

ROMNEY MARSHES AREA INTERNAL DRAINAGE BOARD

ANNUAL NEWSLETTER APRIL 2025

The 2024-25 season

A long, wet autumn and winter kept ground water levels high into Spring 24 delaying drilling which subsequently impacted both EA and IDB weed cutting programmes. On the upside the land drainage system looked healthy well into summer with no algal blooms or fish kills seen or reported. Spring found opportunities for repairs with a new door being fabricated and installed on the Fleet Petty Sewer and temporary repairs made to the Pewis Petty Sewer door. In May the EA completed the replacement of new bottom bearings at Jesson pump whilst the IDB carried out silt spreading on the Lydd and Abbatridge Petty Sewers. The EA's £40m Lydd Ranges Scheme comprising of an extensive groyne field, rock armour and beach recharge was opened in June. One of the final sections of the Agency's Folkestone to Cliff End Scheme (FoCES) to be completed, these technically and visually impressive works now protect our vulnerable western flank which had previously relied solely on beach recharge. A dry July enabled Board staff to commence the most extensive level survey ever undertaken across our combined District using the EA's GNSS system. This enabled us to establish benchmarks on 75% of the districts water level control structures in three weeks which was a feat. August saw Ostridge Contractors and FGS Pilcher embark upon the cutting of our 350km of adopted watercourses and although there were standing crop delays, most of the programme was completed on time save for parts of Denge which had to be abandoned due to awful ground conditions. The EA's new policy of compensating land occupiers for working through standing crops enabled completion of their programme on time. Both the EA and the IDB are most grateful to those who allowed access. Heavy rain in early September tested the Redoubt way culvert that was installed March 2024 by the IDB to reduce flood risk to the Redoubt Way estate. A major bottleneck was removed from the Jurys Gut (Main River) by Ostridge Contractors when they worked through the Lydd system; this would have been a major contributing factor to the high water levels experienced on the Gut / Kemp the previous winter. A combination of heavy rain and the belated presence of in-channel temporary piling works in October led to a spectacular bank failure at Brede sluice which was subsequently rectified with permanent piling works and engineered fill. November brought the relief of seeing the EA's Warehorne pump complete its testing and commissioning following an extensive refit which included a new fish-

friendly auger. During this period the Board was still pushing the EA to start their hand-cutting programme which was delayed due to lack of contractors, but multiple sections remain uncut. January's heavy rain equated to 136% of the Long Term Average which delayed IDB desilting works until the end of the month. A total of 5km of the Links Field Lesser Sewer, Startmarsh, Pump & Bentley Petty Sewers were completed with staggering volumes of arisings generated. In early March a road closure was necessitated for the replacement of the problematic culvert carrying the Links Field Lesser Sewer in Newchurch. By kind permission of the landowners an additional access culvert was installed upstream to enable future maintenance with plant and the run was desilted. We thank the respective landowners for their wholehearted support and cooperation. As March runs into April we continue to steadily elevate water levels across all districts in readiness for the summer ahead.

The 2025-26 season

A priority for Spring is to complete our level survey. The silt from the recent desilting works will be spread and where seeded when conditions permit. The 25/26 desilting programme includes Wey Street and Bilsington Lesser Sewers and we'll hopefully continue the works in the Fairfield system to prolong the life of our 116 year old pumping station at Brack. Last years announcement of our new website was evidently a tad premature; with luck we'll have more time to devote to this project this year.

Environment Agency updates

Simon Beale, Rother and Romney Asset Performance Team

'We thank those farmers that allowed us to track through crops last season. This increased efficiency tremendously, enabling delivery of the full programme. For the season ahead we understand there are financial incentives to encourage farmers to leave buffer headlands around fields. This is excellent news, as it will help reduce siltation in watercourses and enable us to avoid standing crops whilst undertaking annual maintenance. However, it's important that when a buffer strip is established on a tracking route, the relevant agreement allows for plant access. Should we encounter headlands along our tracking route, we'll assume that the agreement permits tracking. We also kindly request that farmers ensure adequate space is left for our vehicles and plant to access tracking routes.'

Ali Taylor, Rother and Romney APT Technical Advisor

'Desilting was successfully completed in the 2024/25 season on sections of the Willop, Denge Main, Five Waterings, Sedbrook and Wallingham Sewers. We'd like to extend our thanks to the landowners for their cooperation during these works. For the 2025/2026 season, the programme is still

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under review, but the following watercourses are being considered for desilting: Willop, Wallingham, New Romney Main, Abbatridge, Five Waterings, New Sewer, Sedbrook and Marshland Sewers. However, the program may be subject to change in response to potential budgetary constraints'.

General information

Unsolicited water level management – As much as we appreciate assistance from our ratepayers we do not need any help adjusting water level control structures thank you. Please leave them alone. Interference with sluices is in breach of Byelaw 19 and the Board can legally recoup any losses incurred rectifying interference and/or tamper-proofing structures.

Conservation headlands / buffer strips – Please be mindful of our access requirements for maintenance if establishing buffer strips. We (like the EA) will assume that any buffer strips we encounter can be trafficked by our plant.

Natural Flood Management – If anybody is opting to install any NFM structures in watercourses please bear in mind that they require consent from the Board.

Unconsented works – A gentle reminder that works in or within 8m of an IDB adopted watercourse require Board consent, as do most works within any Ordinary Watercourse. If in doubt, please ask and we'll gladly advise.

EA incident reporting – 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.

Mineral lick tubs – Please gather up your empties before they go free range and cause an obstruction. Bear in mind these items not only block culverts but also jam open flaps and doors which in a tidal situation especially poses an obvious and significant flood risk. Thank you to all of you who have made the effort, it doesn't go unnoticed.

Drain markers – Unless your drains are clearly marked with posts projecting above the summer 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 – 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 payments. 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– Charming though they are; as water level managers we do not relish the thought of Eurasian beavers arriving in the district. This is ideal beaver habitat and with few natural predators we can reasonably assume that they'll establish quickly and there'll likely be significant cost implications for the Board. The Dutch Waterschappens have spent multiple millions managing beavers in recent years. We ask you all to remain vigilant and report any sightings or field signs such as those shown in the link below. Although we can now register for the beaver class licence (CL51) our options to manage the negative effects of beavers remain limited.

<https://www.ada.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/LIT-60382-Field-signs-Beaver.pdf>

American mink eradication – Our district has suffered decades of predation from mink. Water voles, waterfowl, ground nesting birds, kingfishers, fish, and domestic fowl (among others) are all easy prey for these tenacious, destructive predators. Following on from the wholly successful mink eradication project in Anglia, Water Life Recovery South East (WRSE) is now underway across the region and the Board is an active participant both on the ground and on the steering group. Although the project is still largely unfunded volunteers have organised themselves to coordinate their trapping effort across the district with some remarkable early results. If you would like to be a part of the project please let us know. Some of you trap mink as a matter of course and we would greatly appreciate you contacting us so that we can collect data from you to feed back into the project. This project is truly science and technology based and success is guaranteed if enough people pull in the same direction either by hosting traps, trapping themselves or simply by reporting mink sightings. For more info or to report mink sightings please contact us.

And finally....

We were recently contacted by Fir Park Farm museum who are on a mission to save large redundant pumping station and agricultural engines from the scrapyards to exhibit in their museum. If you have any large Ruston, Crossley etc engines that you want gone, Ruth Millard would be delighted to hear from you. Firparkfarm@outlook.com