

Briefing note: Flooding in Sydling St Nicholas

October 2025

This note describes Sydling St Nicholas's flood history, the work we and our partners at Dorset Council have undertaken and advice on what you can do to build resiliency in a flood event.

Sydling St Nicholas flood history

Sydling St Nicholas has a history of flooding, with the most significant recent event on 31st October 2021.

Flooding in Sydling St Nicholas is a very complex issue. The geography of Sydling St Nicholas makes it vulnerable to flooding from a variety of sources. The location of the village in a steep sided valley results in fast run off from the surrounding fields, resulting in flooding from main river and surface water. The main river of Sydling Water has a complex flow arrangement through the village, with many privately owned historic structures in the channel. Sydling St Nicholas is also vulnerable to groundwater flooding due to the chalk geology. When high rainfall and high groundwater combine, water can often be seen flowing down the road. The road is also the historic route of Sydling Water.

How is the Environment Agency working to manage the flood risk in Sydling St Nicholas?

Following the flooding experienced in 2021, The Environment Agency prioritised the delivery of Property Flood Resilience (PFR) worth over £250,000 in Sydling St Nicholas. This investment better protects over 25 properties, with a combination of measures installed. Some of which are passive and some which may need activating. These properties should have a plan of when to activate/install their PFR, servicing and maintenance.

The Environment Agency provides a Warning Service covering the village, which includes a flood alert for the wider area of the Upper Frome and Tributaries from Toller Whelme to Dorchester (including Sydling Water), together with a groundwater flood alert for West Dorset and a more specific groundwater flood warning for Sydling.

Computer hydraulic modelling work may be possible in the future on the main river of Sydling Water. The outputs from this will help to better understand flow arrangements of the river within the village.

The Environment Agency and our partners remain open to working with landowners to explore the potential of Natural Flood Management options within the catchment.

