




**AXE BRUE, PARRETT &
NORTH SOMERSET LEVELS
INTERNAL DRAINAGE BOARDS**

GOVERNANCE

**POLICY STATEMENT ON
WATER LEVEL & FLOOD RISK MANAGEMENT**

Version 1.1

Approved by the Boards:		
Axe Brue IDB	14 March 2023	 Chair
Parrett IDB	14 March 2023	 Chair
North Somerset Levels IDB	14 March 2023	 Chair

To be reviewed every 5 years or as policy changes.

REVISIONS AND AMENDMENTS

Revision	Date	Changes	By whom
V1.1	30/1/23, 31/1/23 9/2/23	Inclusion of Clause 9.2 to allow for requirements of the Environment Act 2021	N Stevens

1. Introduction

Purpose

1.1. This policy statement has been prepared by the Axe Brue, Parrett and North Somerset Levels Internal Drainage Boards (the Boards) to provide a public statement of the Boards' approach to management of water levels and flood risk within the Axe Brue, Parrett and North Somerset Levels Internal Drainage District (the District). The Boards are constituted by order of Parliament operating under the terms of the Land Drainage Act 1991 and are designated as flood risk and coastal erosion 'Risk Management Authorities' (RMAs) under the Flood & Water Management Act 2010.

1.2. The Boards serve the local community by managing water levels in ordinary watercourses and other water infrastructures within the Districts to mitigate against the risks from flooding and drought. In delivering their functions, the Boards will meet their environmental obligations and commitments and seek opportunities to enhance the environment. The Boards recognise it is their responsibility to ensure governance, local accountability and financial security, achieving value for money from all activities. As independent public bodies, the Boards are committed to the pursuit of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

Background

1.3. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) has policy responsibility for flood and coastal erosion risk management in England. The Environment Agency is responsible for taking a strategic overview of the management of all sources of flooding and coastal erosion. Lead Local Flood Authorities (unitary authorities or county councils) are responsible for developing, maintaining and applying a strategy for local flood risk management in their areas. Delivery is the responsibility of a number of flood risk and coastal erosion 'Risk Management Authorities' (RMA), which include the Axe Brue, Parrett and North Somerset Levels IDBs.

1.4. This Policy Statement sets out the Boards' approach to meeting the national policy aims and objectives in this area, as stated in the *National Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Strategy for England 2020* (the National Strategy); the statement will be revised to reflect future revisions of the National Strategy. It summarises what plans the Boards have in place to manage water levels and reduce flood risk, whilst protecting and enhancing the environment, and ensuring good governance and local accountability. Copies of this Policy Statement are available from the Boards' offices at: Bradbury House, 33-34 Market Street, Highbridge, Somerset, TA9 3BW. Digital copies can be downloaded from the Somerset Drainage Boards Consortium's website.

2. Governance and Local Accountability

2.1. The Boards will ensure that their policies and procedures enable effective representation of and accountability to drainage rate payers and the occupiers of non-agricultural land within their Districts, including triennial elections in line with the requirements of the Land Drainage Act 1991, and timely engagement with charging authorities to fill vacancies in seats allocated to appointed members.

2.2. Board Members must take decisions objectively in the best interests of the Board and uphold the ethical standards expected of public officeholders. Board Members must adhere to the Boards' Members Code of Conduct, including the seven principles of public life (Nolan Principles). The Boards will make sure that there is suitable training in place for Board Members and Staff, including on financial and environmental matters as appropriate.

2.3. Board Members must declare financial and other interests relevant to their function with the Board. Board Members will recuse themselves as appropriate where conflicts of interest may occur in relation to procurement, contract management and decision making.

3. Delivering the National Strategy's Policy Aim and Objectives

Aim

3.1. The overall aim of the National Strategy is to ensure the risk of flooding and coastal erosion is properly managed by using the full range of options in a co-ordinated way. The Strategy states that communities, individuals, voluntary groups and private and public sector organisations will work together to manage the risk to people and their property; facilitate decision-making and action at the appropriate level; and achieve environmental, social and economic benefits, consistent with the principles of sustainable development.

Objectives

3.2. The Strategy sets out five objectives in pursuance of the overall aim as follows:

- Understand the risks of flooding and coastal erosion, working together to put in place long-term sustainable plans to manage these risks and making sure that other plans take account of them;
- Avoid inappropriate development in areas of flood and coastal erosion risk and being careful to manage land elsewhere to avoid increasing risks;
- Build, maintain and improve flood and coastal erosion management infrastructure and systems to reduce the likelihood of harm to people and damage to the economy, environment and society as well as achieving wider environmental benefits;
- Increase public awareness of the risk that remains and engaging with people at risk to encourage them to take action to manage the risks that they face and to make their property more resilient;
- Improve the detection, forecasting and issue of warnings of flooding, co-ordinating a rapid response to flood emergencies and promoting faster recovery from flooding.

