

## **Watercourse Maintenance** **for Riparian Landowners : Things to note**

This guidance is aimed at landowners and their agents to help them understand their roles and responsibilities in maintaining watercourses. It is in addition to our 'Living on the Edge' leaflet which explains the wider roles and responsibilities relating to riverside occupancy.

River channels convey water within their banks at low to medium flows. During higher flows, the river will flow out onto its floodplain, which is a natural part of the river system designed to store water. Widening, deepening and dredging river channels, which has been undertaken historically on many rivers, damages their channel habitats and leads to erosion and deposition. These natural processes work to return a river to its previous pre-damaged state.

Dredging is a particular problem. Whilst it can increase a river's capacity for a short period of time, this is often overshadowed by a significant financial and ecological cost, as the river will always seek to restore itself to its previous condition. Increasing the capacity of a river can also increase the risk of flooding by conveying flood waters to areas downstream at a faster rate. This can also prevent the floodplain from performing naturally, preventing it from storing water in low lying areas adjacent to the channel, thus reducing its connectivity with the watercourse.

### **Who is responsible for river maintenance ?**

Our statutory duties include managing flood risk, and we also have a duty to protect and enhance the river and its environment. Watercourses and their associated flood plains are important natural habitats, as well as essential for conveying flood flows resulting from surface water run-off following any significant rainfall event. We have discretionary powers to undertake maintenance work on designated main rivers. This programme of work is prioritised by assessing flood risk throughout the catchments in order to use our limited resources most effectively.

### **Landowners role**

Landowners have ultimate responsibility for the maintenance of the watercourses flowing through, or adjacent to their landholding. However, some of the activities you may wish to undertake may require permission from us.

### **Conservation**

The river corridor often includes wildlife and their places of shelter which are protected by legislation, contravention of which may lead to prosecution (e.g. recklessly damaging water vole burrows or disturbing nesting birds, otters or spawning fish are all offences).

**Therefore, before undertaking any maintenance work, you may wish to contact us to seek advice.**