Westmorland & Furness Council

Sustainable Transport & Highways

Highway's Gully Cleaning and Maintenance

westmorlandandfurness.gov.uk

Who is responsible for dealing with surface water?

Highway Drainage – Key Responsibilities

- W&F Council must keep highways safe and fit for purpose under the Highways Act 1980.
- Effective drainage is essential, especially the road gullies that keep water off the carriageway.
- Highway drains only deal with rain that falls directly onto the road and pavement.
- Landowners must manage water on their own land — including run-off from fields, gardens, roofs, and driveways.
- It is unlawful for water to flow from private property onto the highway, unless it is natural Runoff.
- Adopted Highway Only.

Landowner Responsibility?

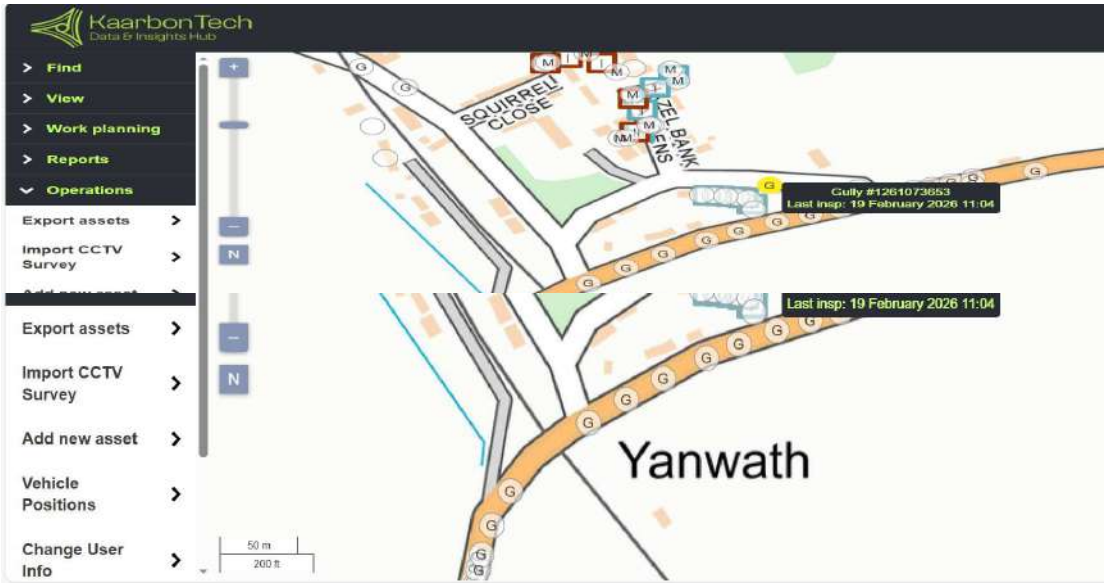
Natural Flow: Landowners are generally not liable for water that flows naturally across their land onto a lower-lying highway.

Maintenance of Ditches: If there is a ditch alongside the road, the adjacent landowner (often called a "riparian owner") is responsible for keeping it clear, even if it sits outside their property boundary.

Negligence/Obstruction: A landowner can be held liable if they fail to maintain a ditch or culvert that causes water to back up and flood the highway.

