

# Hundred of Wisbech IDB

## Biodiversity Action Plan Report 2020-21

### Note on 2020-21 report

In November 2020 ADA published the new updated IDB Biodiversity Plan along with guidance and a press release here:

<https://www.ada.org.uk/2020/11/ada-launches-updated-biodiversity-action-plan-for-idbs/>



Internal Drainage Board Biodiversity Action Plan

## Guidance Document

November 2020

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The Conservation Officer will begin moving Board reports into this new format as soon as possible and keep the Board informed of progress. The new reports are good news for the drainage industry as they reflect years of work by many people to ensure that the most up to date legislation, policy and approaches are accessible and practicable for those involved with water level management and, by extension, wildlife conservation. The existing BAP reports provide a good foundation on which to build and update as necessary.

### Report Summary

#### **Invasive species**

None noted during visits. The District is susceptible to invasive aquatic plants, probably due to the level of development, so maintaining awareness is important.

Floating Pennywort continues to be found sporadically at the fringes of the Middle Level system but has not currently found its way in. All Boards are asked to keep an eye out for large rafts of a 'lily-leaf type' mass floating in the main channels as this is likely where it will turn up first. An information sheet will be shared separately and a training session has been suggested for later in the year.

#### **Barn Owls**

Sightings welcomed by the Conservation Officer. 2020 was an exceptionally poor year across the region.

#### **Water Voles**

Many excellent drains are found in the District and water voles should be considered present in most. There is a good variety of marginal riparian vegetation including sedges, grassy banks and substantial reed edges.

Boards are reminded to contact the Conservation Officer *before* any bank reprofiling or other works that may impact water voles take place. If unsure, please contact the Conservation Officer regardless.

## **Mink**

Mink project underway across the Middle Level; Cambridgeshire now has a dedicated mink officer, a funded position hosted by the Countryside Restoration Trust and Waterlife Recovery East (WRE). All sightings of this and other invasive species are important. A more comprehensive update is available in the 2020 Natural Level newsletter.

Mink have been trapped in adjacent districts in 2020 and 2021 and it's likely they are active in Board drains here. Opportunities to loan rafts are available so any reports or suggested locations are welcomed.

## **Kingfisher/Sand Martin**

Sightings of these species in the breeding season are welcomed by the CO to help build a picture of how their populations fare across the region.

## **Badger**

Badgers and their setts are protected in UK law but exclusion work is permissible under licence where a threat may be posed to land drainage. Such work is not always successful and can lead to further, more problematic, incursions so often the best course of action is to work around them. However, if this is not deemed possible the Conservation Officer should be contacted to determine the best course of action. Care must be taken not to disturb setts during routine management.

## **Otter**

Sightings or reports welcomed.

## **Other Environmental issues**

Outbreaks of Bird Flu were reported in small numbers across the fens through winter 2020. Please contact the CO if you come across dead wildfowl, birds of prey or gulls.

A number of development and infrastructure projects have been commented on by the Conservation Officer in 2020-21. Hundred of Wisbech IDB drains support a range of wildlife and measures should be taken to ensure their long term value through mitigation initiatives where possible.

## **Training/Advice**

At present, the ongoing situation regarding coronavirus means no public events are planned, however when it is deemed safe to restart events opportunities will be looked at and the Boards informed. In the meantime, the Conservation Officer is happy to assist with any enquiries.

