Cambridgeshire County Council

Watercourse Guidance

NATURAL FLOOD MANAGEMENT:
ORDINARY WATERCOURSE CONSENT GUIDANCE

Ordinary Watercourse Consent (OWC)

OWC is the permission required by law (Land Drainage Act 1991) to undertake works within an ordinary watercourse in the UK. In Cambridgeshire OWC can be granted by Cambridgeshire County Council, or the Internal Drainage Board (IDB) if works are taking place within an IDB area.

When do I need Ordinary Watercourse Consent (OWC)?

OWC is required when works are to be carried out that affect the flow or cross-sectional area of any watercourse not classed as a main river. A watercourse is defined as any drain, ditch, stream etc. through which water flows. Water doesn't have to flow through it all the time for it to be classed as a watercourse.

What type of Natural Flood Management work is likely to require Ordinary Watercourse Consent (OWC)?

As a rule, doing any works within the channel of an Ordinary Watercourse will require OWC

- River restoration techniques such as re-meandering, raising bed levels and floodplain restoration to reconnect the river and floodplain will require OWC.
- Installing flow interception such as leaky dams, log deflectors and brushwood berms will require OWC.
- Runoff pathway management such as online attenuation ponds, swales, and sediment traps will require OWC.
- Flood water containment such as bunded offline storage will require OWC if there is an outlet to the watercourse.
- Managing overland flows by increasing flood water storage capacity in a natural bowl will not require OWC as there is no direct impact on an existing watercourse. However, if you plan to divert collected rainwater into an existing watercourse, this will require OWC.
- Tree planting and woodland management will not require OWC.

If you're unsure whether your scheme requires OWC, you can contact the CCC Flood and Water Team for guidance and further information at floodandwater@cambridgeshire.gov.uk.

Log deflectors

Re-meandering

Brushwood Berms

How do I apply for Ordinary Watercourse Consent (OWC)?

Information on OWC together with the application form and guidance on completing this can be found at: Ordinary watercourse consent - Cambridgeshire County Council

How long does the process take?

There is a two-month statutory consultation period and a £50 fee per structure when an OWC application is made. Works shall not start until the relevant permission has been successfully obtained and consent granted in writing from the county council.

Some Natural Flood Management (NFM) measures may require one or more of the following additional permits and assessments:

- Planning permission or written confirmation that planning permission is not required. NFM schemes involving civil engineering works such as the excavation of attenuation ponds are likely to require planning permission.
- Consent to carry out works to trees that are protected by a Tree Preservation Order or located within a Conservation Area.
- Ecological assessment approval.
- Environmental Impact Assessment.
- Consent for intervention measures undertaken on or near to Scheduled Monuments.
- Guidance from Natural England if the project is within a protected site (Site of Special Scientific Interest – SSSI) - or Special Area of Conservation – SAC.

Ecological Assessments

All Ordinary Watercourse Consent applications are assessed by the Council's Ecology Team before approval. As a result, a scheme may be refused or be granted with conditions relating to ecological considerations.

Design Guidance

Guidance on design principles and further information on different types of natural flood management intervention are available in the following documents:

- Guidance on leaky woody structures such as leaky dams: www.catchmentbasedapproach.org/learn/natural-flood-management-programme-assessing-the-risk
- General information on the benefits of different NFM techniques: www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-with-natural-processes-to-reduce-flood-risk
- SuDS principles and information on runoff attenuation feature design: www.ciria.org/Memberships/The_SuDs_Manual_C753_Chapters.aspx