



Providing efficient and cost effective management services

Background

The River Lugg Internal Drainage Board is a public body responsible for water level management and watercourse maintenance in a defined geographical region of Herefordshire. This encompasses low-lying land within the catchments of the Rivers Lugg, Arrow, Frome and the Monnow on the English side of the Welsh border.

Board members are drawn from local rate-payers and elected members of Herefordshire Council. The Board's rateable area comprises some 11,130 hectares with 219 km of scheduled watercourses. The largest urban development within the district is the town of Leominster, with small flood-prone settlements at Pembridge, Eardisland, Bodenham, Wellington, Withington Marsh and Hampton Bishop. Much of the area is rich agricultural land that is dependent upon well-maintained drainage systems.

The Board is responsible for managing water levels within the area, including reducing the risk of flooding to people and properties. It is one of over 110 drainage boards in England, created by statute in areas of special drainage need.

How Hoople became involved

A decision by the Welsh Government to abolish drainage boards and amalgamate them into one body, 'National Resources Wales', meant that Caldicott and Wentlooge Levels IDB would be unable to continue providing management and engineering services to River Lugg Internal Drainage Board.

As a result, an invitation to tender was posted and Hoople Ltd was successful in eventually being awarded the five year contract to manage day-to-day operations on behalf of the Board.

What the contract entails

The successful fulfilment of the contract revolves around collection of rates income which is then spent on an annual maintenance programme to manage water levels by ensuring that watercourses are maintained in good order. In addition, as a public body there are administrative and regulatory requirements to be fulfilled such as quarterly board meetings, budget setting and statutory returns. The Board is also consulted on planning applications and the use of land drainage consents. There is a requirement to liaise regularly with other organisations such as the

Environment Agency, English Nature and DEFRA.

An Area Engineer with many years' experience working for the Board transferred to Hoople as part of the contract. He has responsibility on the ground for management of water levels and watercourse maintenance (through a sub-contractor). He works closely with other members of the Hoople team, including rates collection officers, administrative, finance support and ICT staff.

As a result of winning the contract, Hoople has also been asked by the Board to work on an additional two pieces of work. The first was to manage an EU-compliant tendering process for the renewal of the watercourse maintenance contract, eventually awarded to a locally based contractor. The second project was to work with the Welsh government and DEFRA to take on responsibility for the management of the English area of the Lower Wye IDB.

Again, this was successfully completed on behalf of the Board.

Results

Eighteen months in, the contract between Hoople Ltd and the River Lugg Internal Drainage Board is operating well. Significant progress has been made in reducing the number of outstanding rating queries and a high level of rates collection has been achieved.

Adoption of the Lower Wye IDB has meant the Board is now subject to a more thorough level of external audit, and for 2013-14 the Board received an unqualified audit opinion.

During September 2015 Hoople successfully completed the tri-annual election process for the Board.

Testimonial

Charles Pudge, Chairman of the River Lugg Internal Drainage Board, says: "The IDB has vital work to carry out to reduce flooding to domestic and industrial property and provide land drainage to main rivers for all within the Board's area. We have to raise monies equitably and spend them prudently and to achieve this we need efficient and cost effective management services. This we have in Hoople."

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