

Maintenance of watercourses and flood prevention

Following one of the wettest winters on record, there has been an increase in flooding incidents around the county. While some of these cannot be prevented following the huge volume of rain we have faced, many flooding incidents on highways and other areas can be prevented with good maintenance from the landowner.

Most ditches and minor watercourses in Wiltshire are the responsibility of the 'riparian landowner', which is the person who owns the land on either side of the watercourse. The landowner has both the rights and responsibilities for the ditches, or other watercourses flowing through or alongside their property.

We recommend that landowners have a plan for their property, with detailed information on the watercourses, so that areas of high risk can be identified, and appropriate maintenance work can be planned. It is at the benefit of all landowners to maintain their watercourses to prevent issues occurring in other areas. If a landowner's watercourse is likely to cause issues upstream, maintenance will need to be carried out immediately.

Many spring-fed ditches will have water flowing through them throughout the year, and if water is being held above the designed ditch depth, this will require immediate attention, as the landowner will need to ensure that the ditch's capacity is maximised. While water may still flow through the ditch during heavy rainfall, even a flowing ditch will struggle if not regularly cleared.

Piped highway drainage and private drainage will discharge into watercourses, and these pipes should be above the water line, and above the base of the watercourse. If this is not occurring when inspected by the council, work may be needed to ensure that the drainage is running freely. Another indication that maintenance is required is if the depth of the ditch is above the culvert base.

To undertake work to a watercourse, for example, a pond, lake, or diversion, planning permission may be required, and the landowner will need to check the permission to ensure they are compliant with the design, maintenance, and other such requirements.

Landowners should regularly inspect their watercourses and have a maintenance plan in place, as they are responsible for surface water and soakaways once it crosses the property boundary.