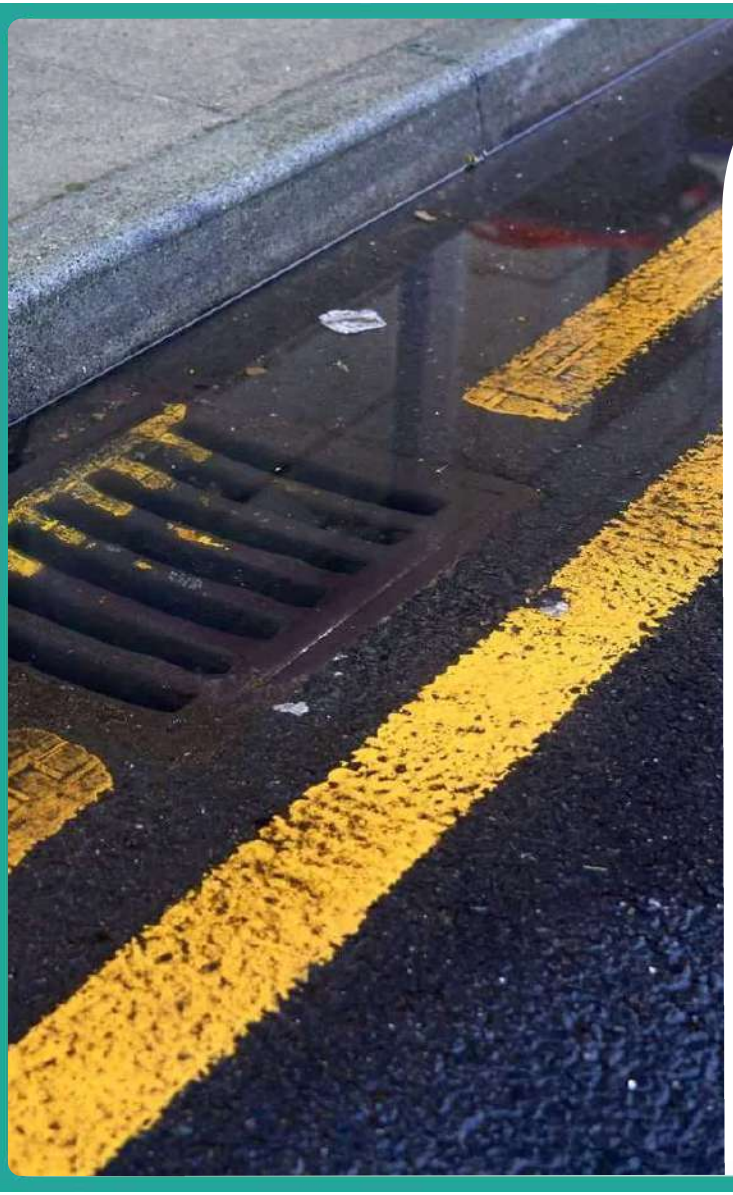
Artificial Runoff: If the landowner has increased the flow (e.g., by paving a large area, installing new drainpipes, or altering the land), they are responsible for the resulting flooding, as this is not "natural" runoff.

W&F Councils Asset Management Approach



- Westmorland & Furness Council operate a structured Highways Asset Management approach to maintain over 72,000 gullies.
- Prioritisation will be based on risk, location, condition, and network criticality, ensuring resources are targeted where they have the greatest impact.
- Routine and reactive maintenance are planned using data-driven decision-making.

- Kaarbontech provides a centralised digital record of every gully, including condition, silt levels, defects, and cleansing history.
- Field teams use mobile devices to capture real-time data, ensuring accuracy and consistency.
- Enhanced compliance and reporting: Accurate records support statutory duties and funding bids.



Gully Cleansing Across Westmorland & Furness

- W&F Highways operates a 3-year cyclic cleansing programme, with the long-term goal of moving to a fully risk-based approach.
- The Resilient Road Network (RRN) is cleansed on a 12-month cycle.
- Highways operations run three in-house gully wagons to deliver routine and reactive cleansing. One gully wagon per area, Eden, South Lakes and Barrow.
- An external contractor provides two additional wagons to support year-round routine cleaning.
- During periods of adverse or forecast severe weather, additional resources can be deployed to meet increased demand.

Drainage Budgets

W&F Strategic Revenue Budget:

- Funds routine cleaning of the RRN, whilst supporting long-term asset protection and planned drainage improvements.

W&F Revenue Budget:

- Funds routine cleansing of all non-RRN gullies.
- Drainage capital allocation funds reactive drainage maintenance, drainage investigations and specific repairs.

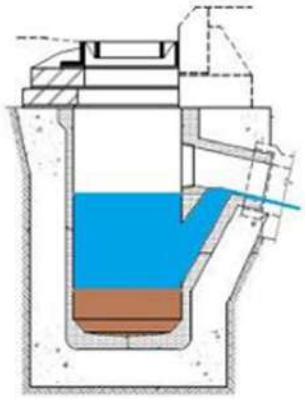
Our Funding Challenges:

- Extreme weather and climate change, causing more flooding and requiring more frequent gully cleansing.
- Rising operational costs (labour, fuel, plant, disposal of silt).
- Ageing drainage infrastructure requiring more reactive work.

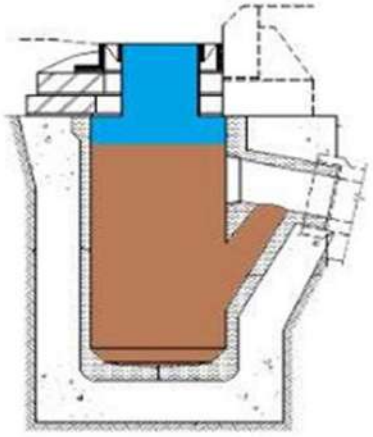
A risk-based approach, supported by asset data and performance monitoring, will be essential to maximise the impact of available budgets.

How do gullies work?

- Every gully has a ‘pot’ underneath. This is designed to collect as much silt and waste as possible to minimise the risk of a blockage. Our teams jet wash and cleanse all the gullies on our road network to ensure that the collection of waste is removed so water can flow freely. The cleansing teams only jet the pipe up to 3m and do not cleanse right back to carrier drain.