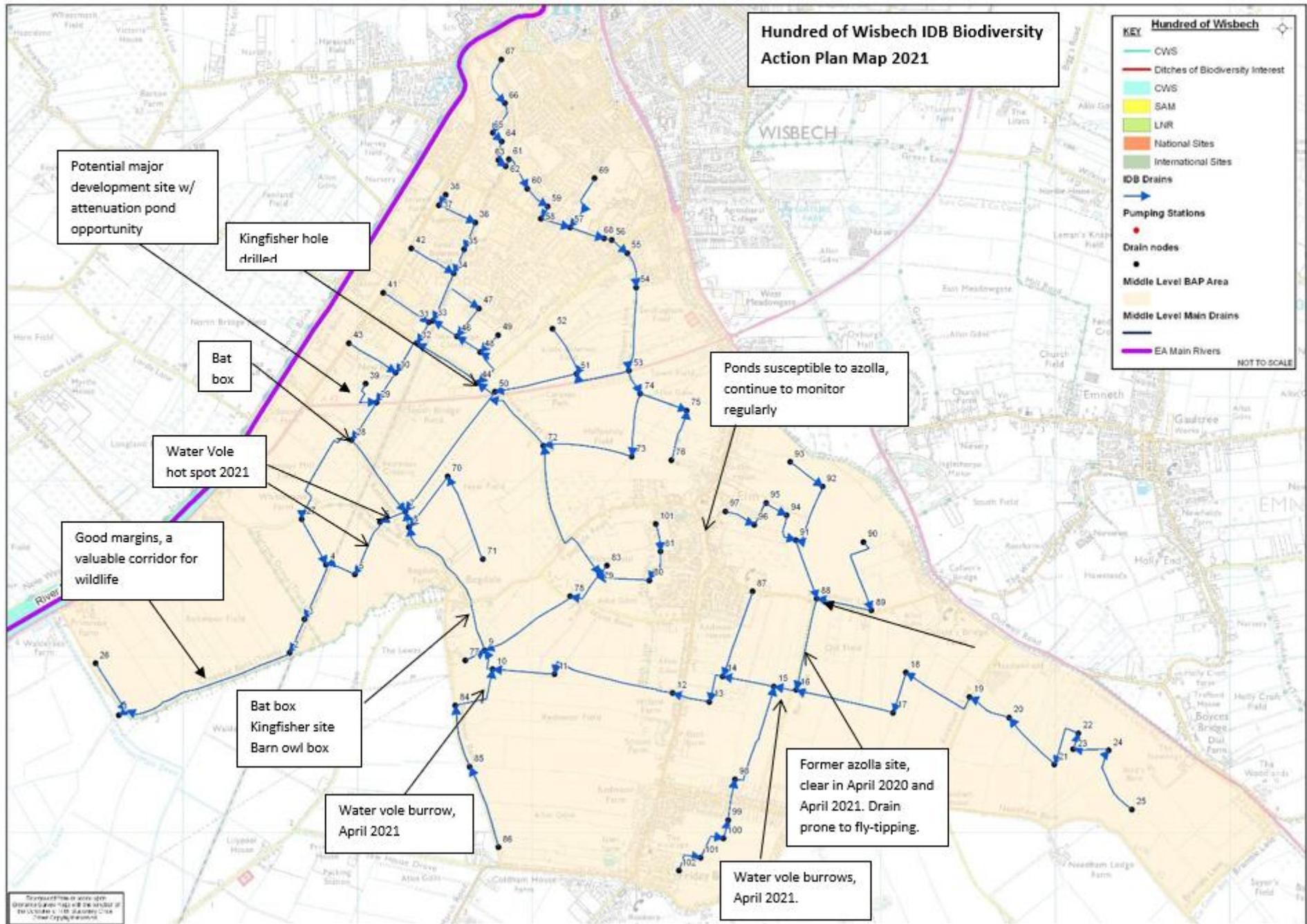
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**Figure 1** established and recovering margins following culverting works at node 2



**Figure 2** a typical Board drain on the edge of Wisbech; a high potential for water voles and reptiles despite the proximity of development



## Drainage Ditch Action Plan

| Target Reference | Target  | Action Reference | IDB Actions  | Partners  | Date    | Indicators   | Report  |
|------------------|---|------------------|--|---|---------|--|---|
| 1                | Manage ditches for biodiversity as well as for drainage   | 1.1              | Establish and maintain a management plan for routine IDB operations incorporating key biodiversity features                                  | Conservation Officer  | 2015    | Plan finalised and followed each year                          | <i>A map-based plan has been produced. It will be updated and added to as further information becomes available.</i>                                |
|                  |   | 1.2              | Look for opportunities to provide natural erosion protection such as marginal plant ledges when re-profiling ditches                         | Conservation Officer  | Ongoing | If re-profiling is carried out, opportunities identified       | <i>No opportunities to carry out this action were identified during the period. Opportunities may exist through development projects in future.</i> |
|                  |   | 1.3              | Provide natural erosion protection as in 1.2 if opportunities available  | Conservation Officer  | Ongoing | Length of ditch with ledge / natural vegetation revetment      | <i>As above.</i>  |
| 2                | Identify ditches of conservation interest and manage appropriately                              | 2.2              | Ensure appropriate management of ditches for priority species  | Conservation Officer, Plantlife, Wildlife Trust                     | Ongoing | Specified in management plan                                   | <i>Priority ditches identified in the management plan map.</i>  |
| 3                | Support the Conservation Officer in working with landowners to benefit wildlife in the district | 3.1              | Refer private landowners to the Conservation Officer for advice on creating field margin buffer zones and wildlife-friendly ditch management | Conservation Officer, Natural England, Wildlife Trust, FWAG         | Ongoing | Number of contacts received and passed to Conservation Officer | <i>No enquiries received.</i>   |
| 4                | Control invasive species  | 4.1              | Report any sightings of non-native invasive species immediately to the Conservation Officer and control as appropriate                       | Conservation Officer, Environment Agency, Plantlife, Wildlife Trust | Ongoing | Reports to Conservation Officer                                | <i>The 2 ponds in Elm and other sites in the District will continue to be monitored and any possible invasives reported to the CO.</i>              |

