

## Step closer to cleaner rivers and reduced flood flows

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A new, more environmentally friendly approach to draining flood waters could soon provide better protection for people and property from flooding, enhance the local environment and reduce the pollution of rivers.

Sustainable Drainage Systems (SUDS) is an alternative approach to drainage in built-up areas designed to overcome some of the disadvantages of conventional piped drainage systems. The SUDS approach has been developed in recent years to reduce the risk of flooding, to improve water quality and to provide a better environment for people and wildlife.

A new code of practice encouraging uptake of SUDS, developed under the chairmanship of the Environment Agency with representation from central and local government and the water industry, was published today. This new code should encourage the uptake of SUDS in new and existing developments by making its adoption and maintenance more straightforward.

The philosophy of SUDS is to mimic as closely as possible the natural drainage from a site before it was developed and to treat water to remove pollutants before it enters streams, rivers and other parts of the environment.

This involves a flexible approach, with a wide range of systems such as ponds and reed beds to accommodate water and absorb pollutants before being released to waterways.

Andrew Skinner, Director of Environmental Protection at the Environment Agency said:

"Building and development prevents large swathes of ground from absorbing rainwater. Where the land once soaked-up excess water, concrete now sends it straight into watercourses.

"This increases the risk of flooding as rivers are swollen by the additional water. It also increases pollution risks and contributes to the excessive erosion of riverbanks. The problem will only get

worse as climate change threatens more intense rainfall in years to come.

"We're convinced that SUDS have a serious role to play in future development and in improving existing management of surface water drainage. Ownership and maintenance is a key issue. We have set out how these responsibilities can be organised under current legislation. We hope the recommendations help to make the adoption of SUDS easier and more straightforward for planners and developers."

The environmental benefits of SUDS include:

- Reducing water flows to watercourses and sewers and potentially reducing risk of downstream flooding
- Improving water quality by removing pollutants from diffuse pollutant sources
- Reducing water demand through rainwater harvesting
- Improving the environment through the provision of public open spaces and wildlife habitat
- Replicating natural drainage patterns, including groundwaters which are used for public water supply

ODPM Minister for Sustainable Development Phil Hope said:

"Climate change means we need a more sophisticated approach to reducing the impact of unpredictable weather patterns, which put people and property at risk of flooding. By reducing the impact of flooding, de-contaminating water and providing an attractive environment for wildlife and people, SUDS can offer communities great economic, social and environmental benefits.

"The development of this code of practice is an excellent example of cross-government partnership working to protect our environment."

The document is based on a consultation undertaken last summer by the National SUDS group and takes into account both responses received to the consultation and changes in guidance in the last 12 months.

*Copies of the report are available at [www.environment-agency.gov.uk/SUDS](http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/SUDS)*