

Our ref: ENV2026/WMC
Date: 23 JANUARY 2026

Dear riparian landowner or resident,

RE: Withdrawal of maintenance and request for supporting information consultation

In Summer 2025, we wrote to you to let you know that we are unable to undertake vegetation maintenance in the main river that you are riparian owner/resident of from January 2026. We wrote to you because a land registry search of your address shows that you have a main river running through, beneath or adjacent to the boundary of your land, and therefore you are a riparian owner or occupier, unless there is a legal agreement which specifically varies this.

We recognise that the notice of withdrawal of maintenance has caused uncertainty for some residents. Following the initial correspondence and discussions with communities and partners, we are undertaking a consultation to allow partner organisations and riparian owners the opportunity to share supporting information that may add to the evidence we have about flood risk and environmental value in their location. We will seek to use new information provided in the consultation, highlighting flood risk and/or environmental benefits to strengthen the case for prioritising this work. This could help us in securing future allocations for watercourse maintenance funding.

On watercourses designated as statutory main rivers, we sometimes carry out maintenance work, such as weed cutting and grass mowing, by exercising our permissive powers. These powers are discretionary, and we have no legal duty to undertake this work. Watercourse maintenance is ultimately the responsibility of the riparian landowner. The term riparian landowner includes tenants or occupiers, as well as the owner of the land.

Funding for watercourse maintenance is allocated nationally according to flood risk and environmental benefit to ensure work achieves maximum benefit. Due to rising operational costs, we are no longer able to undertake vegetation maintenance on low-risk watercourses, such as areas where only agricultural land is at risk, or where flood risk to property is low. The affected locations remain classified as statutory main rivers, meaning that we are still able to use our permissive powers to undertake maintenance in future, subject to funding. We will continue to undertake an extensive programme of vegetation maintenance on high-risk watercourses, respond to incidents like channel blockages, provide a flood

warning service, maintain and repair flood defences, and undertake work where we have a legal duty to do so.

Request for supporting information

If you have any **evidence, data, or information** that could support our efforts to obtain funding, please submit it by **30 April 2026**.

Guidance for evidence submission:

- *Written statement of no more than 300 words explaining why continued maintenance of this watercourse is important to you, your community or your organisation. Include any known legal requirements, such as bespoke agreements between riparian parties and third parties, environmental benefits of maintenance, particularly where there are designated sites, and any instances of property flooding from the watercourse.*
- *Provide copies of any supporting documents, maps or photographs.*

For all paper submissions, please post your response to:

Maintenance Consultation Team
Environment Agency
Rivers House
East Quay
Bridgwater
TA6 4YS

For electronic submissions, please fill out the Microsoft Forms questionnaire by typing the link into your web browser or scanning the QR code.

<https://forms.office.com/e/mFYR2yA5QL>



Next steps

We will share our findings from the consultation response during Summer 2026.

In the meantime, we are continuing to deliver an extensive programme of watercourse maintenance on the larger watercourses. This includes delivering over £11m worth of routine flood defence work annually in Wessex, including maintaining and operating water level control structures, tidal gates and pumping stations; repairing and replacing existing flood defences; providing flood warning services; and responding to incidents. We are also continuing to invest significantly in capital improvements. We will continue to work closely with our partners and local communities to reduce the impact of flooding across Wessex.

Thank you in advance for your input, which is valuable to us.

Yours sincerely,

Wessex Maintenance Consultation Team

Please scan the QR code or visit the website for more information on:

Riparian Rights and Responsibilities

This page outlines information about your rights and responsibilities as a riparian resident and provides additional links to related information such as planning, licenses, and habitats. You can also download the guide “Your watercourse: rights and responsibilities”, where you will find illustrated guidance on undertaking basic maintenance on your watercourse.

www.gov.uk/guidance/owning-a-watercourse



Flood Risk Activity Permits

Providing that your land is not near or within a designated or protected site such as a site of special scientific interest (SSSI), you do not usually need a permit to cut vegetation. If you wish to carry out works on your riverbank or in the channel that may alter aspects such as capacity, stability, shape of the channel or river flow, please check below if your work requires a permit, or if your works are eligible for an exemption:

www.gov.uk/guidance/flood-risk-activities-environmental-permits



Flood Risk Check

This webpage allows you to find out the long-term flood risk for your area and can provide you with information on how to manage flood risk. You may find this information useful when considering your consultation response.

www.gov.uk/check-long-term-flood-risk