## Reedbed Action Plan

| Target Reference | Target   | Action Reference | IDB Actions   | Partners  | Date    | Indicators   | Report   |
|------------------|--|------------------|---|---|---------|--|--|
| 1                | Identify, assess and map any areas of reedbed over 0.5ha in size   | 1.1              | Pass details of any known areas to Conservation Officer   | Wildlife Trust, Natural England, Environment Agency | 2012    | Review of reedbed areas carried out                                  | <i>No new areas of reedbed over 0.5ha present.</i>   |
| 2                | Support appropriate reedbed creation   | 2.2              | Manage the District adopted drains, where possible, to assist private landowners who wish to create areas of reedbed on their own land  | Wildlife Trust, Environment Agency                  | Ongoing | (a) Number of requests received<br>(b) Number of landowners assisted | <i>No formal approaches were received during the period. Informal advice given as required.</i>  |
| 3                | Take conservation value of reedbed into account when planning and carrying out ditch and river maintenance | 3.2              | Where reeds are present, commence mowing or cleansing work outside the bird breeding season (7 <sup>th</sup> April – 15 <sup>th</sup> July). Where reeds are growing in water be aware of the potential for late-nesting reed warblers being present until late August and avoid mowing in that location. In exceptional circumstances where this is not possible, seek advice from the Conservation Officer. | Conservation Officer, Wildlife Trust, RSPB          | Ongoing | Reeds not cut during bird nesting season                             | <i>Reeds or other vegetation were not cut during bird nesting season. Alternate side mowing of banks was carried out where possible.</i> |

## Open Water Action Plan

| Target Reference | Target   | Action Reference | IDB Actions  | Partners  | Date    | Indicators  | Report  |
|------------------|--|------------------|--|---|---------|---|---|
| 1                | Promote the creation of ponds, lakes and reservoirs in appropriate areas | 1.1              | Consider pond creation as mitigation when a ditch has to be filled in or culverted | Local authorities, Amphibian & Reptile Conservation, Wildlife Trust | Ongoing | (a) Number of mitigation opportunities<br>(b) Number of ponds created | <i>(a) No ditch infilling occurred, (b) no pond creation opportunities in mitigation available.</i> |

|   |   |     |  |   |         |   |  |
|---|---|-----|--|---|---------|---|--|
|   |   | 1.2 | Support creation of flood storage areas and reservoirs   | Environment Agency, Natural England, Wildlife Trust, RSPB | Ongoing | Number of projects involved with                              | <i>No application for flood storage areas or reservoirs received.</i>                                      |
|   |   | 1.3 | Assist private landowners with advice, information or contacts as necessary  | Amphibian & Reptile Conservation, Wildlife Trust          | Ongoing | (a) Number of information requests<br>(b) Number responded to | <i>(a) No formal information requests received, (b) informal responses to inquiries given as required.</i> |
| 2 | Look for opportunities to create open water habitat when managing ditches | 2.1 | Create a pool at an appropriate ditch junction when re-profiling (see the Drainage Channel Biodiversity Manual, technique CL3) | Conservation Officer                                      | 2010    | One pool successfully created                                 | <i>Potential for attenuation pond creation in discussion.</i>  |

