

## Watercourses and their Settings

- 9.30 This policy sets out in detail how development is expected to protect and enhance watercourses and their settings, including waterbodies, as a fundamental, connective component of the green and blue network and for the multiple benefits they provide for people and places.

### Policy G4 – Watercourses and their Settings

Development proposals in close proximity to watercourses should support the strategic importance of the borough's network of blue infrastructure by contributing to the relevant River Basin Management Plan (RBMP) objectives and seeking to maximise its multi-functional economic, social and environmental benefits.

Development should avoid impacts on any watercourse and its setting within or adjacent to the development site.

Where a development is likely to have an adverse effect on a watercourse and its setting, a more detailed assessment will be required, including:

- a) how the proposed development would affect a watercourse and its setting, and how impacts will be mitigated (including physical modifications) on water quantity and flow, river continuity and groundwater connectivity, and biological elements (flora and fauna)
- b) how the proposed development will affect measures in the RBMP to achieve good status in water bodies
- c) how the development will comply with other relevant regulatory requirements relating to the water environment

Proposals will only be permitted where they promote positive management to conserve and enhance the watercourse and its setting. Such measures include:

- d) helping to achieve requirements of the Water Framework Directive including identifying and implementing opportunities for re-naturalising the watercourse and improving water quality and ecology, having regard to the relevant RBMP and Greater Manchester (GM) Local Nature Recovery Strategy.
- e) designing schemes that do not involve culverting and seeking opportunities to de-culvert watercourses
- f) enabling the watercourse to provide natural flood management functions
- g) identifying and implementing opportunities for watercourses and their settings to contribute to sustainable placemaking i.e. places which are safe and inclusive spaces for all; enabling sustainable access and/or visibility of waterways; creating walking and cycling routes along river valleys and canals; incorporating appropriate pedestrianisation and cycle links with adjacent neighbourhoods and green spaces; and improving connectivity of the green and blue network
- h) maintaining an undeveloped and unobstructed buffer of ten metres from the top of the bank and the development (unless existing physical constraints prevent) from the top of the watercourse bank and the development site (including private gardens, landscaping, footpaths, lighting and fencing). Buffer zones should be natural in

character and proposals must provide a long-term landscape and ecological management plan for it.

