Internet Explorer 11 has been retired – what does this mean for accessing SharePoint via File Explorer?

What's happening?

Microsoft finally retired Internet Explorer 11 on 15th June 2022. Microsoft have been limiting support for their Apps in Internet Explorer since November 2020 when Teams was no longer supported and then in August 2021 when Microsoft 365 was no longer supported.

As of 15th June 2022, Internet Explorer 11 (IE11) is out of support and you will encounter this in a number of ways. Initially, the IE desktop application will be progressively redirected to Microsoft Edge over the next few months and after will ultimately be permanently disabled via a future Windows Update to help ensure a smooth retirement.

Internet Explorer 11 was introduced in 2013 and since that time Security has moved on, with most users already switching to a more modern browser, typically Chrome or Microsoft Edge, as their browser of choice.

Why should I care?

Internet Explorer 11 had one very useful feature, not supported in modern browsers, it allowed the viewing of SharePoint libraries in File Explorer via a traditional Drive Mapping. This was typically used when your files were migrated to SharePoint from your local file storage (Server or NAS drive) and a drive letter, typically "O" drive, which allowed users to access their files online in SharePoint through a familiar path, and eased transition to the new way of working online. This was setup on some desktop computers or laptops used in the office pre-pandemic, and on a small number of organisations where this was setup on new laptops during the pandemic.

If you don't use this method of accessing your SharePoint files, then you can safely ignore this document, as the issue does not affect you. Otherwise, please read on as sadly, this feature is not supported by the modern browser and so will disappear along with Internet Explorer.

What do I need to do?

Going forward, there are two options for accessing your files in SharePoint: either Online through a browser or by continuing to use File Explorer, but this time syncing your SharePoint Libraries to your computer.

Both options will work, and it is up to the individual user, or their organisation, as to which option they would prefer and find easiest to use.

We have prepared a guide for each of these options, with the SharePoint synchronisation guide providing detailed instructions of how to set this up.

- See page 2 for accessing SharePoint via the browser
- See page 3 for the guide to setting up accessing via File Explorer and OneDrive Sync

How to Access SharePoint through the Browser

Access SharePoint through the Browser

To access your data in SharePoint through the browser:

- Open the site https://www.office.com and login with your email address and password, providing Multi-Factor Authentication if required.

- Click on the app   ⠿   launcher (9 dot grid), at the top left of the browser.

- Select SharePoint   SharePoint   from the Apps list

- Select your site either from the left menu or from the site badges in the centre of the screen. If your site isn't displayed click on the top level site, which usually includes your organisation's name.

Accessing SharePoint through File Explorer using OneDrive Sync

The method below provides details of how to access files in SharePoint without having to access via a browser. This method uses a feature called OneDrive for Business Sync (ODfBS) and is available through your existing OneDrive Sync client.

Access SharePoint using OneDrive for Business Sync Client

As the OneDrive for Business Sync (ODfBS) process uses existing OneDrive functionality, you will need to have first signed into OneDrive. If you haven't already signed into OneDrive, you will be prompted to do this, if so, follow the steps below, otherwise move onto step 2 "Accessing files and Folders".

If you are not sure whether you are using OneDrive, you can check this by looking for the OneDrive icon in the system tray (bottom right of screen, by the clock). If you see this icon then you are already signed in and can skip to step 2 "Accessing files and Folders".

If you see the Grey icon   or Grey icon with line through it   , then you have not yet set up or signed into OneDrive and need to continue below.

1. Setting up OneDrive

To set up OneDrive sync follow these steps:

- Log into Office 365 through a browser at https://www.office.com with your email address and password, providing Multi-Factor Authentication if required.
- Click on the app launcher (9 dot grid)   at the top left of the browser.

- Select OneDrive from the list of Apps   OneDrive   to open the OneDrive page.

- Select Sync in the menu bar
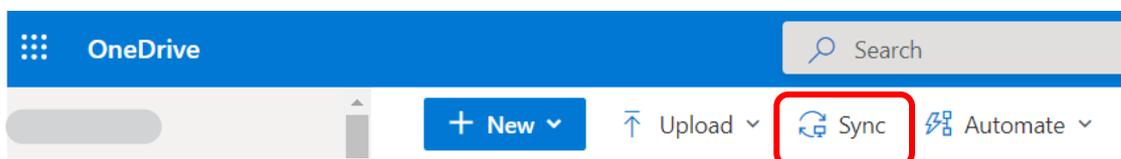
- You will then be prompted to Open Microsoft OneDrive? and so next Click on Open Microsoft OneDrive
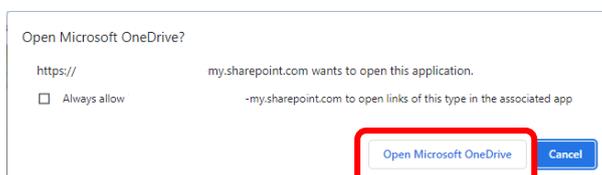
- Then you will be prompted to either Sign in or to enter your email address. If prompted, click Sign in.

