

Lower Medway Internal Drainage Board

Functions of the Drainage Board



The Land Drainage Act 1930 (now superseded by the Land Drainage Act 1991 and 1994) constituted drainage districts, with a Drainage Board for each district, exercising a general supervision over all matters relating to the drainage of land inside their districts.

Internal drainage districts are areas which derive benefit or avoid danger as a result of drainage operations (Drainage operations cover not only works connected with rivers and watercourses, but also sea defences and coastal protection).

Internal Drainage Boards obtain their expenses mainly from drainage rates levied on occupiers of agricultural land within the district and special levies on the local City, Borough or District Councils whose areas coincide with the Board's drainage district. The proportion of drainage rates paid by agricultural land occupiers depends on the annual value of the land in relation to the annual value of all other property, i.e. business properties, dwellings and public utilities, etc.

Difficulties have arisen when one tries to define an area of benefit. This Board was set up in 1934 following a Public Inquiry held by the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries. There have been several appeals against the proposed inclusion of certain areas in the drainage district. As a result of that Inquiry the Minister set out various principles incorporated in what has become known as the Medway Letter. Areas of benefit were defined as those areas included in a contour line eight feet above flood level in rural areas and flood level in urban areas for the non-tidal districts and five feet above high tide in coastal districts. These principles have been followed in the setting up of Internal Drainage Boards all over England and in the case of the Lower Medway, the Minister's own engineers fixed the boundary strictly according to the Medway Letter.

It will thus be seen that it is not necessary to adjoin a watercourse or be sited at the foot of a sea wall to be included in a drainage district. The criteria is whether your property lies within an area of benefit as defined previously. If it does, then you are liable for drainage rates.

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Your property lies within the drainage district and is therefore rated for drainage purposes. The method of calculating the rate is shown on the demand note.

Some people are worried because they see an item for "land drainage and coastal protection" on their Council Tax Demand, payable to their local Authority. They naturally wonder if they are paying twice for the same thing.

The explanation is as follows:

The Environment Agency which is responsible for certain main river and sea defences, is not a rating authority and obtains its money mainly by precepting Internal Drainage Boards and various County Councils within its area. The precept on the Internal Drainage Board is shown on our rate demands; the precept on the County Councils is shown on your Council Tax Demand.

This latter precept on the County Council is spread over every Council Tax payer in the local authority's area whether they lie within a drainage district or not. Thus it is that every Council Tax payer in the County contributes towards land drainage costs. Those occupiers of agricultural land, however, in the drainage district pay not only their general contribution, but a special contribution as well through the Board's rates.