

ENVIRONMENT AGENCY TO WITHDRAW FROM MAINTENANCE OF THE WASHFORD RIVER

Residents in Watchet and along the Washford river will have received the attached letter last week. This contains a link to a document about riparian rights and responsibilities which contains the following advice:

1 Stopping maintenance on main rivers

The Environment Agency can choose to stop maintaining and operating the assets on main rivers. This happens either because the costs are greater than the benefits to reducing flood risk, or there is another party better placed to take on these responsibilities.

2 Managing risk when an asset is no longer maintained

You can discuss your flood risk management options with the Environment Agency.

These could include:

- maintaining the asset yourself
- setting up a community partnership or neighbourly arrangement with others who benefit from it
- setting up an internal drainage board, eg to maintain a pumping station
- doing nothing, or removing the asset and accepting that your risk of flooding may increase
- changing land use, eg creating a wildlife habitat
- a combination of these options

At times of high tide and high river flow, the EA had a presence in the town which was reassuring to residents and visitors. If there was a problem with the river it was well known that it was the EA you had to contact for advice about it.

For each individual resident receiving this letter, they are likely to have concerns because although they are responsible for their property's banks and halfway across the river, they are not responsible for the opposite bank or the

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Environment, Planning and Tourism Committee

other half of the river. Each resident, if they manage their responsibility can still be affected by events upstream or down stream of them.

In Watchet, the most likely problem leading to a flooding event is something blocking the footbridge at Mill Lane by Waterloo cottages or the road bridge on Market Street. Upstream, a release of water from localised flooding at such as Kentsford farm could threaten Whitehall. If the EA no longer have responsibility, who do people turn to?

The letter indicates that objections can be raised to the EA decision to withdraw from maintenance. The more organisations that raise objections as well as individuals, surely the better?

St Audries Court in Whitehall (staudriescourt@housing21.org.uk), Stoates Mill Management Ltd, Somerset Council (owners of Market Street car park), Roadwater and Washford communities (their parish councils), English Heritage (Cleeve Abbey) are some that spring to mind.

Recommendations

1 Watchet Town Council object to the decision by the EA to withdraw from maintenance of the Washford river.

2 Watchet Town Council contact neighbouring parishes and organisations along the river to encourage them to similarly object to the withdrawal of maintenance.

3 Watchet Town Council work with partners to engage with the EA to understand the nature of the maintenance carried out and the present condition of the banks and flood risk assessment along the river.

4 Watchet Town Council work with partners and the EA to explore community solutions to protect residents from flood risk in the future should it no longer be possible to call on the EA for help.

Cllr Murphy, 21 July 2025

creating a better place
for people and wildlife



RIPIARIAN OWNER
17 STOATES MILL
WATCHET
TA23 0FG

Our ref: **SSQM**
Date: 11th July 2025

Dear Riparian Owner

Notice for withdrawing watercourse maintenance on your land

We are writing to you regarding the future maintenance of the Washford River and Traphole Stream..

As you will be aware, over recent years the Environment Agency has carried out conveyancing maintenance on the banks of the Washford River and Traphole Stream.

The maintenance carried out by the Environment Agency was under permissive statutory powers at its discretion (Section 165 of the Water Resources Act 1991) and subject to funding availability and flood risk priority. These powers are discretionary with no legal duty to exercise them.

Our funding for routine maintenance is limited and therefore is under regular review. We have had to prioritise maintenance subject to the funding and resources available to us to ensure that we continue to reduce the risk of flooding to the maximum possible number of people and properties. Following our review of this location, available funding, and flood risk priority, we will not be carrying out further conveyancing maintenance of this watercourse at this location.

This letter is to give you 6 months' notice from the date of this letter of our intention to stop carrying out maintenance of the Washford River and Traphole Stream..

As an owner of watercourse land, you are a Riparian owner and have responsibilities for the stretch of watercourse you own. Given this, you may wish to arrange for maintenance work to be carried out on your behalf. For help and advice on this please see information regarding riparian responsibilities and guidance for best practice maintenance on page 19 of Your Watercourse. In the **Your Watercourse : rights and roles** document at the bottom of the page on www.gov.uk/guidance/owning-a-watercourse website.

For any work in the channel or near a watercourse, we advise that you apply for the correct permission to do this work where required. More information can be found on page 34 of the **Your Watercourse : rights and roles document** www.gov.uk/permission-work-on-river-flood-sea-defence

customer service line 03708 506 506
gov.uk/environment-agency

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