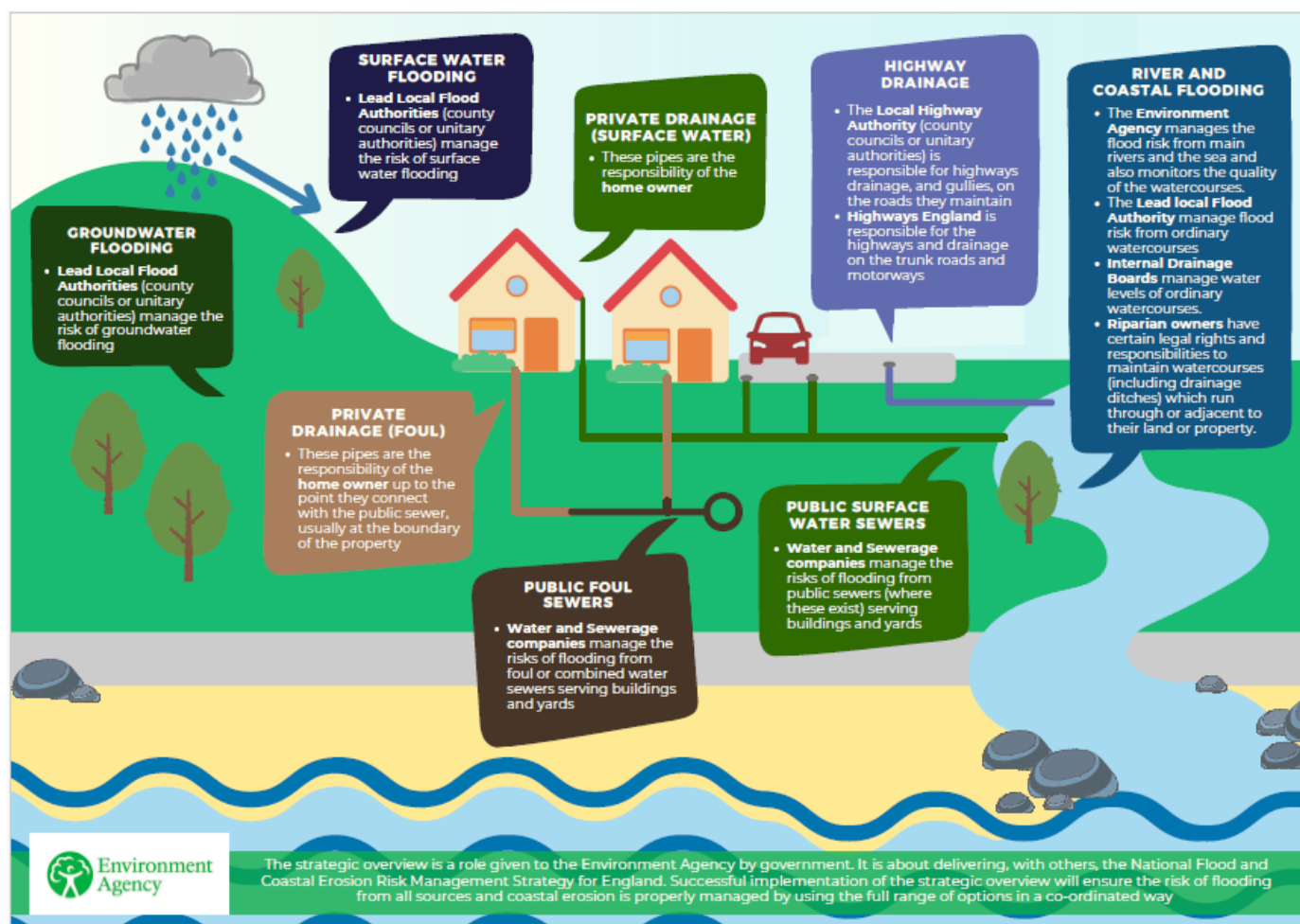


Floodline 0345 988 1188

Incident Hotline 0800 80 70 60

Classification and responsibilities of Sydling Water

Sydling Water in St Nicholas is classified as main river. Main rivers are usually larger rivers and streams. They are designated as such, and shown on the Main River Map. The Environment Agency carries out maintenance, improvement or construction work on main rivers to manage flood risk. The Environment Agency does not own or operate any flood defence assets in Sydling St Nicholas, nor carry out any maintenance activities for flood risk benefit. The maintenance of the river channel falls to riparian ownership. Other rivers are called 'ordinary watercourses'. The lead local flood authority (Dorset Council) carry out flood risk management work on ordinary watercourses, and also manage the risk from Surface water and Groundwater flooding.



Environment Agency gauging station

The Environment Agency owns a gauging station in the village. This measures flow on Sydling Water. It is not linked to any flood warning procedures.



The Environment Agency historically conducted some adhoc management of vegetation growth in the channel upstream of the gauging station. This will no longer be carried out as it was shown to have no effect on the accuracy of the gauging station, or flood risk.

Why is there no bespoke Flood warning for the river for Sydling St Nicholas at present?

Due to the size of the catchment and length of the Sydling Water leading up to the Sydling St Nicholas community, a fluvial flood warning service isn't possible with a conventional flood warning approach. The Environment Agency generally uses an upstream gauge to provide lead time for a flood warning (via the time of travel from the gauge to the community). For smaller catchments this type of service isn't suitable. Alternative approaches are in development.

How is Dorset Council working to reduce the flood risk in Sydling St Nicholas?

Dorset Council, as the Lead Local Flood Authority, continue to monitor ordinary watercourses to ensure that riparian landowners fulfil their statutory duties under the Land Drainage Act 1991. This includes the responsibility to keep ordinary watercourses clear of obstruction, allowing for the free passage of water and mitigating flood risk within the wider catchment.

Dorset Council Highways team have cleared out the watercourse in the vicinity of Lamperts Farm, Dorchester Road as a goodwill gesture. They have also enlarged two highway gullies in the High Street.