## Water Vole Action Plan

| Target Reference | Target  | Action Reference | IDB Actions   | Partners                             | Date    | Indicators   | Report   |
|------------------|---|------------------|---|--------------------------------------|---------|--|--|
| 1                | Manage ditches according to the law and to best practice for water vole | 1.1              | Assume water voles are present when carrying out works (discuss special circumstances with the Conservation Officer) and follow the ADA water vole mitigation guide | Conservation Officer                 | Ongoing | Measures incorporated in management plans          | <i>Water vole friendly ditch maintenance practices were adhered to.</i>  |
|                  |   | 1.2              | Publicise good practice for rat control near drainage ditches   | Conservation Officer, Wildlife Trust | Ongoing | Good practice publicised                           | <i>Good practice for rat control was publicised via the Environmental Officers newsletter issue 5.</i>             |
| 2                | Enhance drainage ditch habitat to benefit water vole                    | 2.1              | Look for opportunities to add a marginal shelf when re-profiling banks  | Conservation Officer                 | Ongoing | (a) Opportunities identified<br>(b) Measures taken | <i>(a) No further opportunities to carry out this action were identified during the period.<br/>(b) See above.</i> |

|     |                                |     |  |                                      |         |  |   |
|-----|--------------------------------|-----|--|--------------------------------------|---------|--|---|
|     |                                | 2.2 | Consider using coir roll to stabilise banks and provide marginal vegetation  | Conservation Officer                 | Ongoing | (a) Sites considered<br>(b) Measures taken               | <i>No appropriate sites for this measure were identified during the period.</i>   |
| 3-8 | Monitor water vole populations | 3.1 | Set up a survey programme to monitor water vole populations  | Conservation Officer, Wildlife Trust | 2010    | Surveys carried out                                      | <i>Informal presence/absence surveys were carried out by the CO and will be re-visited each year. It is an important district for this species.</i> |
|     |                                | 3.2 | Provide data on water vole to the relevant Biological Records Centres  | Conservation Officer, CPBRC, NBIS    | Ongoing | Data sent via Conservation Officer annually              | <i>Records passed on.</i>   |
| 4   | Control mink as necessary      | 4.2 | Carry out mink control as part of the Middle Level programme and <u>report all sightings</u> to the Conservation Officer | Conservation Officer                 | Ongoing | (a) Number of trapping days<br>(b) Number of mink caught | <i>See note in summary. No reports but traps available.</i>   |

## Otter Action Plan

| Target Reference | Target  | Action Reference | IDB Actions   | Partners                            | Date             | Indicators  | Report  |
|------------------|---|------------------|---|-------------------------------------|------------------|---|---|
| 1                | Improve otter habitat                           | 1.1              | Identify and maintain existing key bushes and trees near watercourses likely to be important for otters                   | Conservation Officer                | 2012 and ongoing | Sites identified and listed in management plans   | <i>Key bushes and trees identified on the Biodiversity Action Plan map.</i>                   |
| 2                | Monitor otter populations                       | 2.3              | Ensure any dead otters are reported to the Conservation Officer and transferred to the Environment Agency for post mortem | Environment Agency                  | Ongoing          | Otters reported to Conservation Officer, if found | <i>No dead otters were recorded in the District during the period.</i>                        |
| 3                | Reduce otter deaths related to eel and crayfish | 3.1              | Report incidents of suspected illegal netting, trapping or fishing to the   | Environment Agency, Angling Clubs & | Ongoing          | Incidents reported, if discovered                 | <i>Otters being drowned in illegal eel nets remain a concern. Members are requested to be</i> |

|  |                           |  |  |            |  |  |  |
|--|---------------------------|--|--|------------|--|--|--|
|  | trapping and road traffic |  | Environment Agency Fisheries Officers and the Conservation Officer | syndicates |  |  | <i>watchful for suspicious activity and report it to the Conservation Officer on 07765 597775 immediately.</i> |
|--|---------------------------|--|--|------------|--|--|--|

## Bats Action Plan

| Target Reference | Target                                 | Action Reference | IDB Actions   | Partners                                     | Date                   | Indicators   | Report   |
|------------------|--|------------------|---|--|------------------------|--|--|
| 1                | Improve habitat for bats               | 1.1              | Put up at least 2 bat boxes at appropriate sites, e.g. pumping stations               | Bat Conservation Trust                       | 2015                   | Number of bat boxes sited                                      | <i>Two bat boxes sited previously, one at IDB Depot &amp; one at Little Ranch lakes.</i> |
|                  |  | 1.2              | Pollard suitable trees to provide bat roosts  |  | Ongoing                | Number of trees pollarded                                      | <i>Any key trees identified on the Management Plan map.</i>                              |
|                  |  | 1.3              | Identify potential sites for a bat hibernaculum, e.g. in disused buildings or tunnels | Conservation Officer, Bat Conservation Trust | As opportunities arise | (a) Potential sites looked for (b) Site created                | <i>A potential bat hibernaculum previously created at Little Ranch, Begdale</i>          |
| 2                | Collect information on bat populations | 2.1              | Monitor bat boxes   | Bat Conservation Trust                       | 2015 onwards           | (a) Number of boxes monitored (b) Number of boxes used by bats | <i>Checks made when possible. Boxes in good condition.</i>                               |
|                  |  | 2.2              | Pass bat box information to CPBRC and NBIS  | Environmental Officer, CPBRC, NBIS           | 2015 onwards           | Data via Environmental Officer annually                        | <i>Data passed on.</i>   |

