



**NOTE REGARDING PROPERTIES THAT CONTAIN OR ARE LOCATED  
ADJACENT TO WATERCOURSES**

Prospective purchasers of properties that contain, or are adjacent to watercourses, and culverts (piped watercourses), should read the attached document 'Rights and Responsibilities of Living by a Watercourse'. You may be responsible for the maintenance of the watercourse or culvert.

Should you have any queries over these responsibilities, then the prospective purchaser or his/her agent are strongly urged make contact with Paul Cann, Senior Drainage Engineer, at Arun District Council, Tel: 01903 737819 or email [paul.cann@arun.gov.uk](mailto:paul.cann@arun.gov.uk)

**PLEASE ENSURE THAT THE CONTENTS OF THIS NOTE ARE  
BROUGHT TO THE ATTENTION OF THE PROSPECTIVE  
PURCHASER**



# RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF LIVING BY A WATERCOURSE

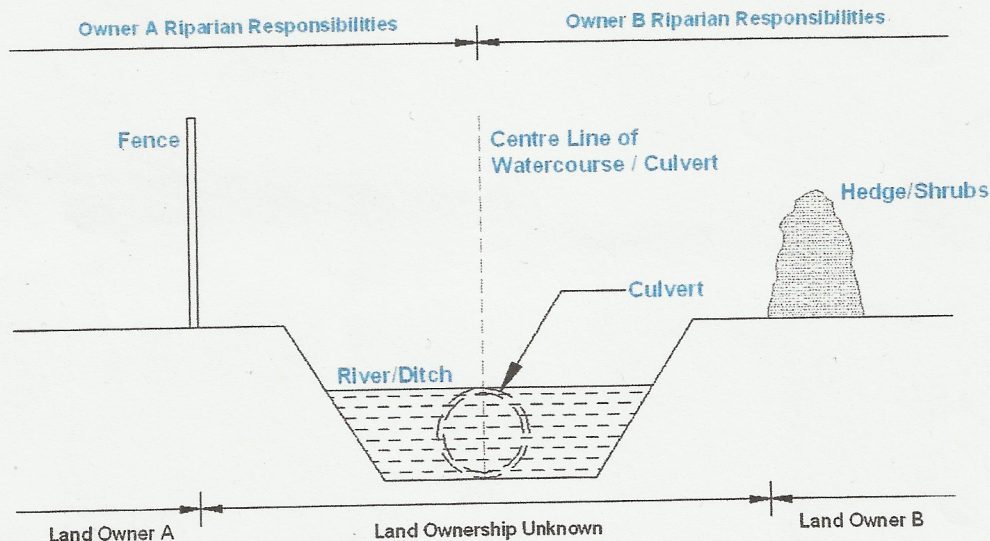


Do you own a property adjacent to a river, stream, brook, drainage ditch, culvert (piped watercourse) or any other form of watercourse? Then you need to read this advice note. The purpose is to explain the rights and responsibilities of property owners and residents whose property is adjacent to any form of watercourse

## Who is a Riparian Owner?

Under common law you are the **riparian** owner of any watercourse within or adjacent to the boundaries of your property. Where a watercourse is between two or more property boundaries each owner may be equally responsible. So in the diagrams below, even if the Title Deeds for Owner A's property show the boundary to be the fence, they have riparian rights and responsibilities to the centre of the watercourse. Further scenario's are shown on the attached drawing.

### Example 1



## Riparian Owners Rights

You have the right to protect your property against flooding from the watercourse and also to prevent erosion of the watercourse banks or any structures.

## Riparian Owner Responsibilities

As a **riparian** owner your responsibilities include the maintenance of the bank and bed of your section of watercourse or culverted section, in order to avoid any obstruction of flow in the watercourse.

### The most common problems affecting watercourses are:

- Failing to keep vegetation growth under control.
- Failing to obtain consent for installing pipes or culverting of watercourses.
- Disposal or storage of garden or domestic rubbish, waste etc. on the banks of watercourses.
- Failing to remove excess silt.

## Riparian Owners and the Law

A riparian owner is not permitted to construct any structure or works such as bridging, culverting, diverting, infilling or creating a pond in, under or over a watercourse which is likely to affect the water flow without prior consultation with the District Council.



