

## Ince and Frodsham Marshes

### How will water levels be managed in the future?

**We have completed investigations into water levels on Ince and Frodsham Marshes and have a preferred option for our role in the future. We now need to know if you have any information that can help us make our final decision.**



Frodsham Pumping Station

### Introduction

Ince and Frodsham Marshes are low lying areas of predominantly agricultural land in Cheshire. Water levels on the Marshes are controlled by a network of drainage ditches and river channels and two pumping stations. The Environment Agency currently maintains and operates the pumping stations and regularly maintains the river channels. If left to their natural state the Marshes would become increasingly wet and boggy.

Limited funds mean that we can no longer carry out the river maintenance work that we have done in the past. We assess our maintenance activities using a risk based approach and we invest in the activities that contribute to managing flood and coastal risk where they are economically and environmentally justified. We will continue to maintain assets which reduce flood risk to people and built property where it is economical to do so.

In 2010 we commissioned a project looking at different ways to manage water levels on the marshes in the future. With the help of local people, we identified four possible options to study in more detail, specifically focussing on benefits, consequences and costs. These options were:

- Continue with current maintenance and pumping
- Turn off both pumping stations and stop maintenance
- Continue to operate Ince Pumping Station but turn Frodsham Pumping Station off
- Continue to operate Frodsham Pumping Station but turn Ince Pumping Station off

The more detailed investigation has recently been completed. Based on the results, we have now chosen a preferred option.

## Our preferred option

Our preferred option is for us to stop operating the pumping stations and maintaining the watercourses. We will do this over a reasonable period of time. As part of this option we would make the pumping stations safe and turn them off or remove them completely. We understand that this option may have significant impacts on the local land owners and land managers. We want to work closely with them to try to identify what could be done to minimise the impacts.

## Key findings from the study

The study has shown a number of things affect water levels across the marshes and these have informed our preferred option.

**Hool Pool Gutter divides the area that each pumping station drains.** This means that if Frodsham pumping station is operating then it only affects water levels in the watercourses east of Hool Pool Gutter. Similarly, if Ince pumping station is operating it can only affect water levels in the watercourses west of Hool Pool Gutter.

**If we go ahead with the preferred option, when in rains, watercourses will start to fill.** As rainfall continues, water can rise to a level that prevents fields from draining naturally into the watercourses. This will create waterlogged conditions and could eventually lead to surface water flooding.

**If neither of the pumping stations operate,** the west and central parts of the marshes will become more prone to water-logging, surface water flooding and flooding, depending on rainfall.

**If Frodsham Pumping Station is operated but Ince Pumping Station is turned off,** large areas to the West of Hool Pool Gutter would have greater flood risk. This would be from both river flooding and water lying on the fields and not being able to flow away. Areas to the East of Hool Pool Gutter will maintain similar levels to those they currently have.

**If Ince Pumping Station is operated but Frodsham Pumping Station is turned off,** large areas in the central part of the marshes would have increased flood risk. This would be from both river flooding and water lying on the fields and not being able to flow away.

**If we stop maintaining the channel network**, the risk of flooding to a few buildings could increase. Landowners could maintain their own channels as we have done in the past.

**Hool Pool Gutter Culvert** is owned by the Manchester Ship Canal Company. It carries water from Hool Pool Gutter and surrounding areas under the Manchester Ship Canal onto the Mersey Estuary. It is the original drainage route for the Ince end of the marshes before Ince Pumping station was built. If we stop pumping at both pumping stations Hool Pool Gutter Culvert will once again be the only drainage route for that end of the marshes.

## Reasons for consultation

We now want to talk to affected stakeholders to discuss our preferred option. We are specifically keen to hear if you have any relevant information that could influence our final decision.

During the consultation we would also like to gather information to help us plan what will happen if we go ahead with our preferred option. We will do this to:

- Understand the impact of our preferred option on all Stakeholders, as individual enterprises and as interest groups.
- Understand ways that we can help to mitigate the effects of our preferred option.
- Find out whether stakeholders are prepared to take action (either individually or collectively) to manage water levels themselves. This could include watercourse maintenance, taking over and running one or both the pumping stations or any other suggestions.
- Encourage stakeholders to talk to each other so they can cooperate in the future management of water levels on the marshes.

## The next stages

From November 2011 we will engage with the following people and organisations to discuss the consultation:

- MPs, Local Authority, Parish Councils.
- Land Owners, Farmers and the NFU
- Industrial and proposed Industrial operators, Infrastructure Operators;
- Environmental organisations and Defra family organisations.

The consultation will end on 30 April 2012. We plan to make our final decision on the future operation of the pumping stations and our maintenance within three months of the end of consultation.

If we go ahead with our preferred option, we would work with stakeholders and the community to help them adapt to the change in water levels.

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View from Lower Rake Lane Helsby , towards Frodsham

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