3.3. The Boards support the National aim and objectives for the management of flood risk and water levels and the Boards' policy and approach will be consistent with them.

4. Flood Risk and Water Level Management in the Boards' Districts

4.1. The Districts have been determined to derive benefit, or avoid danger, as a result of drainage operations. As such the whole of the Districts are at some risk from flooding, but that risk is managed wherever it is practically, environmentally and financially viable¹.

4.2. The Boards make decisions regarding flood risk within their Districts taking into account the following:

- Assets in place considering design standard and life;
- Environment Agency and Lead Local Flood Authority flood risk strategies, plans and maps;
- Other information such as the history of flooding and land use impacts.

4.3. The following outlines the key details of the **Axe Brue District** (refer to the plan provided in the appendices):

- Total area of the drainage district: 30,300 ha (303 km²).
- Catchment area draining to and including the District: 78,400 ha (784 km²).
- Area of agricultural land: 25,350 ha (253 km²).
- Area of other (non-agricultural) land: 5,000 ha (50 km²)

4.3.1. Assets for which the **Axe Brue Board** has operational responsibility:

- Water level control structures: 295 (of which 23 are culverts <10m)
- Watercourses (maintained): 623 km (of which 8.9 are culverts >10m)
- Raised embankments: 73.5 km (this doesn't include instances of accumulated spoil that have formed an embankment)
- Reservoirs: 0
- Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS): 0
- Pumping Stations: 0

4.3.1.1. Assets within or adjacent to the **Axe Brue District** that are maintained by the Environment Agency:

- Main rivers: 35 km
- Raised embankments/flood walls: 135 km (National Defences)

¹ It should be noted that the Land Drainage Act 1991 provides the Board with statutory powers to carry out works of maintenance and improvement for land drainage and flood defence purposes, rather than imposing a duty on the Board to carry out such works.

- Pumping Stations: 10

4.4. The following outlines the key details of the **Parrett District** (refer to the plan provided in the appendices):

- Total area of the drainage district: 24,600 ha (246 km²)
- Catchment area draining to and including the District: 173,200 ha (1732 km²)
- Area of agricultural land: 21,860 ha. (218 km²)
- Area of other (non-agricultural) land: 2,740 ha. (28 km²)

4.4.1. Assets for which the **Parrett Board** has operational responsibility:

- Water Level Control Structures: 371 (of which 23 are culverts <10m)
- Watercourses (maintained): 585 km (of which 6.8km are culverts >10m)
- Raised embankments: 350m
- Reservoirs: 0 ha
- Sustainable drainage systems (SuDS): 3
- Pumping Stations: 1

4.4.1.1. Assets within or adjacent to the **Parrett District** that are maintained by the Environment Agency:

- Main rivers: 802 km.
- Raised embankments/flood walls: 302 km (National Defences)
- Pumping Stations: 18.

4.5. The following outlines the key details of the **North Somerset Levels District** (refer to the plan provided in the appendices):

- Total area of the drainage district: 11,817 ha (118 km²)
- Catchment area draining to and including the District: 24,314 ha (243 km²)
- Area of agricultural land: 8,709 ha (87 km²)
- Area of other (non-agricultural) land: 3,100 ha (31 km²)

4.5.1. Assets for which the **North Somerset Levels Board** has operational responsibility:

- Water level control structures: 83 (4 Not-in-use)
- Watercourses (maintained): 195 km
- Raised embankments: 0.7 km
- Reservoirs: 0

- Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS): 8
- Pumping Stations: 1

4.5.1.1. Assets within or adjacent to the **North Somerset Levels District** that are maintained by the Environment Agency:

- Main rivers: 86.3 km
- Raised embankments/flood walls: 24.35 km
- Pumping Stations: 0

5. Building, Maintaining and Improving Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Systems

5.1. Through the operation, maintenance and improvement of watercourses and other water control assets within the Districts, the Boards seek to achieve a general standard of water level management that enables the drainage and irrigation of agricultural land, reduces flood risk to developed areas, and sustains environmental features throughout their Districts.

