

# Maintenance options if you own all or part of a watercourse

April 2018

You normally own a stretch of watercourse if it runs on or under your land, or on the boundary of your land, up to its centre. The Environment Agency has powers to carry out maintenance on main rivers to help keep water flowing freely and to reduce flood risk, but owners have ultimate responsibility for their stretch of watercourse. This also applies to the banks of the watercourse, including any trees growing from them, and any assets within the watercourse, unless they are privately owned.

For guidance about your responsibilities and rules to follow for watercourses on or near your property, and permissions you need to do work around them visit:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/owning-a-watercourse>

## Owners: your responsibilities

- Make sure the river can flow clearly without obstruction at all times, to ensure there is not an increase in flood risk to your property or anywhere along the channel
- Maintain the bed and banks of the watercourse and any trees or shrubs growing along the banks, to prevent anything getting washed into the river
- Clear any litter or debris from the channel or from any assets, to prevent it from causing a blockage or obstruction
- Prevent anything from entering the channel which may affect the water quality, habitat or wildlife, such as pollutants.

Routine maintenance activities create many opportunities for environmental enhancement, but they can also have a significant impact on the environment. You need to carry out any maintenance sensitively to ensure that the plants and animals that are dependent on the water environment are not negatively impacted.

*The ultimate goal is to achieve a balance between providing flood protection and protecting the conservation value of a watercourse.*

In general, the more diverse the physical structure of a river (for example, if it includes riffles, pools, wet berms, cliffs, debris dams and marginal vegetation), the more diverse the plant and animal communities. These features and habitats must be retained to preserve the plants and animals they support throughout their life cycle. For example, features such as marginal vegetation provides refuge and habitat, from which plants and animals can re-colonise into adjacent areas where maintenance has been carried out. The quantity and location of features to be retained will vary from site to site depending on the nature of the river.

customer service line  
03708 506 506

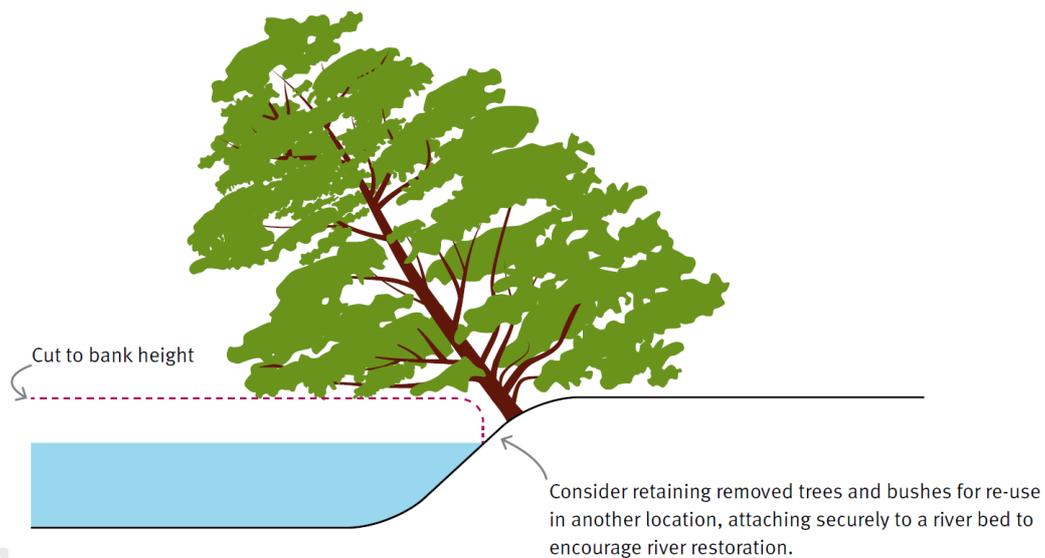
incident hotline  
0800 80 70 60

floodline  
03459 88 11 88

# Maintenance options and examples

## Bank trimming and weed cutting

- Trim vegetation 1 metre up on both banks leaving 100mm of growth
- Clear 80 percent of the weed from the channel
- Cut overhanging branches to just above bank height or to allow reasonable access to the channel
- Please be aware of wildlife and do not disturb nesting birds
- Leave any organic vegetation on site, but stack tree off-cuts beyond high water level
- Clear debris and small blockages from the channel



## Contact us

Call the Environment Agency hotline to report:

- blockages and fly-tipping in rivers that poses an immediate flood risk
- river flooding
- pollution in a river
- Illegal fishing, dead fish or fish gasping for air

Don't ignore it, tell us about it!

**Incident Hotline**  
**Telephone: 0800 80 70 60**  
**24 hour service**

For general enquiries you can contact:

National Customer Contact Centre  
PO Box 544  
Rotherham  
S60 1BY

Telephone 03708 506 506

Email enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk

## Prepare for flooding

Although we work to reduce flood risk, we cannot remove it entirely. We work to help individuals and communities prepare themselves for flooding, by providing information to those who need it.

You can find out more about what to do before, during and after a flood by visiting

[www.gov.uk/prepare-for-flooding/future-flooding](http://www.gov.uk/prepare-for-flooding/future-flooding)

To find out if your property is at risk of flooding you can contact:

**Floodline**  
**Telephone: 0345 988 188**  
**24 hour service**

If it is at risk, sign up for our free Floodline Warnings Service and start preparing for when a flood happens.

If you have any queries about the information contained in this briefing, or about current flood schemes in your area please contact:

[HNL-PSO@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:HNL-PSO@environment-agency.gov.uk)

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