Dorset Council Highways service is responsible for maintaining the culverts in East Street. This includes inspections, maintenance and any upgrading work. In general, the Council's Highways operatives typically carry out any planned and emergency repairs to relevant structures. The team works alongside the EA to ensure wildlife and important habitats are not disturbed.

Understanding your watercourse as a riparian owner

Where a watercourse runs adjacent to or through your land you will be what is termed a 'riparian landowner'. You normally own a stretch of watercourse:

- that runs on or under your land
- on the boundary of your land, up to its centre

The deeds for your property or land will tell you if this is not the case. Check your deeds if you're not clear about ownership.

There is also useful guidance within [Your watercourse rights and roles](#) on how to maintain your watercourse and permitting of works. You can also find advice on how to work with others to reduce flood risk and protect and enhance the natural environment of our rivers and streams.



Your watercourse: rights and roles  Environment Agency

Do you own or occupy land next to or containing a watercourse?

Our 'Your watercourse: right and roles' guide will help you understand your role, rights and responsibilities as a riparian owner for main rivers.

Simply scan the QR Code or go to www.gov.uk/guidance/owning-a-watercourse

General enquiries: 03708 506 506
wessexenquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk

What is a watercourse?
Any stream of water flowing in a defined channel or through an underground pipe or culvert. It can be small or wide, natural, or artificial and includes channels that are dry for long periods of time and may not flow every year.

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Privately owned structures

There are some privately owned and operated structures in Sydling St Nicholas. The EA do not own or operate any flood defence assets in Sydling St Nicholas. It is the responsibility of the asset owner to operate their assets to manage the watercourse.

The Environment Agency do not give operational advice to owners. It is the responsibility of riparian owners to manage and operate such structures. Triggers for operation of local assets could be considered by the asset/riparian owner and could include local observations, weather warnings, or flood alert.

As a Riparian owner you are responsible for letting the water flow naturally, preventing pollution and protecting wildlife. There is clear advice in this document regarding Riparian ownership: [Your watercourse rights and roles.pdf](#)