- If prompted enter your email address, it may be pre-populated, and then click Sign in. You would not need to provide your password if you have already signed in with your email address and password to your PC or laptop
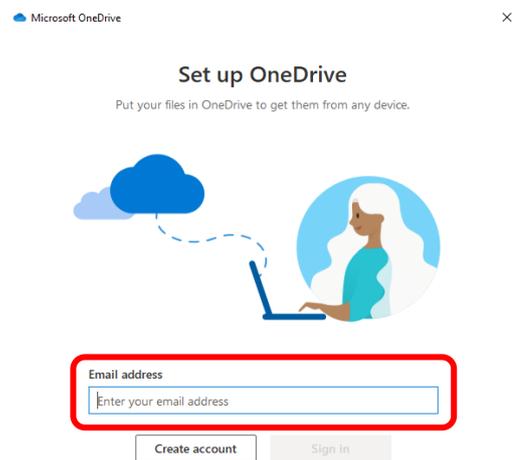
- Once setup has completed successfully, the **You're all set!**' dialog box will be displayed. You can close this dialog box via the 'x' at the right top corner
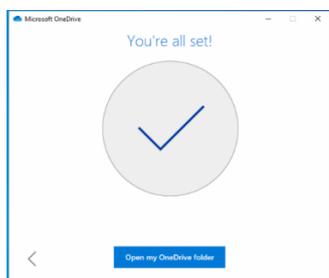
- After successfully signing in using the steps above, your Desktop, Documents, and Picture folders will be synced and backed up to your OneDrive, allowing access to these folders from different PCs, other devices or locations where you are logged into your Office 365 account.

2. Accessing files and folders from SharePoint via File Explorer

Navigate to your SharePoint site in the browser and open a folder you would like to access via File Explorer. Look for the Sync icon on the navigation bar and click on it.

Please note that certain top-level folders cannot be synced (these are Sites and Sub-Sites), so if you don't see the Sync Icon then this folder isn't capable of being synced and you need to try a folder in the next level down.
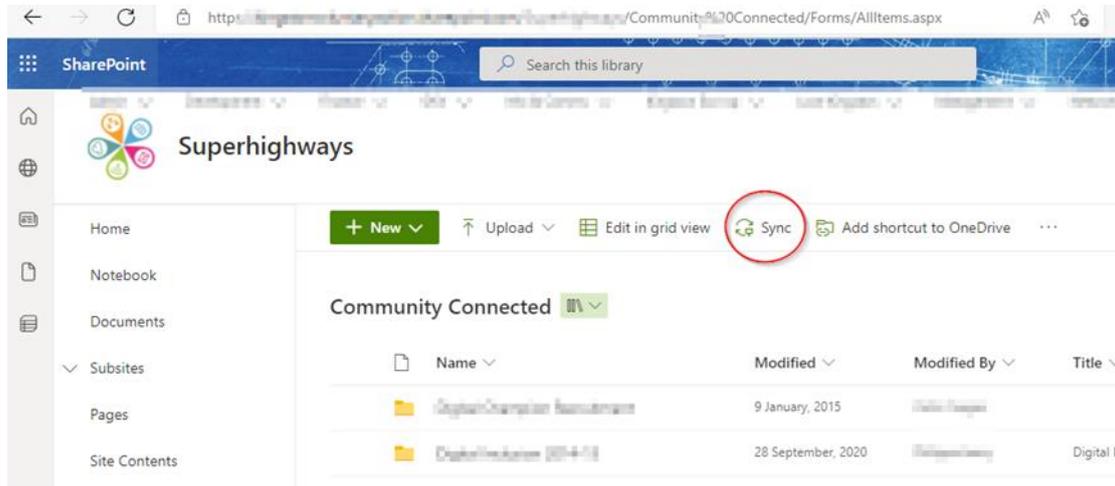
An alert will pop up saying This site is trying to open Microsoft OneDrive. Click Open, then click on Close as shown below to acknowledge the We're syncing your files message.
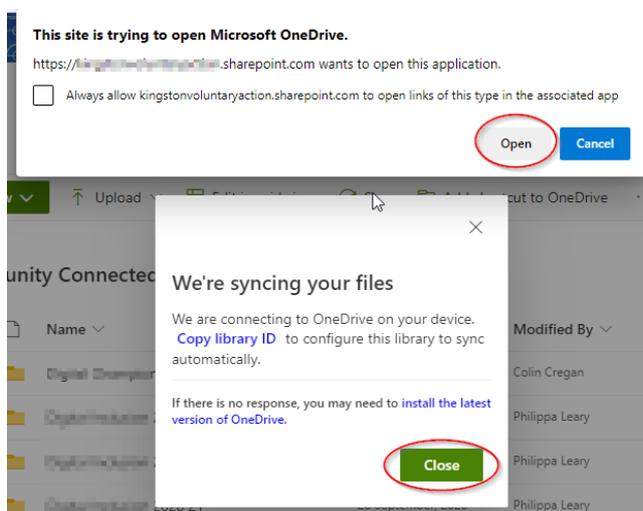
Once synced, the folder should appear within File Explorer as below. Note the Organisation icon and name

