDB Drainage Rates can be paid by Direct Debit. It is a simple and effective method for ensuring payment of your annual Drainage Rate.

If you have not already done so, you can set up a Direct Debit easily by returning the completed mandate to the office in the reply-paid envelope.