

### The 2023-24 season

For the first time the Board's annual maintenance programme was briefly suspended owing to the dangerous conditions created by the wettest October in decades. Water levels remained high across the district for most of the following autumn and winter with rainfall well in excess of the LTA (Long Term Average). A drier than average January provided some respite and the receding water levels enabled Board Contractors to complete desilting of 2km of the Lydd Petty Sewer. With February came 335% of the rainfall we would normally expect which delayed completion of the Abatridge Lesser Sewer desilting until March. The wet autumn and winter meant misery for some residents especially in Lydd and New Romney where the foul system failed necessitating 24/7 tanker operations. Mobile sanitation units were required in Lydd for the duration. The extended rainfall event tested water treatment facilities and the period was punctuated with frequent emergency releases of effluent. The elevated water levels across the district frustrated the EA's weedcutting effort. When water levels dropped some ratepayers reported the cutting to be substandard. Though we agree we ask you to be mindful that in deep water the EA's weed baskets are less effective than the adapted baskets of the Board's contractors. The EA is also struggling to replace experienced operators as they retire. They can only work with what they have got.

Despite the dreadful winter conditions the EA were able to complete desilting works on the Denge Main and the Five Waterings, the latter of which was an impressive sight that garnered praise from ratepayers and Board staff.

The district continues to benefit from our diligent and ever-present Bailiff David Cooke. We cannot overstate how vital this man is to the delivery of our function and we hope you all appreciate his supreme effort. After once again working tirelessly all summer and autumn to keep our annual maintenance programme on schedule he then had to deal with the challenges arising from the exceptionally wet and stormy autumn and winter. For his sake we can only hope this year is more forgiving.

### The 2024/25 season

Our new website should be operating soon and we hope the new format will be a more effective communication tool with more information relevant to ratepayers and the broader stakeholder group with whom we engage.

Though the EA have once again had their budget trimmed by central Government they are still hopeful of delivering

their full annual maintenance programme and scheduled desilting works. Board staff are encouraged by the EA's commitment to their ongoing programme to refit their pumping stations and several are currently being brought up to standard. At every opportunity Board staff reiterate to the EA how vital the pumping stations are for maintaining the established water levels across the district, but the fact remains that it's easier to make a case for some pumping stations than for others. This is also the case for flood embankments as with the cost of repairs remaining high year on year the Board is periodically consulted by the EA regarding the removal of flood banks. The Board's position on 'reconnecting rivers with flood plain' by this method remains one of steadfast objection. In most cases if ratepayers support reconnecting their land to Main River the existing infrastructure can be operated to achieve this without making irreversible changes to our flood defences. Once embankments have been breached and extra flood storage capacity has been created it will be impossible to restore them as it will increase flood risk downstream.

### Environment Agency news

*An important message from the EA – 'Due to decreasing resource and increasing financial pressures, we need to be more efficient in the delivery of weedcutting and associated bank flailing. Whilst previously we've managed to avoid tracking on standing crops (and will continue to wherever possible), there may be times it will be necessary in order to complete our annual maintenance in a timely fashion. EA officers will endeavour to communicate with land occupiers before any such movements occur. If this is not possible and crops are damaged then please contact our Estates Department by email at: [estatesouth@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:estatesouth@environment-agency.gov.uk). We hope we can count on your understanding on this matter.*

### General information

**EA incident reporting** – There are now two phone numbers for contacting the EA. For general enquiries use 03708 506506. To report matters including flooding, pollution or failing assets use the incident reporting line 0800 807060.

**Office visits** – To avoid wasted journeys please ring ahead before visiting the office as staff may be out on site or attending meetings. Our office number is 01797 227000.

**Unconsented works** - Please be aware that the Board has powers to enforce the removal of unconsented works. All works in or within 8m of an IDB adopted watercourse require Board consent, as do most works within the trapezoidal section of any

Ordinary Watercourse. If in doubt please ask and we will gladly advise. Our new website will include detailed watercourse consenting guidance.