Information for residents in Sydling St Nicholas

Check your flood risk and sign up for warnings

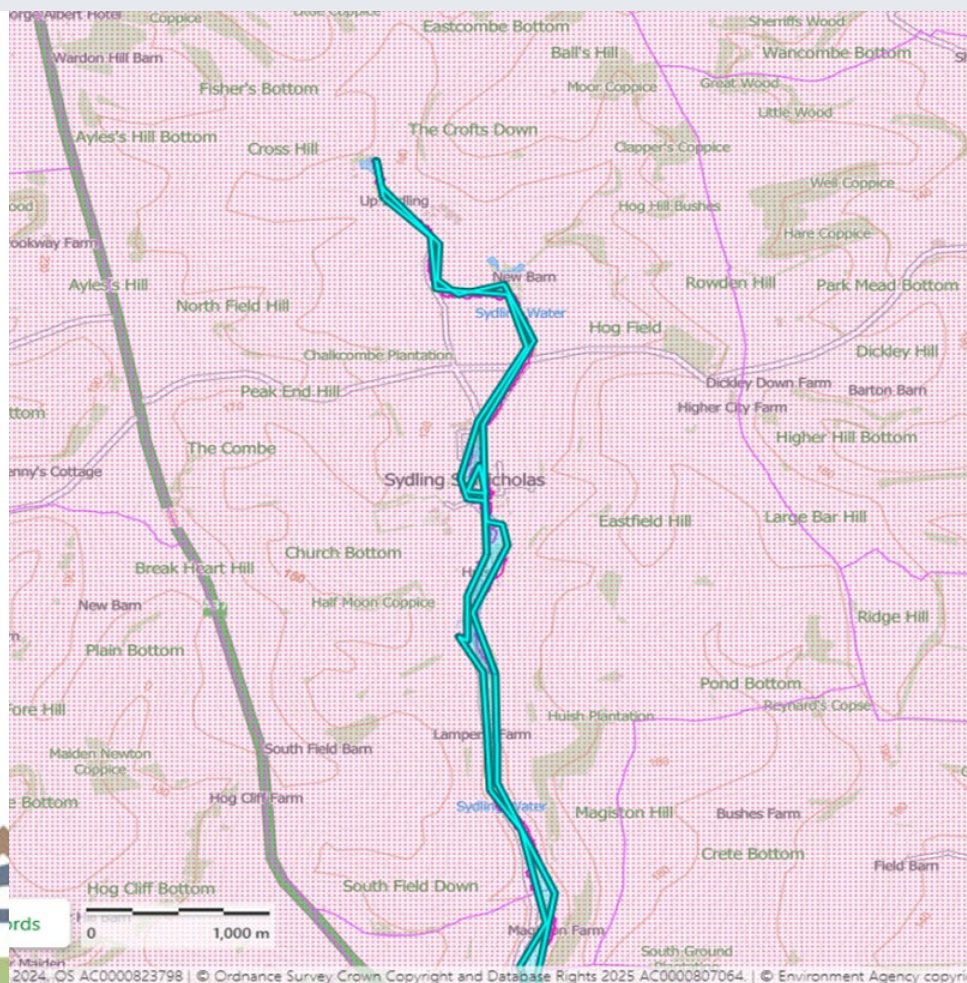


River

Flood Alert Area – Upper Frome