

Press release

WATER SUPPLY RESTORED TO SOMERSET COASTAL WILDLIFE SITE WITH NEW PIPE DRILLED UNDER THE RIVER PARRETT



The Parrett Drainage Board, in conjunction with SW Directional Drilling Ltd, has successfully drilled a new 252 metre long water supply pipe under the tidal River Parrett near to Comwich in Somerset. This is one of the longest pipelines installed under a river in the south west and replaces old ductile iron pipes damaged by high tides in 2015.

The new pipeline will supply fresh water from the Quantock Hills, via a route under the River Parrett, to an area of the agricultural and nature conservation land near to village of Pawlett, known locally as Pawlett Hams and Pawlett Meads. The Hams are famous for their agriculturally productive coastal grazing marshes and network of wildlife rich ditches and rhynes that support populations of water voles, rare plants and insects. The Hams also provide vitally important habitat for large numbers of migratory water birds, such as Curlew, Shelduck, Dunlin and Redshank, that visit the Severn Estuary in winter months.

Since the damage to the original pipe occurred, the area has been dangerously short of water for the cattle that graze there and the wetland wildlife that lives there. This new

pipeline will secure a supply of water to the area for at least the next 50 years, which will enable farmers to graze their fields and help restore the wildlife rich ditches to good health.

Colin Leppard, a local Natural England adviser helped the Parrett Drainage Board to deliver the environmental and economic benefits of the project.

He said: "We are delighted to see the project completed. Once the pipeline delivers freshwater to the area, it should quickly make the ditches stock-proof. This will provide drinking water for grazing animals, as well as improved habitat for the plants and animals that live there. It will also help support the water birds that use the site."

Will Barnard of Somerset Wetland Wildlife Foundation Ltd (SWWF Ltd) says that "the freshwater supply for the Pawlett Hams, via the pipes under the Parrett, is critical for our grazing animals during the summer. Those animals are an integral part of SWWF's management of the rare habitats on the Hams, and play an important role in the local economy. Without the repairs conducted by the Drainage Board, the long term future of livestock and habitat management on the Hams would have been severely compromised."

For further information contact:

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Notes to editors: Drilling of the pilot bore under, through a mixture of Clay and Rock commenced Tuesday 1st of August and the pipe installation was complete by Friday 4th of August, installing a 252m length of 355mm diameter pipe. The Board and its contractors are currently working to connect the pipe to the Cannington Brook to allow water from the south side of the river to be pumped to the north side next week.

Pawlett Hams is 397 hectares of rare, coastal, freshwater grazing marsh. It forms an important part of the Bridgwater Bay Site of Special Scientific Interest, which is predominately intertidal.

The site is also notified at European and International level.

Drainage Boards:

- The Somerset Drainage Boards Consortium comprises two internal drainage boards, the Axe Brue and the Parrett Drainage Board. The Boards provide the vital services of drainage and irrigation to 136,000 acres (55,000 ha) of the Somerset Levels and Moors much of it below sea level, which includes some 22,000 businesses and properties.
- It maintains a network of 1,200 km of rhynes and watercourses, but is not responsible for the main rivers, which are the preserve of the Environment Agency.
- Regular clearing and dredging is necessary to keep the rhynes in urban and rural areas clear of vegetation, silt and debris to enable water to flow freely to the main rivers.

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