



**SURREY  
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# Fact sheet

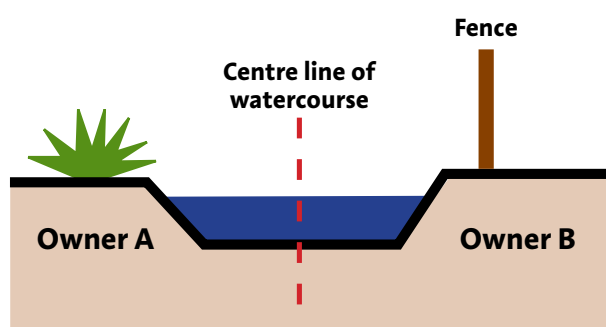
## Guidance for landowners when maintaining a watercourse on or next to their property

**A watercourse is any natural or artificial channel which water flows through, such as a river, stream, ditch, cut, culvert, dike or sluice. Landowners who own land situated adjacent to any watercourse are termed riparian owners.**

### Ownership of watercourses

If your land boundary is along a watercourse it is assumed that you are responsible for maintenance up to the centre of the channel, while the landowner on the other side of the watercourse is responsible for the other half.

If a watercourse flows through your land, you are responsible for all maintenance.



### Consent

Please be aware that consent or a permit may be required before doing any maintenance to a watercourse. Depending on the type of watercourse, you will need to contact

#### Main rivers - Environment Agency

Incident hotline 0800 80 70 60

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



Environment  
Agency

#### All other watercourses - Surrey County Council

General enquiries 03456 009 009

Highway emergency 0300 200 1003

[flooding.enquiries@surreycc.gov.uk](mailto:flooding.enquiries@surreycc.gov.uk)



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A map of main rivers is available on the Environment Agency website.



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For information on how you can protect your home, or advice on how your community can work together to prepare for flooding, please visit [surreycc.gov.uk/surreyprepared](http://surreycc.gov.uk/surreyprepared)

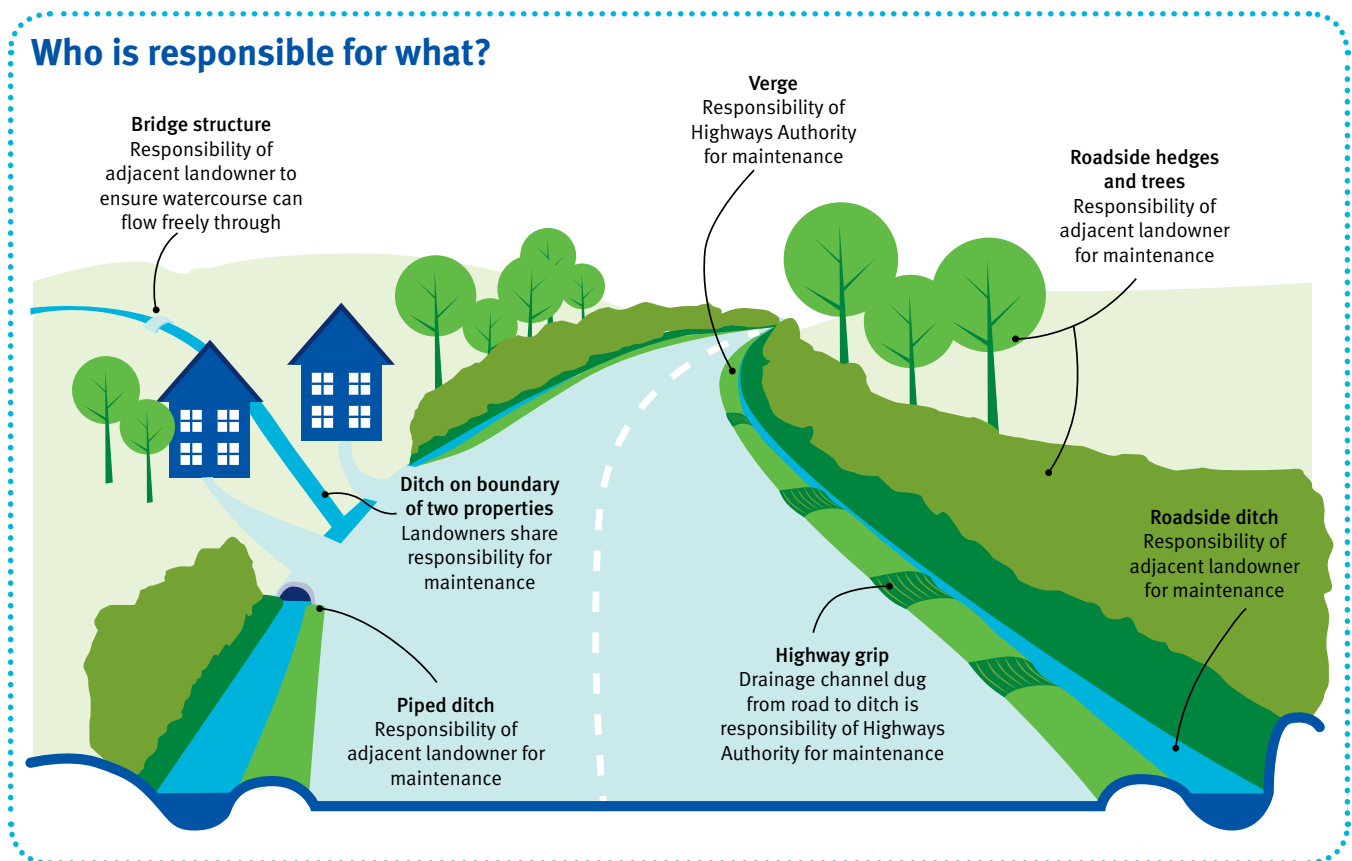
Surrey Prepared is made up of councils, emergency services, the Environment Agency, utility companies and the voluntary sector who work together and with communities to plan and prepare for potential emergencies.

## Rights of riparian owners

If you are a riparian owner, you must allow the free flow of water through your land without obstruction, causing pollution or affecting how the water will flow onto other people's property.

This includes when water breaks the banks of the watercourse, has come from someone else's land or is caused by inadequate capacity downstream.

You have the right to protect your property from flooding and your land from erosion provided that it doesn't affect the riparian rights of other landowners. However, you will require consent if the work affects the flow or storage of water.



## Responsibilities of riparian owners

If you are responsible owner of a section of a watercourse, you must:

- Maintain the bed and banks, so they are free of obstruction which could cause an increase in flood risk. However some work may need a consent or a permit.
- Maintain the flow through any culverted or piped watercourses.
- Keep any structure free of debris, including trash screens, weirs, culverts and mill gates.
- Not cause obstructions, temporary or permanent, that would stop fish passing.
- Not allow the watercourse to become polluted. This includes putting garden waste into the channel.
- Control invasive species (such as Japanese knotweed) – advice may be available from your local district or borough council.
- Make sure any work is in keeping with the natural river system - work must not damage wildlife and every opportunity should be sought to improve the habitat.

**To find out what you need to do to maintain a watercourse, a guide and some frequently asked questions are available at [surreycc.gov.uk/riparianownership](https://surreycc.gov.uk/riparianownership).**