and Tributaries (outlined in blue, below).

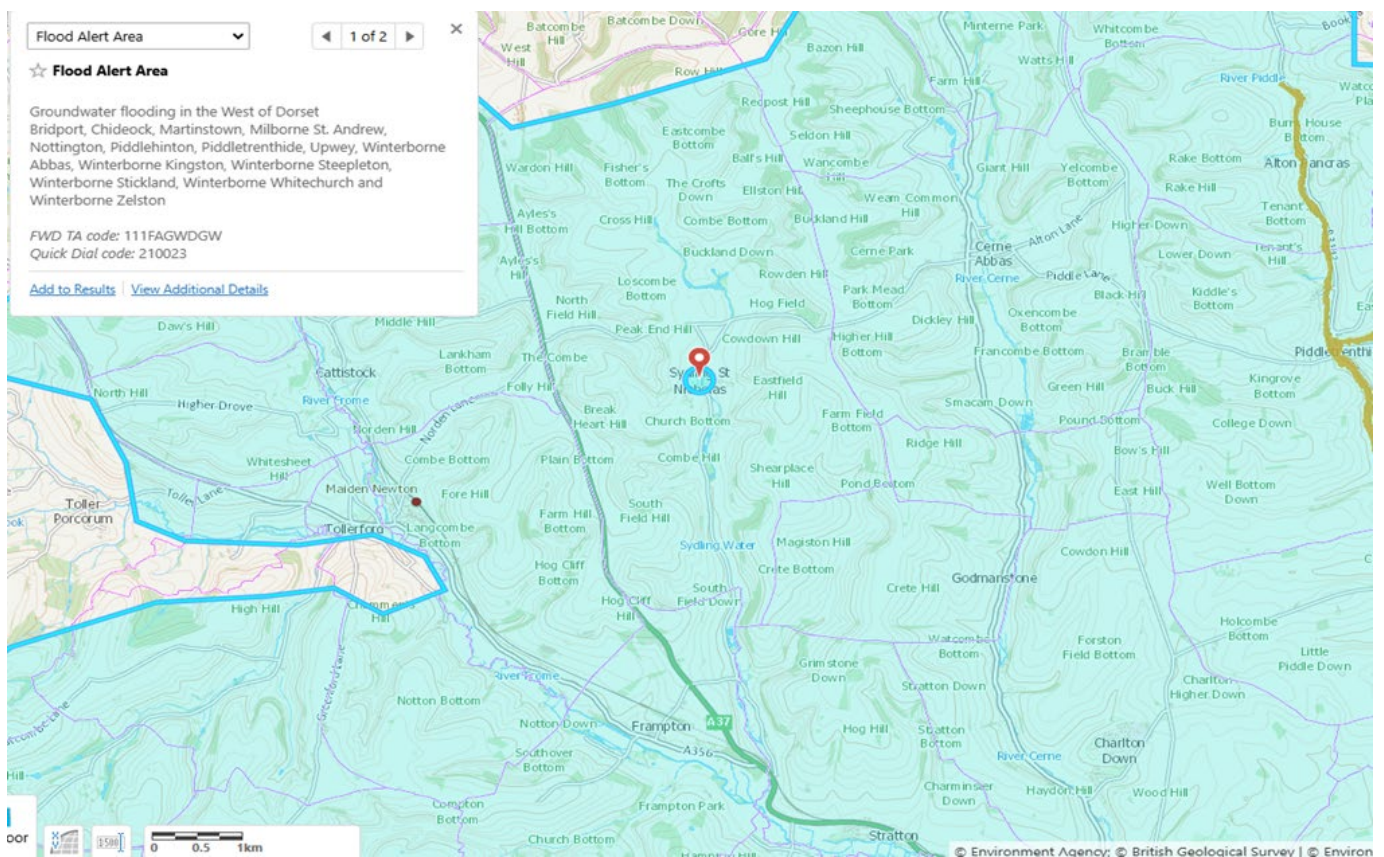
This is for tributaries between Toller Whelme and Dorchester and includes Sydling Water.