Click on the > before the organisation name, to expand the Organisation folder to see the synced folders underneath.
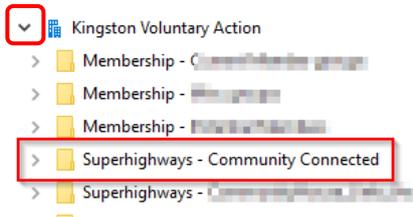
We recommend that you only repeat and sync for the folders you need to access the most. The syncing process only needs to be done once, and you will have access to this folder and its contents within File Explorer unless you disconnect the sync via OneDrive again.

3. Reducing local storage space used

Just like OneDrive, this feature uses File on Demand, which means that only files that you have opened will be copied to your computer, the other files will be a link. The files that are stored locally will be synchronised with SharePoint, so that changes are not lost.

The more files that you have synchronised locally, the more storage space will be taken up on your computer. To limit this, we would recommend enabling a feature in Windows called Storage Sense.

Storage Sense can be run manually or set to work in the background and clean-up any local copies of files that haven't been used for a specified number of days (1, 14, 30, 60 days or never). The default is Never and we would recommend changing this to 30 or 60 days. If an unused file has been cleaned-up, then the next time you access it, it will be copied locally again. We recommend an automatic monthly clean-up.

Storage Sense is enabled and setup by following the instructions below:

- Click on Start in the bottom left of your screen and then click on Settings
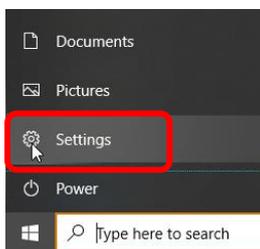
- Select System from Windows Settings box.
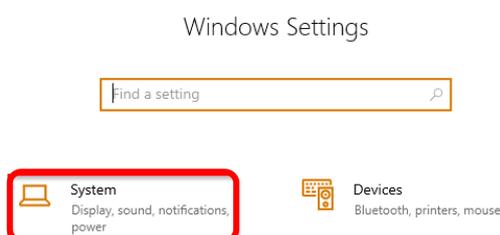
- In the left panel, click on Storage under System
- Make sure Storage Sense is set to On. Then click on Configure Storage Sense or run it now for further setting up.
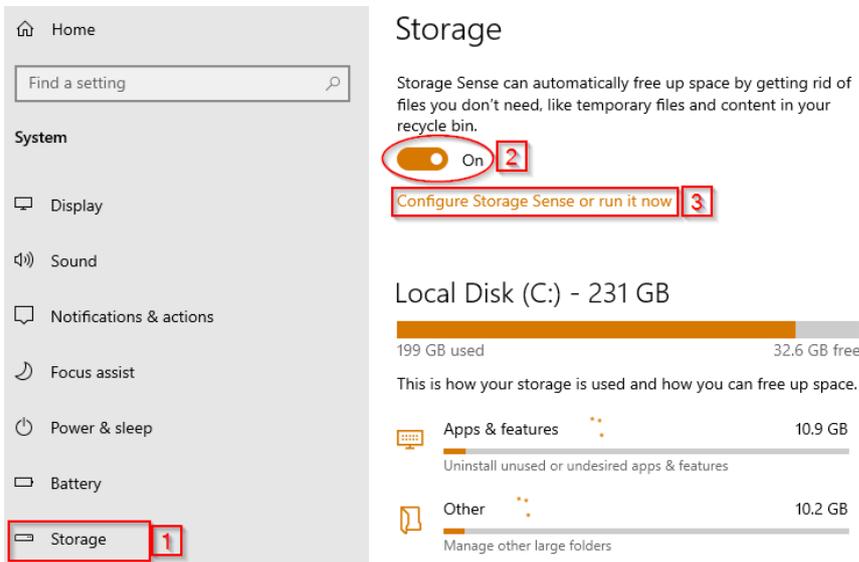
- You can set Storage Sense to run Every day / Every week / Every month / During low free disk space. We recommend choosing either Every month or at least During low free disk space
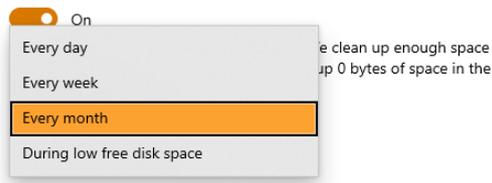
- Scroll down to find your synced folder/s. In this example Superhighways – Community Connected. Then set how many days to keep the synced files on your laptop or PC and repeat for each folder you have synced

Please note this action does not delete these files / folders from SharePoint, it only removes them from the local storage on your PC or laptop. They will continue to be available online. Once you open a file again, it will download it and save it on your laptop or PC again.