### Legislation

Your responsibilities as a **riparian** owner are based on the following legislation:

- The Public Health Act 1936
- The Land Drainage Acts of 1991 & 1994
- Water Resources Act 1991
- National Rivers Authority (now the Environment Agency) Land Drainage Byelaws 1981.

### Implementation of Legislation

In an effort to reduce the risk of flooding the District Council aims to improve and maintain an effective watercourse system through a process of co-operation, liaison, advice and assistance wherever possible. Enforcement of legislation will only be used where necessary to resolve problems. Any increase or decrease in flow, diversion of flow, blockage of flow or other alterations which damage adjoining land, or the owner's rights, could result in private legal actions and claims for damages.

### What is a Watercourse?

A watercourse is any channel through which water flows and can be open or enclosed underground as a culvert.

### Main Rivers

Main rivers are usually larger streams and rivers, but also include smaller watercourses of strategic drainage importance. A main river is defined as a watercourse shown as such on a main river map, and can include any structure or appliance for controlling or regulating the flow of water in, into or out of a main river. The Environment Agency's powers to carry out flood defence works apply to main rivers only. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) designates main rivers.

### Ordinary Watercourses

An ordinary watercourse is every river, stream, ditch, drain, cut, dyke, sluice, sewer (other than a public sewer) and passage through which water flows which does not form part of a main river.

### Critical Ordinary Watercourses

Watercourses which are not classified as 'Main River' but which the council has agreed with the Environment Agency to be critical because they have the potential to put at risk from flooding large numbers of people or property.

### Roadside Ditches

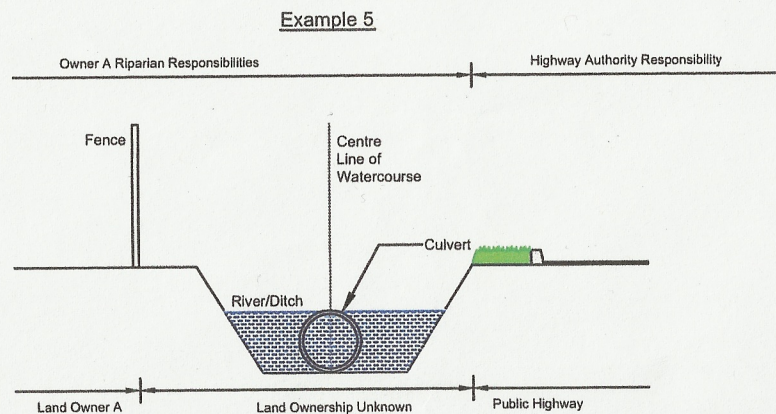
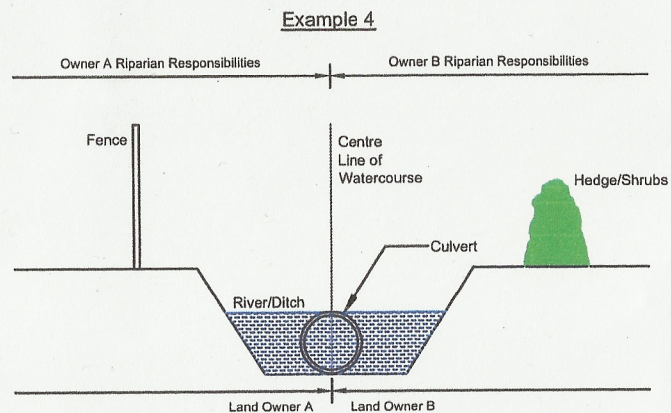
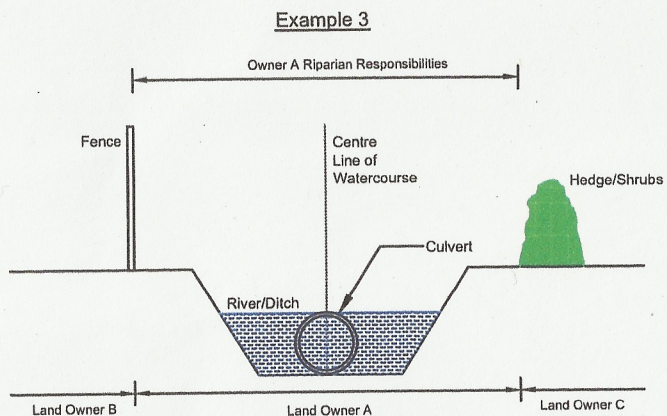
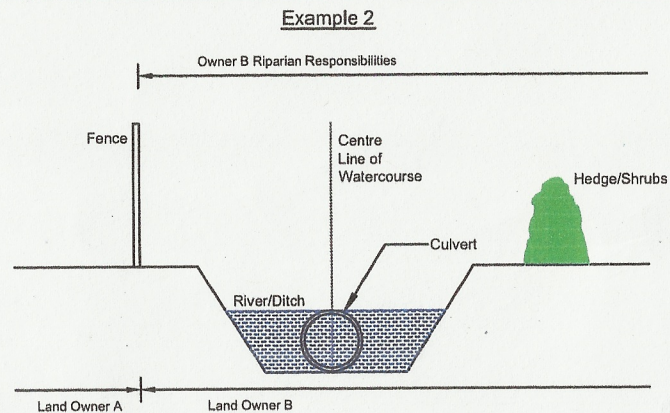
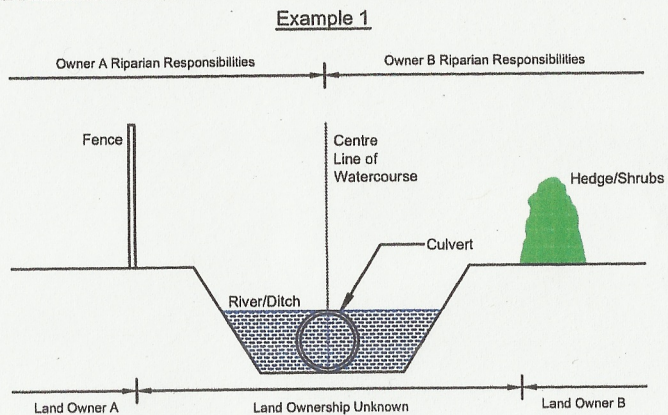
The riparian owner of any ditches alongside roads is normally the adjoining landowner, as the highway boundary invariably lies along the top of the bank closest to the road. Adjacent owners should not carry out any work on the ditch, (other than regular maintenance), which would interfere with its proper operation, or restrict road surface water draining into it. Although the Highway Authority has the right to discharge rainwater from the highway into these ditches under current legislation, the landowner is responsible for maintaining it.