5.2. The Boards monitor and review the condition of their watercourses and other assets, particularly those designated as critical, over-spilling from which could affect people and property. Consistent with the resultant needs established, a routine maintenance programme is in place to ensure that the condition of the assets is commensurate with the standards required. The programme is reviewed periodically by the Boards to ensure they are delivering the appropriate condition.

5.3. Where standards are not at the desired level, improvement works will be sought where they are considered to be practical and financially viable by the Boards. Where improvement works meet the criteria set by Defra, financial support will be sought from the Government's Flood and Coastal Resilience Partnership Funding. Where appropriate works will be undertaken in partnership with other Risk Management Authorities and take opportunities to work with natural processes.

5.4. Work for and by the Boards will be carried out in accordance with best practice and to deliver best value for money taking due regard of local flood risk management requirements and strategies, opportunities for partnership working, environmental obligations and guidance available from Defra, the Environment Agency and other organisations.

5.5. Other watercourses usually are the responsibility of other bodies or the adjoining owners. The Boards 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 Boards to become involved, bearing in mind the powers available to other persons or bodies.

5.6. The Boards' powers to carry out water level and flood risk management works are permissive (i.e. the Boards are not obliged to carry out works) and their resources are limited. The Boards' policy is therefore to designate the watercourses in the Districts as either Critical, High, Medium or Low Risk and prioritise their resources to the appropriate maintenance and, where necessary, improvement of these channels and associated structures. The watercourses and structures so designated will change over time, as necessary, the current designated watercourses and structures are shown on the plans attached to this Statement.

5.7. The Boards have 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 Districts and will, under this duty where appropriate advise others regarding the undertaking of works when it is not appropriate for the Boards to exercise their own powers.

5.8. The Boards will also seek to ensure, where possible, that assets managed by other Risk Management Authorities, which also reduce flood risk to their Districts, are maintained at a satisfactory standard and may enter into a Public Sector Co-operation Agreement with another Risk Management Authority to achieve better value for money when carrying out work to reduce flood risk.

6. Regulation of Activities - Avoiding Inappropriate Development and Land Management

6.1. The Boards will take appropriate steps to help riparian owners understand their responsibilities for maintenance, byelaw compliance and environmental regulations.

6.2. The Boards will regulate as necessary, using available legislative powers and byelaws, the activity of others to ensure their actions within, alongside, and otherwise impacting the drainage system do not increase flood risk, prevent the efficient working of drainage systems, or adversely impact the environment.

6.3. The potential impact on flood risk from future development, both within their Districts and the wider catchment draining into the Districts, is fully recognised by the Boards. The Boards will take an active role in the assessment of local plans, major development and, individual (planning) applications, to prevent inappropriate development and land use to ensure that flood risk is not increased. This will include, where appropriate, providing pre-application advice and checking of flood risk assessments.

6.4. Where appropriate the Boards will seek contributions from developers to cover the cost of both immediate and longer term works necessary to mitigate against any resultant increase in flood risk. Such contributions will be recorded in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework and associated technical guidance.

6.5. The Boards will, where appropriate, designate structures or features affecting flood risk using section 30 of the Flood and Water Management Act 2020.

7. Communication and Transparency

7.1. The Boards will publicise the local risks from flooding, the reasons for managing water levels within the District and articulate the efforts being undertaken by the Boards to manage water levels and flood risk as well as the steps the local community and land managers can take to assist in its management.

7.2. The Boards will be open and transparent in their actions and decisions. The Boards will comply with the requirements set out in the relevant Local Government transparency code.

7.3. The Boards will provide an overview of the objectives and costs of their water level management operations by publishing on the website:

- A record of the watercourses it periodically maintains;
- A statement of the types of general maintenance activities it routinely undertakes and why;
- Their Annual Report to Defra (IDB1 Form); and
- Approved Board minutes and papers.

7.4. The Boards will seek views and respond to enquiries from the local general public in this regard and work with local partners to build a culture within which watercourses are seen as vital to managing flood risk, and enhancing habitat and amenity. Every effort will be made to dissuade abuse of watercourses.

7.5. The Boards invite any comments regarding the condition of their systems, which could assist with the management of water levels.

8. Working together

8.1. The Boards will co-operate and share information with other relevant authorities in the exercise of their flood and coastal erosion risk management functions. The Boards will contribute to strategies, plans and consultations relevant to its catchment and functions.

8.2. The Boards will assist the Environment Agency wherever possible in its provision of adequate and cost-effective flood warning systems, and assist Risk Management Authorities where necessary during flood emergencies. The Boards will participate as necessary in exercises to develop and test emergency response procedures.

