



St Cuthbert (Out) Parish Council

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PARISH GUIDE

RIVERS AND FLOODING.

Flooding alerts, river water levels and river ownership

There are a number of rivers and watercourses in the parish, but not all are monitored. Only watercourses classified as Main Rivers come under the jurisdiction of the Environment Agency.

- River Axe - jurisdiction of the River Axe from Wookey Hole caves to the A371 is the Lead Local Flood Authority, Somerset County Council. South of the A371 the river is classified as a Main River.
- River Sheppey – classified as a Main River across the parish
- Keward Brook and St Andrews Stream, classified as Main Rivers from their outflow at the Bishop's Palace to the confluence with River Sheppey near Coxley.

For minor watercourses, the jurisdiction could be either Somerset County Council (as the Lead Local Flood Authority), or the Axe and Brue Internal Drainage Board (IDB). A map showing the boundary between the two authorities can be found under the Downloads tab at <https://www.somerset.gov.uk/waste-planning-and-land/apply-for-consent-to-work-on-an-ordinary-watercourse/>

Water level stations and Flood Warnings

All our rivers have visual water level gauges at some point along their length. However, only two rivers have accessible recorded water level gauges. These are available on-line together with flooding alert information:

River Axe at Henley Lane, Wookey:

<https://flood-warning-information.service.gov.uk/station/3059?direction=u>

River Sheppey at Fenny Castle:

<https://flood-warning-information.service.gov.uk/station/3054?direction=u>

The Government's Flood Warning and advisory on-line page is

<https://flood-warning-information.service.gov.uk/warnings>

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Who is responsible for maintaining the river?

There is much confusion about watercourse ownership, rights and responsibility for maintenance. A watercourse is any river, stream, brook, ditch, drain, culvert or pipe through which water may flow. The general rule is that:

- a) if the watercourse runs through or beneath your land, you are 100% responsible for the maintenance;
- b) if the watercourse runs adjacent to your land, even if it does not fall within the boundary depicted on the Title Deeds, you are probably responsible for that half of the watercourse closest to your boundary as the presumption is that each party owns to the centre line of the watercourse;

The only exception to the general rule is where your property's Title Deeds are very clear on something different applying. Note, you do not own the water flowing across or adjacent to your land, only the watercourse bed.

Riparian owners' legal responsibilities (for owners of property on a river bank)

- a) Not to obstruct the flow of water, or pollute or divert or do anything prejudicial to the enjoyment of the water by others (if you do so you may be liable for damages);
- b) Not to build any structure, including culverts and bridges, that impinge on the watercourse or prevent the free passage of fish, without permission from the district council and/or the Environment Agency;
- c) To maintain the banks and bed of the watercourse in good repair, including any trees and shrubs growing on the banks that assist preventing flooding and erosion, and any flood defences that may exist;
- d) To maintain any approved structures along the watercourse and keep them debris clear.
- e) Report an incident: call the Environment Agency Incident hotline to report flooding, blockages, pollution, unusual changes in the flow, collapsed or badly damaged banks;
- f) You must apply to use herbicides within one metre from the top of the bank of the watercourse;
- g) Remove litter from the banks and any animal carcasses. Under no circumstances allow garden waste, including grass cuttings, on the banks or in the water;
- h) Protect wildlife, do not disturb certain species or their habitats, including the bed and banks; do not disturb birds and their nests or spawning or eggs of any fish;
- i) Remove and prevent invasive species such as Japanese knotweed and Himalayan balsam from spreading into the wild or onto neighbours' land.

For more information visit: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/owning-a-watercourse>