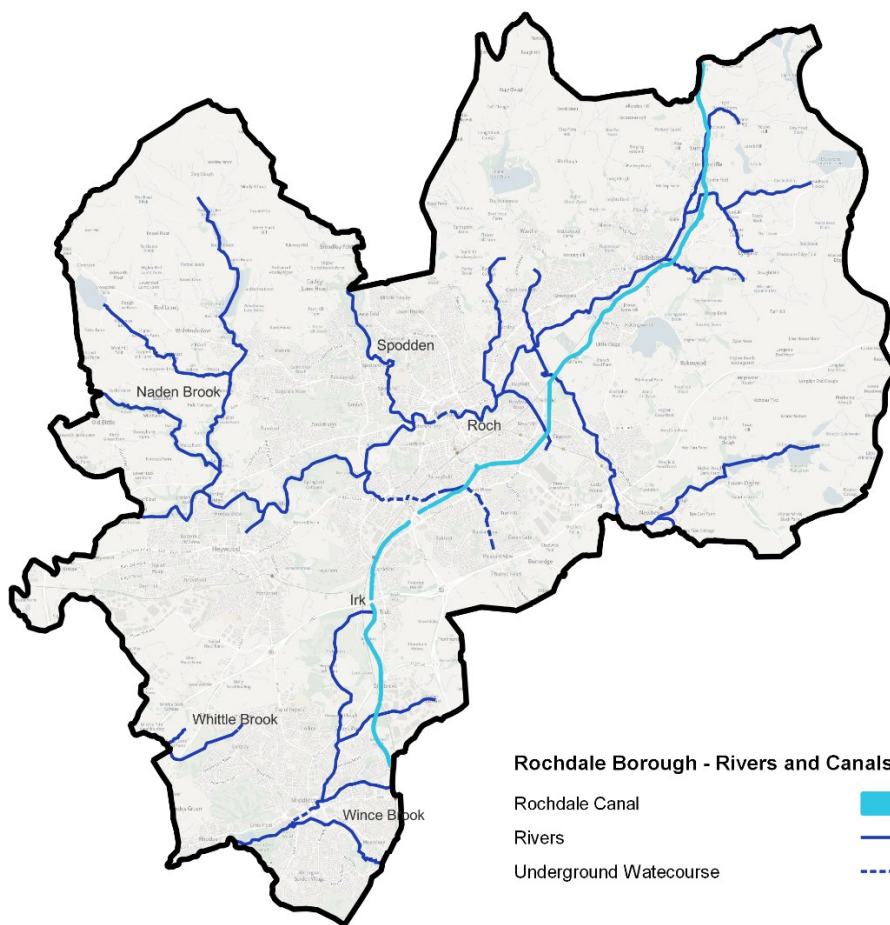
**Places for Everyone Links:**

Policy JP-G3 River Valleys and Waterways

**Reasoned justification**

- 9.31 The requirement for development to contribute to this policy will generally not be relevant for householder applications, applications for change of use, listed building consent and advertising. The council will exercise discretion and take a proportionate approach where there are potential impacts and opportunities.
- 9.32 Rivers, streams, canals, and their settings, are vital elements of the network of green and blue infrastructure and provide many important functions in their own right.
- 9.33 In the borough, they are often the only remaining physical link between existing areas of semi-natural habitat and open space and are therefore essential for halting and reversing the decline in nature and providing critically important ecosystem services, including addressing climate change and flooding, urban cooling, recreation, tourism and landscape.
- 9.34 The borough's main rivers and tributaries and the Rochdale Canal are shown on Figure 5, however, there are other smaller watercourses that may also need to be considered in relation to proposed development.

Figure 5: Rochdale's River and Canal Network



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- 9.35 Watercourses should provide an integral part of the setting for new neighbourhoods and should not be overlooked for their contribution to place making. Blending future development needs with the role the waterways play in terms of ecology, flood defence, climate adaptation, wellbeing and recreation will be key to delivering successful communities.
- 9.36 The protection and enhancement of these functions will be a key consideration in assessing development proposals that impact on watercourses and their settings.
- 9.37 In accordance with NPPF, planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by preventing new and existing development from contributing to unacceptable levels of water pollution. Development should, wherever possible, help to improve water quality, considering relevant information such as river basin management plans.
- 9.38 National planning guidance recognises that multiple benefits for people and the environment can be achieved through good design and mitigation. For example, flood risk can be reduced and biodiversity and amenity improved by designing development that includes permeable surfaces and other sustainable drainage systems, removing artificial physical modifications (for example, weirs and concrete channels) and

recreating natural features. Water quality can be improved by protecting and enhancing green infrastructure.

- 9.39 Places for Everyone requires new development to be designed to protect and improve river valleys as central components of our green and blue network and a vital part of a Nature Recovery Network, making a major contribution to local identity, quality of life and the natural environment. Proposals must ensure that river corridors and their associated habitats are integrated within development and enhanced wherever possible, ensuring they are managed sustainably in the long term and opportunities to address Water Framework Directive failures are considered. This in turn will provide high quality and attractive environments, achieve additional economic benefits (through multifunctional ecosystem services and land value capture) whilst ensuring there is increased resilience to future climate change pressures and an overall improvement in biodiversity.
- 9.40 The North-West River Basin Management Plan, required under the Water Framework Directive, and implemented through UK legislation, provides the statutory framework for protecting and enhancing the benefits provided by the water environment.
- 9.41 The borough's watercourses have a diverse character, from rural to urban, but all are heavily modified from their natural state. Whilst significant improvements to Rochdale's watercourses have taken place over the last few decades, further improvements are essential. None of the borough's rivers are in good condition, as required by the Water Framework Directive. Ecological health is generally assessed as moderate and many of our watercourses fail on the grounds of chemical pollution.
- 9.42 The setting of a watercourse can be defined as the width of the channel in which water flows, together with its influence on the surrounding landscape necessary for its natural functioning. Any development which could impact upon a watercourse in any way (pollution, abstraction, visual impact etc) should ensure that the watercourse setting is conserved and enhanced.