8.3. The Boards have provided the Environment Agency and other local Risk Management Authorities with information on the major flood defence assets for which the Boards are responsible. The information is available from the Environment Agency at Rivers House, Bridgwater.

8.4. The Boards will seek to work with all relevant local organisations, in carrying out their flood and coastal erosion risk management functions and environmental obligations.

9. Environmental Measures

9.1. The Boards have nature conservation duties under the Land Drainage Act 1991, the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, the Protection of Badgers Act 1992, the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, the Water Environment (Water Framework Directive) (England and Wales) Regulations 2017, the Eels (England and Wales) Regulations 2011, the Flood and Water Management Act 2010, the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, **the Environment Act 2021**, Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries Act 1975, and as a competent authority under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2019. The Board will fulfil these in a positive way.

9.2 Further to the requirements of the Environment Act 2021², the Boards will review their Water Level Management Plans and Biodiversity Action Plans with reference to the local nature recovery strategy and relevant species conservation or protected site strategy for their areas.

9.3 Much of the Boards' watercourse maintenance work constitutes vegetation control and de-silting and is often a vital and routine requirement. Whilst inevitably some short or long term impacts may arise, this management is often essential to maintain the distinct assemblage of aquatic habitat and species present in the District. Such work will be carried out in a way that manages the potential risks to the environment. The Boards have access to environmental expertise from their Ecologist, and have Biodiversity Action Plans that indicate the way in which their functions can be carried out in a way appropriate to the environment and how the environment can be enhanced. The Boards maintain only a small proportion of the total watercourse length in the Districts, the significant majority being the responsibility of the adjoining land owners or of other bodies.

9.4 When carrying out work, be it maintenance or improvement, the Boards will aim to:

² Para 9.2 added as a result of the Environment Act 2021

- Avoid unnecessary or long term damage to agricultural interests and to natural habitats and species;
- Take appropriate opportunities to protect the natural and historic environment of their Districts, wherever possible, including the enhancement of habitats and water bodies.

9.5 The Districts are situated within numerous sites of national biological or geological interest including:

- **Axe Brue:**
 - Bridgwater Bay SSSI
 - Catcott, Edington & Chilton Moors SSSI
 - Cheddar Reservoir SSSI
 - Shapwick Heath SSSI
 - Sharpham Moor Plot SSSI
 - Street Heath SSSI
 - Tealham & Tadham Moors SSSI
 - Westhay Heath SSSI
 - Westhay Moor SSSI
 - Berrow Dunes SSSI
 - Severn Estuary SSSI, SAC and Ramsar
 - Somerset Levels and Moors SPA
- **Parrett:**
 - Curry & Hay Moors SSSI
 - Kings Sedgemoor SSSI
 - Langmead & Weston Level SSSI
 - Moorlinch SSSI
 - North Moor SSSI
 - Southlake Moor SSSI
 - West Moor SSSI
 - West Sedgemoor SSSI
 - Wet Moor SSSI
 - Bridgwater Bay SSSI
 - Severn Estuary SSSI, SAC and Ramsar
 - Somerset Levels and Moors SPA
- **NSLIDB:**
 - Puxton Moor SSSI
 - Biddle Street SSSI
 - Yanal Bog SSSI
 - Tickenham Nailsea and Kenn Moors SSSI
 - Kenn Church, Kenn Pier and Yew Tree Farm SSSI
 - Gordano Valley SSSI
 - Western in Gordano SSSI
 - Severn Estuary SSSI, SAC and Ramsar

9.6 The Boards have the following Water Level Management Plans:

- Axe Brue:
 - North Drain
 - South Drain

- Parrett:
 - Bridgwater and Pawlett
 - Curry and Hay Moor
 - Kings Sedgemoor and Aller Moor
 - Northmoor and Saltmoor
 - Othery, Middlezoy, Westonzoyland and Chedzoy
 - West Moor
 - Wet Moor
 - West Sedgemoor

- North Somerset Levels:
 - Oldbridge River WLMP
 - North Somerset (2005) IDB WLMP

9.7 The Boards will play their full role in sustaining the Water Level Management Plans prepared for SSSIs to maintain, or bring sites into, favourable condition, in conjunction with Natural England and other interested parties and review the plans in accordance with guidance.

10 Approval and Review of this Policy Statement

10.4 This Policy Statement was adopted by the Axe Brue, Parrett and North Somerset Levels Boards on 30 and 31 January, and 9 February 2023.

10.5 The Axe Brue, Parrett and North Somerset Levels IDBs will review and update this Policy Statement as and when changes to policies are made and, notwithstanding, within a period not extending beyond five years.