

Types of Watercourses

Main River vs Ordinary Watercourse

What is a watercourse?

Watercourses can be described as 'a natural or artificial channel through which water flows' and includes rivers, streams, brooks, becks, culverts, and ditches. There are two types of watercourses; main rivers and ordinary watercourses. It is worth noting that just because a watercourse has the word 'River' in its name, doesn't mean it is a 'main river'.

Main River

These are usually larger watercourses which are designated as a 'main river' on the Environment Agency's (EA) Main River Map. The EA carry out maintenance, improvement and construction work on these main rivers to manage flood risk for the catchment.



Image: The Environment Agency - River Map of main rivers



Image: The Flood Hub - River Ribble

Ordinary Watercourse

These can include watercourses such as some rivers, brook, beck, ditch, dyke, stream, leat, goyle, rhyne or culvert. The Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) and the Internal Drainage Board are responsible for managing flood risk and carrying out flood defence work.



Image: The Flood Hub - Culvert



Image: The Flood Hub - Stream in Ribchester

Main rivers are the larger rivers which have a major effect on the drainage within a catchment area. If you live in an area at risk of flooding from a main river, you may be eligible for the EA Flood Warning Service. If you need to report flooding, blockages, damage or unusual changes in flow to a main river, contact the EA incident hotline on 0800 807 060.

The responsibility for maintaining and ensuring the free flowing of ordinary watercourses usually falls upon the riparian owner. A riparian owner is somebody who has a watercourse running through, beneath or adjacent to their land or property. Riparian owners have a responsibility to ensure the water flows naturally, however any flooding incidents or damage should be reported to the LLFA.