



Building over  
or close to a  
public sewer or  
lateral drain

A guide for  
homeowners

## Foreword

As a homeowner, you may be thinking about extending your house or building a conservatory or garage in your garden. Sometimes, this kind of work can impact on underground sewer pipes that lie within your property's boundary.

To help you understand your obligations to protect these sewer pipes, Water UK has produced this customer guide with the 10 water companies in England and Wales responsible for collecting your wastewater. This guide explains that if you can give positive answers to a number of questions your project will be able to proceed as planned.

## Introduction

Water companies supply clean drinking water to, and collect wastewater from, homes and businesses across England and Wales. They then treat the wastewater and return it safely back to the environment so that our rivers and seas are kept clean.

This involves a vast network of sewer pipes, just under 450,000km of them in total. These pipes run under the ground all over the country, in streets and gardens, fields and land.

So, if you're building something new, such as an extension or garage, chances are there will be a sewer pipe nearby. That's why it's important that your home, and these pipes, are protected both during and after the building work.

In some cases, you will need to get consent from the water company that collects your wastewater so that they can ensure their pipes are protected.

This guide explains what you should do if you plan to build over, or within three metres of, one of their sewer pipes.

Conversely, building over or near water mains - the ones that supply your clean drinking water - is generally strictly forbidden and you will need to contact the water company that supplies your drinking water if your plans might affect water mains.

## Why is this guide necessary?

Building over or near a sewer pipe could lead to the pipe itself, or your home, being damaged.

It is also important to avoid undertaking any building works which make it harder for water companies to access and maintain their sewers in the long term. This would result in increased costs to customers and may also cause significant disruption at your home.

So, if there are sewer pipes on your land, you may need to consider the position, size and design of your building work before you start.

Your work may need Planning Permission or Building Regulations approval from the local authority. Also, some work falls under homeowners' permitted development rights, or doesn't need Building Regulations approval (things like conservatories, car ports and porches sometimes fall into this category).

However, none of these permissions give you automatic consent to build over, or close to, a water company's sewers.

## What do I need to look out for?

The first step is to find out what underground pipework exists within your property boundary.

There are two types of pipes that need to be taken into account:

- sewers, which carry wastewater from two or more houses and which are within your property boundary; and
- lateral drains, which carry wastewater from a single house and meet the public sewer network outside the boundary of that house.

The following diagram show some typical examples of sewers and lateral drains. It also shows the dividing line between pipes that you as a homeowner are responsible for, and those which water companies own and look after.





There are often tell-tale signs that there's pipework within your property boundary. For example, there may be an inspection cover or manhole cover in your garden, such as those shown below:



If there are no physical signs of sewers, that doesn't mean there isn't something underground. If your property is connected to the public sewer, it's likely that there will be a sewer pipe and/or lateral drain located within your property boundary and so you will still need permission to build over or close to it.

## There are a few ways to find out more:

- Your architect or builder may be able to help you to find out if there's a public sewer or drain within your property boundary
- Details of drainage arrangements may be included within the legal documentation related to your property
- The water company that collects your wastewater may be able to assist in helping you locate sewer pipes within your property boundary. Their contact details are set out at the end of this guide (please note there may be a charge for this service).

**If you do not know which company collects your wastewater you can find out by visiting [www.digdatconnect.com](http://www.digdatconnect.com)**

## Getting consent

While the exact procedures that each water company follows are different, they have all agreed that if you can meet certain conditions, your project will be approved.

There are only very limited exceptions to this such as where they have site-specific knowledge about problems with the sewer network which are not more widely known about. If water companies want to make use of this exception, they must let you know within 14 days of your application being received.

Even where your project does not fulfil these conditions, many water companies offer a service where you can discuss problem areas before submitting a revised application which successfully meets all the conditions.

Where a project does not meet the conditions, it will need to be dealt with on a case by case basis. This will normally require a formal build-over agreement to be entered into between the homeowner and the water company that collects your wastewater.

The fees chargeable for these different services and further information can be found by contacting your relevant water company at the address given at the end of this guide.

Anglian Water	<a href="http://www.anglianwater.co.uk">www.anglianwater.co.uk</a>
Dwr Cymru/Welsh Water	<a href="http://www.dwrcymru.com">www.dwrcymru.com</a>
Northumbrian Water	<a href="http://www.nwl.co.uk">www.nwl.co.uk</a>
Severn Trent	<a href="http://www.stwater.co.uk">www.stwater.co.uk</a>
South West Water	<a href="http://www.southwestwater.co.uk">www.southwestwater.co.uk</a>
Southern Water	<a href="http://www.southernwater.co.uk">www.southernwater.co.uk</a>
Thames Water	<a href="http://www.thameswater.co.uk">www.thameswater.co.uk</a>
United Utilities	<a href="http://www.unitedutilities.com">www.unitedutilities.com</a>
Wessex Water	<a href="http://www.wessexwater.co.uk">www.wessexwater.co.uk</a>
Yorkshire Water	<a href="http://www.yorkshirewater.com">www.yorkshirewater.com</a>



Water UK represents UK water and wastewater service suppliers at national and European level.

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