

Guidance: Using SEPA flood maps for land use planning

July 2021

Introduction

This advice and the SEPA flood maps are provided to ensure that new development avoids areas at flood risk. It will help anyone interested in the development of a site that is in or close to places that could flood. New development should avoid areas at risk of flooding to make sure that it is safe from flooding, now and in the long term. Any land that can flood should be kept free of new development, because when floodplains store and carry flood water, they give protection from flooding to nearby communities.

What the maps show:

Our flood maps are developed from a combination of national and local models and show areas at risk of flooding. They do not provide a precise or site-specific assessment of flood risk to any individual property. We have assessed flood risk to areas within Scotland, not flood risk to individual properties. The flood maps should be used to identify whether a site sits within an area that is at risk of flooding and therefore if further assessment is likely to be needed before progressing with the development of a site. In using the maps, some of the most important things for you to note are:

- You should check the maps for all the different flood sources and likelihoods, including the future flood maps (which show what may happen to your site in the future due to climate change).
- The flood extents in these maps show areas where flooding could happen. They do not confirm the exact risk at a location or confirm that the inside of a property has flooded or would flood.
- The absence of flood extents on or close to your site does not confirm that there is no flood risk. Some sources of flooding are not modelled in the flood maps, such as flooding from small watercourses and neither is the influence of some structures or small features on the ground.
- There is still some likelihood that your site could be at risk of flooding if it is close to the edge of the flood extents.

More information on what the flood maps show and how they were made can be found on our website at <https://www.sepa.org.uk/environment/water/flooding/flood-maps/>.

Using the flood maps

The [SEPA flood maps](#) use a postcode and address to provide a flood risk assessment of the area surrounding the address. It lets you know if there are any areas of flood risk within a circular area of 50 metres radius from the address. You can use the interactive flood map viewer to look at the area and find out if the site of your planned development is in or near an area of present or future flood risk.

If your site does not currently have an address, you can either enter a neighbouring address, or [go directly to the flood map](#) and use the map controls to find the area. The flood map also has a search facility that allows you to search for a placename as well as a postcode.

What you should do with this information

As a first principle, you should avoid placing any built development in or close to areas shown to be at risk of flooding. You should also avoid building up ground levels.

If parts of your site are in, or close to, areas shown to be at flood risk on the SEPA Flood Maps you should recognise that the planning process may not be straightforward, and your site may not be approved for development (advice on lower risk developments is provided [in our standing advice](#),ⁱ some of which may be acceptable in flood risk areas, provided the advice therein is followed. If despite this, you wish to pursue development then you should do the following:

- Make enquiries about any past flooding, flood protection schemes or detailed flood studies for the area of interest. We recommend you contact other authorities including the relevant Council who may have more information on flood risk management in the area.
- Include information with your submission to the planning authority to show that your development is set back from - and is higher up than - any nearby sources of flooding. It may be possible to make the planning process easier and faster if you show this clearly in the information you provide with your submission.
 - Include clear plans that show where development will be located within your site and that development is kept away from areas that could flood.

- Topographic information should be included to show the height difference between areas that could flood, and the land being developed. This could include surveyed ground levels and finished floor levels.
 - Pictures and dimensions of any nearby bridges or culverts, including the height of any flood relief points where water would go in the event of them being blocked or overflowing.
 - Photos and local information on any past flooding are also very helpful.
- Be aware that a Flood Risk Assessment may be required if the site is anticipated to be at flood risk. More information on Flood Risk Assessments can be found in SEPA's [technical flood risk guidance for stakeholders](#)ⁱⁱ. Flood Risk Assessments must be carried out by suitably qualified and experienced professionals. A Flood Risk Assessment does not guarantee that your development will be shown to be suitable for the site and it may only confirm that the site will flood.
 - Make space for flood water in your site to help ensure your development is resilient to flooding and climate change. Such space also creates an opportunity to enhance your site/development through the provision of multi-functional blue/green infrastructure (contributing towards occupier amenity, biodiversity enhancement, opportunities for active travel or local food production, and the protection and enhancement of carbon stores).

Links

<https://www.sepa.org.uk/media/534740/sepa-flood-risk-standing-advice-for-planning-authorities-and-developers.pdf>

¹ <https://www.sepa.org.uk/media/162602/ss-nfr-p-002-technical-flood-risk-guidance-for-stakeholders.pdf>

¹ <https://map.sepa.org.uk/floodmaps/>

¹ <https://map.sepa.org.uk/floodmaps/FloodRisk/Help/>

¹ <https://www.sepa.org.uk/environment/water/flooding/faqs/>

¹ <https://www.sepa.org.uk/environment/water/flooding/flood-maps/>

¹ <https://www.sepa.org.uk/environment/land/planning/>

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- ⁱ <https://www.sepa.org.uk/media/534740/sepa-flood-risk-standing-advice-for-planning-authorities-and-developers.pdf>
ⁱⁱ <https://www.sepa.org.uk/media/162602/ss-nfr-p-002-technical-flood-risk-guidance-for-stakeholders.pdf>