A Flood Alert is the first level of message to be issued and is an early heads up that flooding can be expected to low lying land and roads by the river. NB There is no further trigger for a flood warning for Sydling Water (as explained within the briefing), so you would be advised to sign up and opt in to receive this flood alert which gives you the heads up to prepare - watch forecasts, check local conditions and prepare to activate your home flood plan and property flood resilience (PFR) measures.



Groundwater Flood Alert Area for the West of Dorset

Groundwater flooding in the West of Dorset (outlined in blue below) You can see this covers a large area – larger than the map below. This is the first level of message to raise awareness of increased groundwater levels. This could include roads or land being affected. You can opt in to receive the Flood Alert for West Dorset if you want earlier notification of groundwater levels rising in the wider area. Please note that this alert area covers the whole of the West of Dorset affected by groundwater and could be triggered from any location within it.



Floodline 0345 988 1188

Incident Hotline 0800 80 70 60

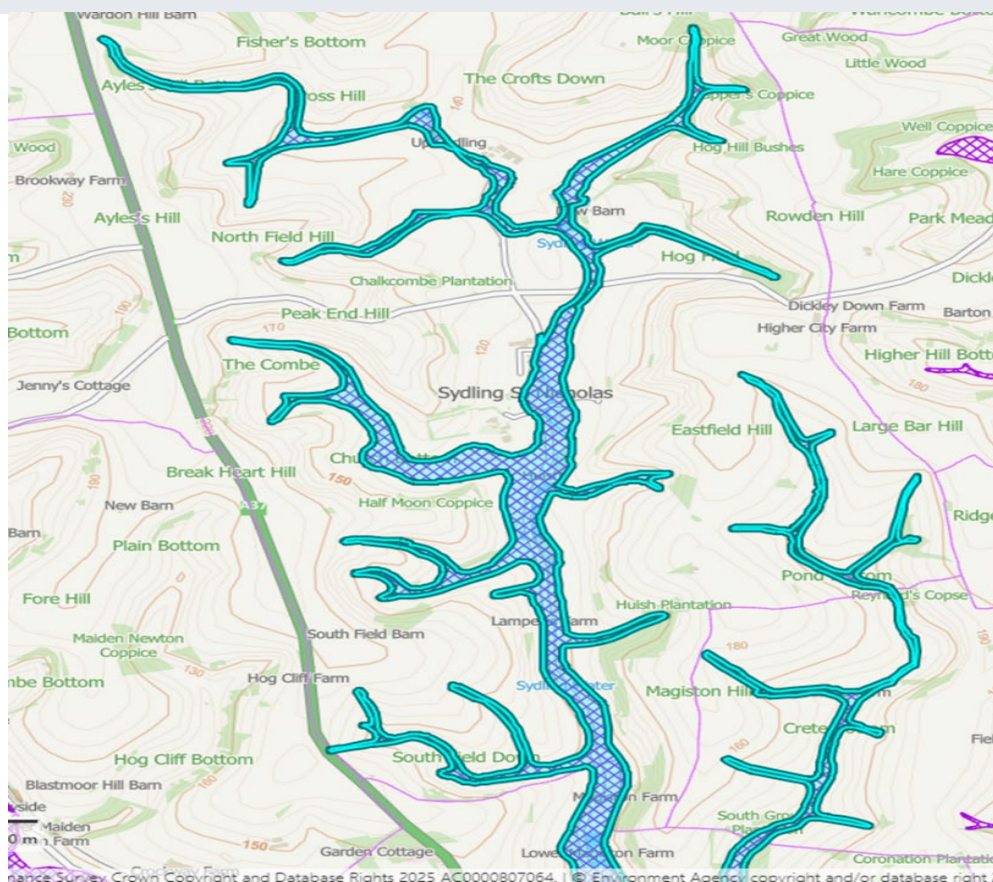
Groundwater Flood Warning for the Sydling

Flood Warning for Groundwater flooding for the Sydling (hatched area, outlined in blue, below).

This covers the area for Up Sydling and Sydling St Nicholas. This is a smaller, more localised area within the larger flood alert area where properties could be affected by groundwater flooding. Please note that not all properties within the flood warning area will be affected, but there is a risk. The Groundwater Flood Warning for Sydling is triggered from the Dickley Down borehole. You can check levels for the last 5 days at:

<https://check-for-flooding.service.gov.uk/station/9158>

A flood warning is time to take action - activate personal flood plan, prepare your property and put into place any property flood resilience measures.



Sign up to the Warning Service for River and Groundwater

Sign up to the flood warnings at www.gov.uk/sign-up-for-flood-warnings or call Floodline on 0345 988 1188.