**Mineral lick tubs** – Although we are grateful that the volume has reduced, these items remain the most common cause of culvert blockages; please gather up your empties before they become an obstruction. Bear in mind that they can also jam open flaps and doors which in a tidal situation especially poses an obvious and significant flood risk.

**Drain markers** – Unless your drains are clearly marked with posts projecting above the summer reed growth they may get damaged; as will our contractor's plant. We can accept no responsibility for the damage of unmarked drains or drain markers of insufficient length.

**Padlocks** – We are well aware of the need for rural security, but should you opt to fit or change padlocks or combinations on any access used by the IDB, please make a key available to us, or pass us the combination at your earliest convenience to prevent our staff / contractors having to crop chains / padlocks.

**Payment of rates** – The Board appreciates that these are testing times but chasing unpaid bills ultimately incurs cost to the Board which puts an inflationary pressure on the following years rates so we really do appreciate prompt payment of rates. In response to requests from our ratepayers we are now equipped to accept debit and credit card payments over the phone and in person. Please let us know if your billing address changes so that we can keep our records up to date, also check your rate demand thoroughly to ensure sure the land shown under your account accurately reflects what you own or rent. If you have any queries please contact the office on 01797 227000.

## Environmental update

**Beavers-** Contrary to the popular narrative; this recently protected species penchant for unsolicited engineering will only frustrate the water level management effort that defines the Board's function. At some point they will mysteriously appear within the district so please be vigilant and report any sightings; there is only a limited window for dam removal. The River Stour IDB's lower catchment is seeing increasing beaver damage as are some Dutch Waterschappens who collectively are spending millions on translocations and repairing beaver damage.

**Burning reed residues-** Please do not burn cut reed; the residues provide refuge for a variety of valued and protected species throughout the year and burning tends to kill them. Bankside burning breaches IDB Byelaw 8 – 'Lighting of fires'.

**American mink eradication project** – There are sadly no updates regarding the launch of this project. Removing mink

from the district will benefit multiple species hence mink control is an IDB Biodiversity Action Plan action. Key to the projects success will be the support of our ratepayers, in particular regarding the granting of access to enable trapping. Updates will be posted on our new website.

## An update from the High Weald National Landscape (formerly the High Weald AONB) : Funding for High Weald farmers

The Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) grant programme will end on 31 March 2025 so the year ahead will be the last opportunity for landowners located within the High Weald to secure significant funds for site improvements that cannot be funded by maintenance budgets or agri-environment schemes. FiPL funds both capital costs and one-off revenue costs, offering grants up to £250,000 with intervention rates of 40% to 100%. So far 110 land managers within the High Weald have received a total of £1.3 million with grants ranging from £500 to £100,000.

### Popular projects

- Infrastructure to support more nature-friendly grassland management, e.g. electric fencing, water systems and Nofence technology.
- Infrastructure that supports deer management, carcass processing and venison production, e.g. deer seats, deer chillers and larders.
- Hedge and woodland management machinery and equipment for more sensitive and flexible management, e.g. tree shears.
- Hedge planting – popular with landowners who wish to reinstate lost hedgerows but are not ready to enter SFI or CS.
- Natural flood management, in particular leaky woody debris dams (NOTE – THIS ACTIVITY REQUIRES CONSENT).
- Training courses (for individuals and groups) to help develop skills in nature-friendly farming and public engagement.

To find out more and get in touch for a chat please visit: <https://highweald.org/grants/farming-in-protected-landscapes/>.

**An update from the Romney Marsh Countryside Partnership - Wildlife of the Marsh-** Want to learn more about your local wildlife? RMCP are looking for local volunteers to help us survey our nature reserves for wildlife this coming season. RMCP are a local non-profit who manage and restore nature reserves across the Romney Marsh. Volunteers are a vital part of our work to help us protect and enhance the wild spaces of SE Kent. Contact us at: [RMCP@dover.gov.uk](mailto:RMCP@dover.gov.uk) to find out more or call us on 01304 241806. From bumblebee and butterfly surveys, to breeding bird surveys, RMCP monitor a wide range of wildlife on the Marsh and are always appreciative of an extra pair of eyes to help us spot things. No experience necessary.