Properly Functioning Gully:
Some silt at the bottom
Water sitting in the gully up to the outlet level.
During dry periods this will evaporate away but following wet weather it is normal to have an amount of water sitting in the gully pot.



Blocked Gully:
Here the level of silt has risen significantly and has blocked the outlet pipe (bottom hole) and the rodding eye outlet (the top hole).
The rainwater cannot reach the drainage pipe and so in wet weather fills up the pot causing the gully to flood.

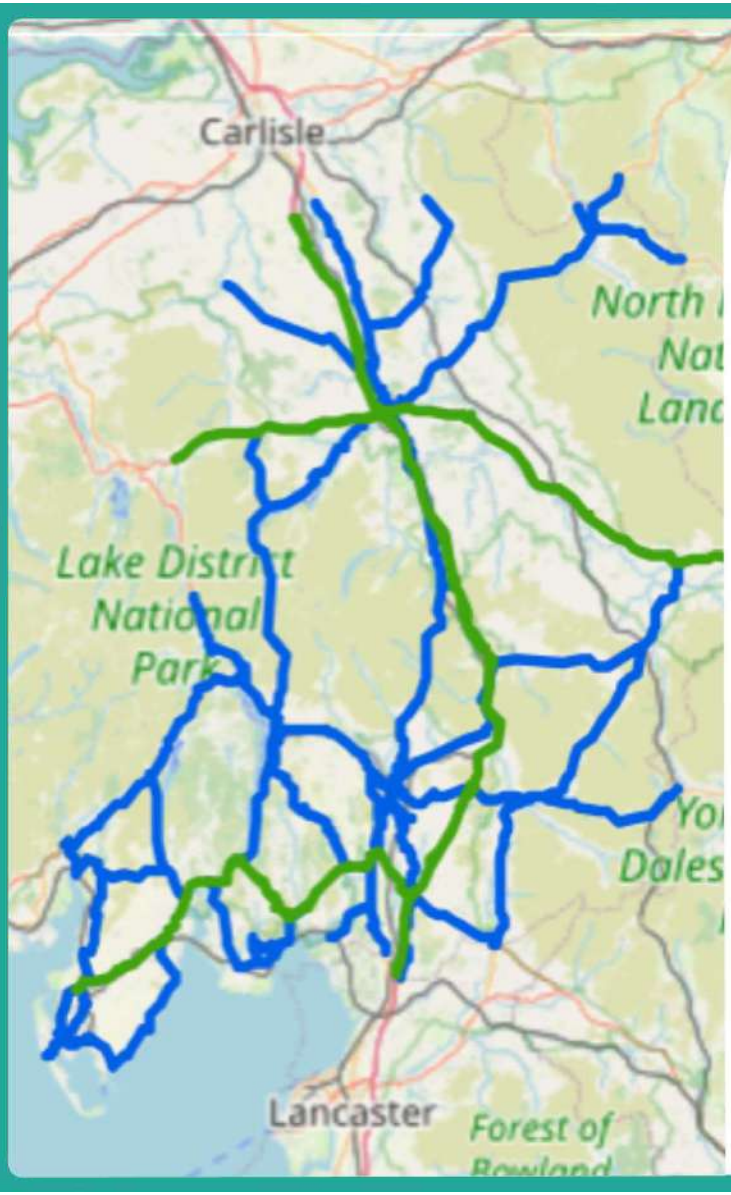
- It’s not just gullies we clean but also culverts, soakaways, split channels, swales and maintaining grips.

Causes of Flooding

Flooding can happen for several reasons, including:

- Intense storms or sudden downpours that exceed the capacity of roadside gullies and ditches, especially when the ground is already saturated
- Cracked, damaged, or broken pipes
- Runoff from fields or overflowing rivers during periods of heavy rainfall
- Blocked drains caused by a build-up of mud, leaves, or other debris.
- Rivers or lakes bursting their banks during prolonged or extreme rainfall.

These conditions can overwhelm drainage systems during severe weather. In most cases, water will naturally drain away within 1–2 hours once the rain stops.



Flood Response

When flooding is observed or reported, we assess its severity to prioritise our response and aim to manage resources effectively to ensure the safety of road users and minimise disruption.