However, if West Sussex County Council, the highway authority, have created or piped the ditch under their highway powers, they became responsible for its maintenance. Likewise, any pipe beneath the highway is the responsibility of the County Council. When the condition of a ditch is causing flooding on a highway it will be the County Council that may take action under the Land Drainage Act. Watercourses occur naturally, they serve to drain the land and assist in supporting flora and fauna. Historically, watercourses have taken surface water run off from buildings and roads, as well as fields and parks. In the process of development many have been culverted or changed in other ways. In normal conditions the watercourse may be a dry channel in the ground. In storm conditions it may become a raging torrent. Continued development tends to increase the rate at which water is discharged to a watercourse, (even though adequate safeguards to prevent this are available), a process that could lead to increased risk of flooding if not controlled.

### Additional Information from the Environment Agency ([www.environment-agency.gov.uk](http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk)):

- Pollution Prevention Guidelines (PPG 5) Works and Maintenance in or near Water (October 2007)
- 'Living on the Edge' - Guide to the rights & responsibilities of a riverside owner (3rd Edition – April 2007 [due to be updated mid 2012])





# ARUN

## DISTRICT COUNCIL

### Notes

Rivers/ditches may take the form of a pipe, as indicated.

Based upon the Ordnance Survey map with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office & Crown Copyright. No liability is accepted by the Council for any error or omission. Arun District Council 100010487



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Amendments	by	Date

Job Title

Watercourses - Riparian Responsibilities

Drawing

Typical Examples

Scale N.T.S

Drg.No. 24.100.1.1

Drawn by P.Cann

Traced by P.Cann

Checked by B.Holland

Date 2nd August 2010

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