

***' Today I have been out in the field you drained in the autumn, the new main is running well. It is like a different field compared to a year ago, I'm confident it will be a big step towards improving yields and getting on of blackgrass. If only the rest of the estates drains were working as well !!'***

Hamish Stewart, Farm Manager

**Ragley Home Farms is a 3,500 acre arable Farm, surrounding the historic Ragley Hall. A LEAF Demonstration Farm, the company practises Integrated Farm Management. IFM is a whole farm, sustainable approach producing healthy crops and livestock in an environmentally responsible way. And as part of that plan Farm Services Ltd has worked in partnership with Farm Manager Hamish Stewart to improve the estate's drainage.**



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The Estate has many existing drains that were installed in the 1970's and although some are still working well, many of the laterals are without a gravel backfill, and spaced at 30 metre intervals, which has proven to be too far apart on the soil types on the estate.

The first step, taken on by the estate and still on going, was to clean the ditches and check that all the existing drains were working as well as they could be. In some cases this has improved the performance of the existing drains to the point where nothing else has to be done. In other fields it has had little or no effect, meaning that re-draining is the only option.

Each field is surveyed and thought is given to how best drain it in the most cost effective manner, with careful consideration given to existing drainage. In 2015 we drained a 38 acre field and in this field many of the existing drains were in perfect condition including the main 6" drain. The lack of permeable backfill meant that these drains were unable to collect enough water to make the field productive and yields were down.

The design in this field utilised some of the existing main drains where they were proven to be in good working order



and we raised the depth of the new drains to prevent damaging the existing ones, whilst old drains were not working well there is little point in damaging something which is moving some water.

In 2016 the approach was different, in a 30 acre field investigations proved the existing drains were in poor condition some with a build up of silt blocking the pipe whilst in some places the drains had collapsed.

Clearly it was not possible to reuse these drains in any way and the only option was to re-drain and to do so at a depth which intercepted the existing drain allowing any water they still might be carrying to be picked up by the new drains.

***A careful, flexible approach, which involves assessing not just the soil type and topography of each field but its past drainage history has resulted in cost savings and drier, more productive fields.***

