

Regular Field Drain Maintenance

Watercourses and drainage ditches require correct maintenance in order to allow surface water to flow freely, this will also reduce the risks of flooding. Correctly maintained watercourses can also create an excellent habitat for wildlife. There are specific maintenance procedures that should be followed in order to correctly maintain the ditch.

In order to maintain the functioning of a drainage ditch, the following requirements should be adhered to:

Remove any physical obstructions such as large rocks, rubble, fallen trees and branches and other waste materials (litter, grass cuttings etc) so that water can flow freely.

All non-organic waste should be completely removed off site and disposed of in an appropriate manner. Any green waste resulting from the maintenance of ditches can be left a safe distance for a few days to allow any organisms to move back into the watercourse, after which the green waste should be removed so it doesn't wash back into the watercourse. Ensure that any disturbed debris does not end up flowing downstream and causing problems for other landowners.

Do no store anything alongside the watercourse which may interfere with maintenance, affect the stability of the bank or get washed into the channel.

When trimming vegetation, it is important to consider any impact on biodiversity. Mowing of banks around ditches should be minimised during the animal spawning season of March to mid-July. It is recommended to cut only up to just above the water level on one side of the watercourse, leaving the fringe of the bank uncut, thereby maintaining some habitat as well as enabling a free flow of water in the ditch. Cuttings from any clearance work should be removed from the channel to avoid it causing blockages downstream. Putting removed material too close to the top of the bank can lead to it falling back in during times of flooding.

Silt should be removed along the length of the ditch to ensure it flows properly in the right direction. If there are any pipes into or out of the ditch you should remove silt to the same level or below the bottom of the pipe(s). Where possible, try to maintain the original slope and cross section of the ditch when de-silting. If the slope of the ditch is altered it can change the flow pattern, cause erosion or increase flood risk either upstream or downstream.

As long as the silt is non-hazardous you can put it on the bank of the watercourse. Depositing silt on top of the banks of the watercourse allows for any organisms to move back into the ditch. It is essential that this material does not then block any ditches or stop water draining into the ditch if it would normally do so.

The silts must be as close as possible to where it was dredged from either on the bank of the waters from where it was taken or on land directly next to the watercourse. If you think a material may be hazardous contact the Environment Agency for advice.

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