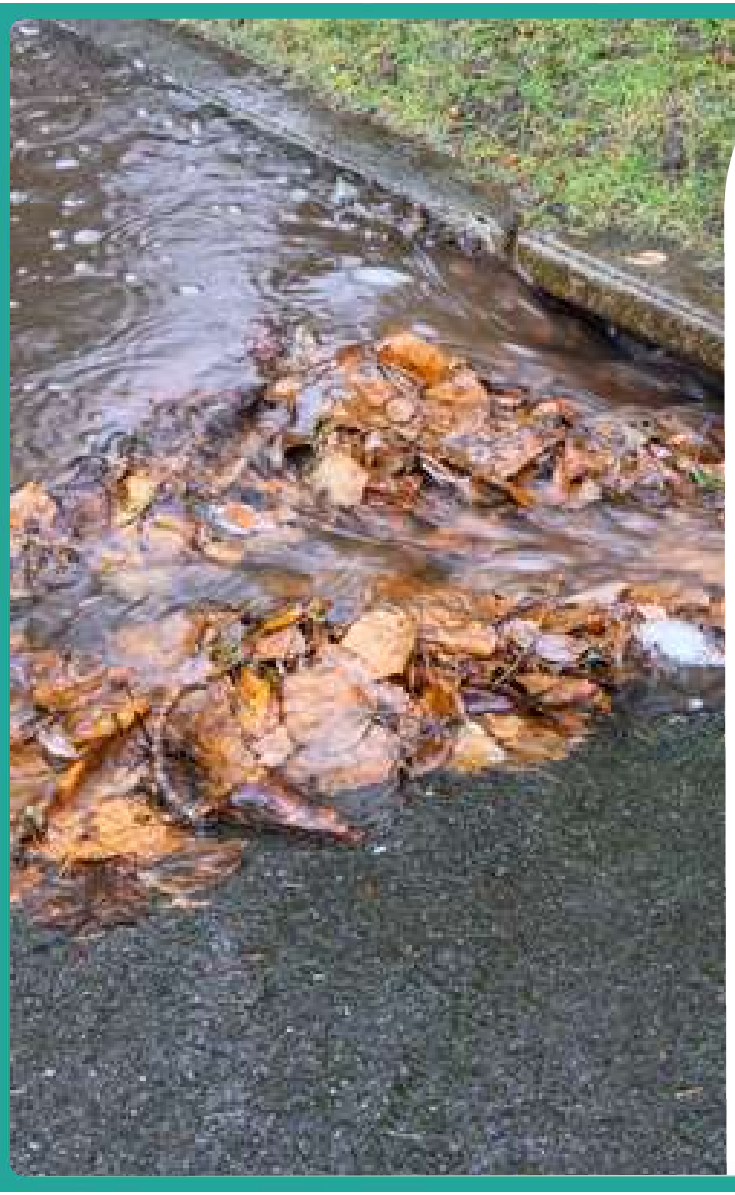
- Category E - Emergency (1 day): extremely hazardous that requires emergency attention because they pose an immediate danger to highway users.
- Category U - Urgent (5 days): require urgent attention because they pose a risk to highway users.
- In some cases, we may install temporary flood warning signs or implement other safety measures to protect road users while flooding is present. Eg. OOH
- Where flooding is caused by a blocked highway drainage system, we will attempt to clean and unblock the affected system. Our response is based on a risk-based prioritisation approach.

Limitations of Reactive Flood Response

Whilst every effort is made to resolve or reduce flooding during a reactive visit, there are situations where this may not be possible. These include:

- The drainage system is damaged (e.g. stuck or broken grating) or located on private land.
- Standing water is too deep to safely access the drainage system.
- Flooding is due to the capacity of the existing system being exceeded.
- If water is still not free-flowing after cleaning and unblocking, the location will require further investigation.

Please note that our reactive teams are not equipped to carry out major repairs, such as digging up the road or installing new drainage systems. These more complex issues are added to a list of locations for future planned drainage improvements.



How can you help?

- As we have so many gullies, we can't service them all regularly. Very often when we respond to a call out for a blocked drain on the road, we find that the grate is just covered by wet leaves or grass. This acts like a plug and stops the water flowing down it freely.
- If you notice that a gully on your street has become blocked by leaves which can be easily brushed away, without putting yourself or others at risk, please brush the blockage to one side. Clearing the leaves regularly makes sure the water can flow freely into the drain next time we get heavy rain.
- If you can't clear the blockage yourself safely, please report it to us and we will clear it as soon as we are able to.

Reporting Drainage Issues

We follow a risk-based approach to maintaining gullies. Higher risk areas and areas prone to flooding are cleared more regularly. In lower risk areas the frequency of clearing may be reduced.

- All non-emergency problems, such as blocked gullies and drains, can be reported quickly and easily online using the council's "Report street or road damage" form to log issues with, for example, drainage, gullies, or flooding.

- **Information Needed:** Be prepared to provide the location (road name, postcode, or map pin) and details of the blockage, What three words is helpful to identify a specific gully.

- You can also report a problem by phone to the Highways Hotline: 0300 373 3306 - Monday to Friday, 8.30am to 5pm

Any Questions?