Check Flooding Service

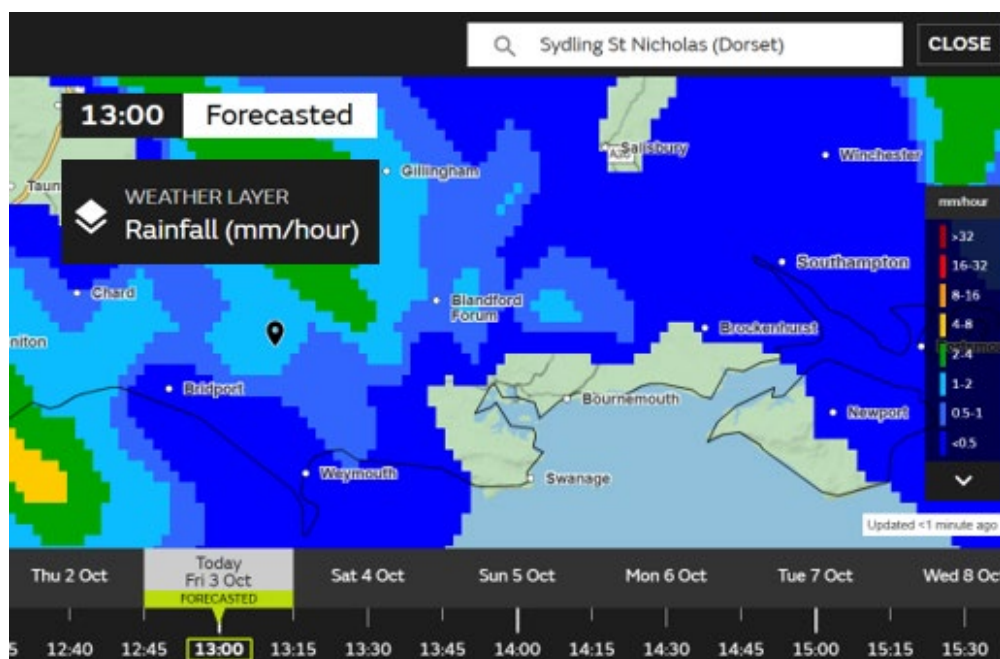
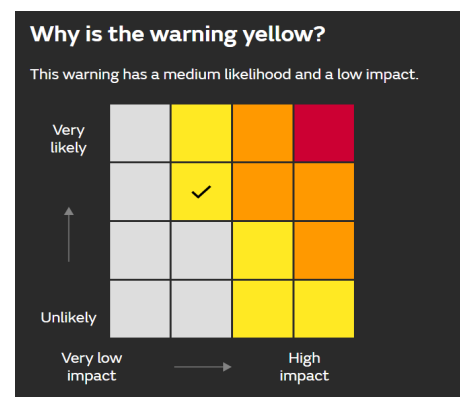
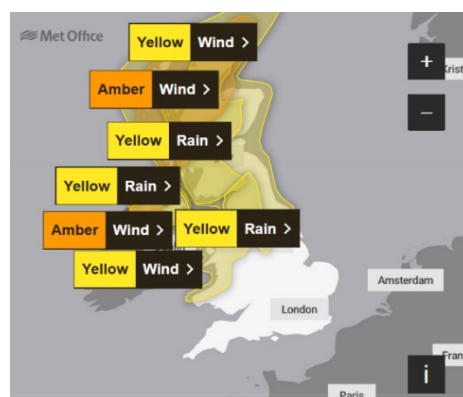
To check current flood alert and warning information, together with river, sea, groundwater and rainfall levels plus information on flood risk in the next 5 days, visit www.gov.uk/check-flooding or call Floodline on 0345 988 1188

Surface water

The Met Office provides a forecast based service and the colour of the warning is determined by a matrix of likelihood vs impact. It is accompanied by the area expected to be affected and if you click on the warning and check 'further details' you will find details of the amount and intensity of rainfall that is forecast. You can also check the rainfall radar in the forecast to track intensity and the forecast path.

If you are affected by surface water flooding, you could include a Met Office yellow warning as a first trigger for activating your personal flood plan, it is time to be aware and prepare.

Follow weather warnings online at www.metoffice.gov.uk or download the app



What can you do?

Flooding is a natural occurrence, and we cannot eliminate the risk of all flooding; our [National Flood Risk Strategy](#) calls for the nation to embrace a broad range of resilience actions where there is a risk. In all locations we would initially advise individuals and communities to:

- Check your current and long-term risk here [Check the long term flood risk for an area in England - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)
- Look at the advice on preparing for flooding at [Prepare for flooding: Protect yourself from future flooding - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)
- Sign up to receive any flood alerts and flood warnings for your local area here [Sign up for flood warnings - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)
- Write a personal, community or business flood plan, so you know what to do when flooding is forecast for Sydling St Nicholas [Prepare for flooding: Protect yourself from future flooding - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)
- Look out for your neighbours and vulnerable members of your community. Can you help them to be prepared?
- Regularly check and maintain your property flood resilience measures. Pumps and flood doors require looking after such as checking the seals. [The Flood Hub](#) provides some really good guidance and advice on PFR.
- You can check river and sea levels in England [Find river, sea, groundwater and rainfall levels - GOV.UK \(check-for-flooding.service.gov.uk\)](#)
- Visit the Met Office website www.metoffice.gov.uk or download their App for local forecasts and weather warnings.
- Your local flood warden is a good source of information and guidance. Contact the Parish Council or check the website for more information.

If you have any further queries, please contact us at:
wessexenquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk