

Flooding and Drainage

Guidance for property owners

If you, or somebody you know, would like the information contained in this document in large print, Braille, tape/CD or in another language please contact Wealden District Council on 01323 443322 or info@wealden.gov.uk quoting ref: **D&P 166293.08.14**

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Introduction

This leaflet has been prepared by Wealden District Council, The Environment Agency, East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service and East Sussex County Council. It gives general advice to property owners regarding their responsibilities for managing flood risk and associated property protection.

For information on the responsibilities and duties of risk management authorities in relation to flood and coastal management, please refer to the East Sussex Local Flood Risk Management Strategy which can be found on the East Sussex County Council website.

Know your responsibilities...

Property owners

- Are responsible for disposing of foul water drainage (from toilet, bath, basins, washing machines etc.), surface water drainage (roof, drive, yard areas etc.) and land drainage (garden areas, fields, groundwater etc.) from their property to a suitable disposal point.
- Have responsibilities towards neighbouring properties, and whilst they may allow natural flows from their land onto adjoining lower land, this should not be done in a manner that could lead to a claim for damage or nuisance under civil or common law.
- Are responsible in full or part for watercourses passing through or adjoining the boundaries of their land. Their primary responsibility is to maintain the proper flow and keep the watercourse clear of any obstruction which would impede the flow. (Often when a watercourse is situated on the boundaries of more than one property, this responsibility is shared by all neighbouring land owners).

Further information about owner rights and responsibilities can be found in the Environment Agency's 'Living on the Edge' guide, which can be downloaded from their website.

The land drainage system

Land drainage comprises a system of rivers, watercourses, ditches, culverts, pipes, lakes and ponds intended to drain water resulting from rainfall and flows from underground sources. Watercourses are classified as either main river or ordinary water courses. Main rivers come under the permissive powers of the Environment Agency, which means they can undertake works if they feel it is necessary, but have no duty to do so. Main rivers in Wealden include the Cuckmere, the Ouse, the Medway, the Rother and the Uck.

Non main river systems are defined as 'ordinary watercourses'. It is the responsibility of the land owner to ensure they are maintained appropriately. Consent may be required from the County Council if you intend to carry out work which could affect the flow of water within a watercourse which is not a main river and is not looked after by an internal drainage board. More information regarding ordinary watercourse consent can be found on the County Council's website.

The Environment Agency has record maps indicating main rivers and flood plains, and these can be viewed on their website.

Road drainage

The surface water drainage of all adopted public roads, other than trunk roads, is the responsibility of the East Sussex County Council highway authority. The highway authority, under the Highway Act (1980), has a duty to maintain the highway; this includes ensuring that highway drainage systems are clear and that blockages on the highway are removed. It has a duty of care for those who use the County Council's roads.

Flooding to the highway should be reported to the highways contact centre on 0345 60 80 193.

Drainage of private unadopted roads is normally the responsibility of property owners who make use of or adjoin the road. Trunk roads are the responsibility of the Highways Agency.

The sewerage system

If you pay charges to Southern Water for the collection and disposal of your domestic drainage, you are connected to a public sewer. However, if you are connected to the public sewer by a private pipeline, or have a septic tank, cesspool or soakaway – you are responsible for ensuring that the privately owned equipment is in good condition and does not pose a flood risk.

Copies of the public sewer maps for the Wealden area are held at the Wealden District Council Office in Hailsham and at the offices of Southern Water. Formal record maps indicating the location of private drainage systems are not held by any authority. However, the deeds of a property may include details.

Flood Prevention - *recommended maintenance*

In order to fulfil their responsibility and protect their own interest, owners should carry out regular inspections and maintenance as follows:

- **Drains and sewers** which are privately owned should be cleared; this responsibility often includes parts of the private system under roads or other adjoining land.
- **Manholes and inspection chamber covers** should be kept accessible to enable lifting at all times.
- **Gullies and gutters** on private land should be kept clear of leaves and other debris. Gully grates should be lifted periodically and accumulated silt removed from the gully pot.
- **Cesspools** should be pumped empty on a regular basis by a licensed disposal tanker. Emptying may be required as often as every two weeks depending on the size of the cesspool and the size of household.
- **Septic tanks** should normally be de-sludged by pumping out twice per year.
- **Foul Drainage Pumps** should be inspected and serviced on a regular basis as recommended by the manufacturer.

- **Soakaways** may require silt to be removed periodically.
- **Watercourses** including those that are culverted should be kept free of rubbish, garden refuse and any other debris including excessive undergrowth and tree roots. It is worth noting that a neglected watercourse could result in action under the Land Drainage Act 1991 and may potentially expose the owner to liability for the cost of any damage caused by flooding. Many floods are caused by blockages within culverts or at the inlet from a watercourse. A fault occurring in a culvert will normally be the owner's responsibility to rectify. Blockages can be minimised by the regular inspection and removal of debris and culvert inlets can often have protective grills fitted to prevent debris entering the pipeline.



Flooding – *protection and assistance*

The Environment Agency website gives general advice and information on flooding and details of flood warnings when these are in force. You can find more information and register for the free Floodline Warnings Direct service at: www.gov.uk/environment-agency

Householders are encouraged to protect themselves against flood risk and there are a number of products available which help protect

property. Sandbags are readily available at builders merchants and there are lots of modern alternatives that are easier to store and expand. For more information about different products please go to: www.kitemark.com or www.bluepages.org.uk

Wealden District Council does not supply sandbags unless a Civil Emergency has been declared (Civil Contingencies Act 2004).

East Sussex County Council does not issue sandbags to the public. However they will deploy sandbags to protect the highway or to protect properties at risk of flooding from the highway.

The National Flood Forum offer independent advice and information to people at risk of flooding including about insurance and property level protection.

Major emergencies

Local authorities, the emergency services, health authorities and Environment Agency work together as part of the Sussex Resilience Forum (SRF) in preparing plans to ensure there is an efficient, coordinated response to major emergencies. As part of this process six specific Flood Plans have been prepared for towns in East Sussex where flooding could affect large numbers of properties.

In Wealden there is the **Uckfield Flood Plan** and the **Pevensey Bay area Flood Plan** (this Plan includes parts of Eastbourne and Cooden). These Plans set out the roles of the organisations in supporting local communities if there were a threat of very serious flooding. In the worst case, this could involve evacuation of properties and setting up rest centres as temporary accommodation for evacuees.

Useful Contacts

Wealden District Council

www.wealden.gov.uk
01323 443322



East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service

www.esfrs.org
0303 999 1000



Environment Agency

www.gov.uk/environment-agency
03708 506 506



East Sussex County Council

www.eastsussex.gov.uk



In the event of local flooding to or from the highway, please contact the highways contact centre on 0345 60 80 193.

If you require consent to carry out work which may affect the flow of water within an ordinary watercourse or you have an enquiry, please contact: watercourse.consenting@eastsussex.gov.uk

Southern Water

www.southernwater.co.uk
0845 270 1508



Know your flood risk – guide for homeowners

www.knowyourfloodrisk.co.uk



The Flood Protection Association

thefpa.org.uk



Sussex Resilience Forum

www.sussexemergency.info



The National Flood Forum – for advice and information on all aspects of flooding and flood prevention

www.nationalfloodforum.org.uk
01299 403 055