## Kingfisher Action Plan

| Target Reference | Target                                    | Action Reference | IDB Actions   | Partners             | Date    | Indicators                    | Report   |
|------------------|---|------------------|---|----------------------|---------|-------------------------------|--|
| 1                | Improve the quality of kingfisher habitat | 1.1              | Provide at least one potential nest hole in sheet pilings | Conservation Officer | Ongoing | Number of nest sites provided | <i>Two potential nesting sites created previously at node 44 near Wisbech cold store and at Little Ranch, Begdale.</i> |

|   |   |     |  |                             |         |   |   |
|---|---|-----|--|-----------------------------|---------|---|---|
|   |   | 1.2 | Leave kingfisher fishing perches where possible (e.g. occasional branch)                                   | Conservation Officer        | Ongoing | Number of perch sites left                  | <i>Many drains have suitable natural perches for kingfishers.</i> |
| 2 | Collect records of kingfisher breeding between March and July | 2.1 | Note sightings of potential breeding kingfisher and pass information to CPERC via the Conservation Officer | Conservation Officer, CPERC | Ongoing | Data sent via Conservation Officer annually | <i>Occasional sightings</i>                                       |

## Barn Owl Action Plan

| Target Reference | Target                                  | Action Reference | IDB Actions  | Partners   | Date    | Indicators   | Report   |
|------------------|---|------------------|--|--|---------|--|--|
| 1                | Improve the quality of barn owl habitat | 1.1              | Put up at least 2 barn owl nest boxes in suitable locations  | Wildlife Conservation Partnership                              | 2015    | Number of nest boxes provided                                      | <i>Two. One installed at Little Ranch, one installed at Chapel Farm.</i> |
|                  |   | 1.2              | Pollard suitable trees to provide natural nest sites   | Conservation Officer   | Ongoing | Number of trees pollarded  | <i>Any suitable trees will be identified on the management plan map.</i> |
| 2                | Collect records of barn owl presence    | 2.1              | Monitor nest boxes for use.<br>Have occupied boxes checked for success by licensed barn owl ringers. | Wildlife Conservation Partnership                              | 2015    | (a) Number of nest boxes checked.<br>(b) Number of nest boxes used | <i>Checks made when possible.</i>  |
|                  |   | 2.2              | Pass barn owl box information to CPBRC and NBIS  | Conservation Officer, Wildlife Conservation Partnership, CPBRC | 2015    | Data sent via Conservation Officer annually                        | <i>Data sent.</i>  |

## Procedural Action Plan

| Target Reference | Target  | Action Reference | IDB Actions  | Partners   | Date    | Indicators  | Report   |
|------------------|---|------------------|--|--|---------|---|--|
| 1                | Provide training on IDB BAP and conservation management of drainage channels for all relevant staff by 2013 | 1.1              | Establish programme of 1-day courses for IDB staff and members   | Conservation Officer, Wildlife Trust, Natural England, other specialists | 2013    | (a) Number of courses held<br>(b) Number of Board members / staff attending courses | <i>No events due to Covid-19. Board will be updated when events are planned.</i>             |
|                  |   | 1.2              | Establish suitable training for contractors' staff   | Conservation Officer, Contractors  | 2013    | Contractors attended training course  | <i>Training course run previously.</i>   |
| 2                | Take biodiversity into account when planning and undertaking capital works                                  | 2.1              | Consult with the Conservation Officer and choose the best possible mitigation solutions for biodiversity, e.g. fish-friendly pumps | Conservation Officer   | Ongoing | (a) Number of capital schemes undertaken<br>(b) Number of schemes commented on      | <i>Comments were made on several development projects and biodiversity value highlighted</i> |