

SOUTH HOLLAND INTERNAL DRAINAGE BOARD

INFRASTRUCTURE

ASSET PRIORITISATION CRITERIA

Review date: November 2020

Version 3

To be reviewed every 5 years

Next review date: November 2025

Reviewed and Agreed by:



South Holland
Drainage Board

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1. Background

- 1.1. In general, the Board only adopts or ‘en-mains’ watercourses which are critical to the effective drainage or water level management of a particular area. The simple criteria governing the adoption of watercourses are the subject of a separate report – “Supplementary Guidance for Adoption and Abandonment of Watercourses” – which is available on the Board’s website.
- 1.2. All watercourses not maintained by one of the Boards, unless vested in some other authority, are the responsibility of riparian owners to maintain, repair and improve as necessary to ensure effective drainage.
- 1.3. For some time, the Environment Agency (EA) has classified its main rivers to assist with prioritising work and expenditure, and the WMA Member Boards have seen fit to apply similar appraisals of watercourses under their care.

2. Criteria for prioritising infrastructure

2.1. *Necessity*

It is axiomatic that the welfare of land drained by a Board-maintained watercourse should be critically dependent upon that drainage facility; otherwise it may be difficult to justify the support of the community at large for a need that merely affords advantage to a few beneficiaries.

2.2. *Land and property value*

A watercourse’s priority is based upon the value of the land and assets that it serves. In similar studies promoted by the EA it has adopted a unit of measurement known as the house equivalent per km of watercourse, which is also referred to in the table in 2.4.

2.3. *The worth of non-commercial land-use and enterprises*

Wildlife conservation sites and public recreation areas are important features within the Boards’ districts. Although estimations are largely arbitrary, values can be assigned to assets such as nature conservation reserves, sites of special scientific interest and public parks.

2.4. *Priority classes*

The following classes of priority have been applied to this exercise:

HIGH PRIORITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Development comprising 25+ properties or “house equivalents” per km of watercourse.• The main pumped or gravity watercourse in each catchment.• Arterial branches into large areas of agricultural land otherwise unprotected by High Priority watercourses.
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conservation sites with international and/or national-level designations.* • In flat fenland catchments the drainage route downstream of any High Priority lengths will also be classed as High Priority as it will have a critical effect on flow.
MEDIUM PRIORITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development comprising 10-24 properties or “house equivalents” per km of watercourse. • Grazing marshes. • Conservation sites with 'county' significance.* • In flat fenland catchments the drainage route downstream of any Medium Priority length will also be classed as Medium Priority (until it reaches a watercourse of higher classification), as it will have a critical effect on flow.
LOWER PRIORITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development comprising 0-9 properties or “house equivalents” per km of watercourse. • All other adopted watercourses protecting solely agricultural land.

* See remarks regarding maintenance works in section 6 below.

3. Prioritisation of watercourses for maintenance works

- 3.1. The Board undertakes a variety of maintenance operations on its maintained watercourses to ensure the watercourses' structural integrity and efficient conveyance of water through the system. The most regular of these operations is the removal of vegetation, without which the Board's target standards of protection for both agricultural land and domestic/commercial properties would be seriously compromised. The level of maintenance and timing of the works is dependent on the priority classification of the watercourse.
- 3.2. Each Board's limited resources mean that works and expenditure have to be targeted – generally being concentrated on the higher priority watercourses – and outline details are given below for each priority classification.

4. Maintenance of high priority watercourses

- 4.1. By the start of the cutting season each year, normally during June or July, the vegetation growth in Board-maintained watercourses is such that optimal conveyance cannot be achieved, which in turn increases flood risk in the event of heavy rainfall. Therefore, the order in which the drains are cut follows the priority system.

- 4.2. The start date of the cutting season each year is determined by a risk-based approach, dependent on weed growth, rainfall and saturation of the catchment, although the timing of works on individual watercourses may also be affected by adjacent land use and cropping of fields and/or as a result of environmental considerations.
- 4.3. As the cutting programme commences on High Priority drains, by the end of the cutting season they are likely to be grown up with vegetation again so there is allowance in the budget for a second cut of these High Priority drains, if necessary. This leaves the High Priority drains in as good a condition as possible over the winter and spring periods.
- 4.4. For environmental reasons, any vegetation cutting before the beginning of September generally takes place on one bank and the bed only, leaving the other bank undisturbed to provide habitat during the bird nesting season.
- 4.5. To allow the Board to access High Priority drains at any time of the year, the Board pays the adjacent occupier compensation to allow 24/7 access along the High Priority watercourses.
- 4.6. Further information about the Board's maintenance works may be found in the Board's "Standard Maintenance Operations Policy" document, and the "South Holland IDB Annual Watercourse Maintenance Policy".

5. Maintenance of medium and lower priority watercourses

- 5.1. The Medium Priority and Lower Priority watercourses are cut from the beginning of August through to December/January each year, although before the beginning of September generally only one bank and the bed are cleared of vegetation, leaving the other bank untouched for environmental habitat. As the Board does not pre-arrange to have 24/7 access to these watercourses, they have to be cut as and when access becomes available between crops.
- 5.2. Further information about the Board's maintenance works may be found in the Board's "Standard Maintenance Operations Policy" document, and the "South Holland IDB Annual Watercourse Maintenance Policy".

6. Maintenance of high and medium priority classifications for protected sites

- 6.1. Where a watercourse may have an effect on a designated/protected conservation site, the requirements of the site must be taken into

consideration when planning maintenance works, and the Board's usual maintenance practices may need to be altered to better support the aims of the site. This can be challenging, particularly if the site is surrounded by agricultural land where drainage ratepayers generally expect an effective standard of drainage.

7. Review of asset prioritisation criteria

- 7.1. The Asset Prioritisation Criteria and Asset Management Plan will be kept under constant review by senior management to ensure that it remains fit for purpose.