

Building over or close to a public sewer?

Here's our guidance in response to frequently asked questions that we hope you find helpful.

Introduction

We're responsible for protecting and maintaining sewers in our area and it's really important that we safeguard them for all our customers and future generations.

Sewers are often located within the boundaries of private properties and sometimes within the vicinity of buildings. Building works can affect these sewers and we need to ensure they're not damaged and we can continue to access them for future maintenance - they're our hidden treasures.

Extending your house or building a conservatory or garage can impact on underground sewer pipes that lie within your property's boundary. Therefore, householders and developers planning to build over or close to (within 3 metres of) a public sewer have to seek permission from the relevant sewerage company.

Engaging with your sewerage company and gaining the required approvals before works starts is critical. Building close to or over a public sewer without having obtained formal approval really does have severe consequences; it may jeopardise the future sale of your property, it may prove costly and it may result in legal action.

We do try our best to accommodate our customers' wishes and for most projects, where the risk to sewers is minimal, we are able to swiftly approve proposals. If we are unable to approve your proposals we will always work with you to help identify alternative solutions.

What approvals do I need?

Your building work may need **planning permission** or **building regulations approval** from the local authority and your **water company's approval**. Some work falls under homeowners' permitted development rights or may not require Building Regulations approval (things like conservatories, car ports and porches sometimes fall into this category).

However, importantly none of these permissions give you automatic consent to build over or close to a water company's sewers. This is why we have a building over team and approval process in place, where we work with you to ensure your development can proceed whilst ensuring that both your property and our sewers are protected.

What is 'close to'?

Building within **3 metres** of a public sewer or lateral drain.

The distance to the sewer should be measured from the nearest point of the building, including the foundations, to the middle of the sewer.

Can I start building works without your approval?

No. If there are sewer pipes on your land then you can't start without our approval. You will need to consider the position, size and design of your building work before you start and liaise with us before work begins.

My building is exempt from building regulations, what should I do?

You still need to engage with us and obtain our approval, before works begin.

Exemption from building regulations doesn't give you automatic consent to build over or close to a water company's sewers. This is why we have a building over team and approval process in place, where we work with you to ensure your development can proceed whilst ensuring that both your property and our sewers are protected.

How do I get your approval/ how do I apply / what do I need to do?

There are 2 types of approval available, dependant on your specific circumstance:

1) A Self-Certification Declaration – If you can confidently meet all the required conditions your project will be automatically approved (with limited exceptions). Please note that this only applies to building works at a single domestic property involving pipes of 150mm diameter or less (anything larger than this then you will need to fill in a formal build over application form). Download our;

- **Diagram of the self-certification process** - it shows what we need you to do and what we'll do for you.
- **Self-certification application form** – fill it out and email it back to us or print and post.

2) A Formal Build Over Agreement – If you don't meet the criteria to complete a self-certification declaration, we will need you to follow our application and evaluation process in order to receive our consent for your project to proceed. Download our;

- **Diagram of the build over or close to agreement process** - this shows what we need you to do and what we'll do for you.
- **Formal build over or close to application form** - fill it out and email it back to us or print and post.

You can find all of these documents on the [build over page](#) on our website.

Do I need to gain approval/consent from Severn Trent Water if I am building over or within 3 metres of a public sewer or lateral drain?

Yes. You will need to apply for and gain our approval.

Building over or near to a sewer pipe could lead to the pipe, or your home, being damaged. It's also important to avoid doing any building works that make it harder for us to access and maintain our sewers that could result in increased costs to our customers and could cause significant disruption to your home.

If there are sewer pipes on your land, you do need to consider the position, size and design of your building work before you start and liaise with us before the work begins.

Wherever possible we prefer to see a solution that involves repositioning of the proposed development or diverting the sewer. However, in some cases where risk to the public sewer is small, we are normally willing to allow building over or close to sewers where diversion is not practical and the extension cannot be redesigned.

Due to various changes of responsibility through the years we are now responsible for lots of drainage that was previously private, and therefore we don't have all of the pipes shown on our records yet. That's why it's so important that you check and please do give us a call if you have any uncertainty or would simply like to talk it through with one of our team.

Will there be conditions included in my approval?

Yes.

All approvals will be subject to any conditions that we think are required. Here are some examples:

- All building works must comply with the current requirements of Building Regulations 2000 Part H4.
- All building work must be approved by the building control inspector before backfilling.
- It must be acknowledged that the Sewerage Undertaker's statutory rights in relation to the affected sewer are not in any way prejudiced by the approval of Severn Trent Water Ltd to the proposed building work.
- A Severn Trent Water final approval to build over or close to a public sewer will only be issued when a satisfactory post construction CCTV survey report has been provided.

How much will it cost to have my application evaluated by you?

There are 3 different pay structures; the application fee is dependent on the nature of the public sewer or type of development.

| | | |
|----------------------|--|---------|
| Class 1 Applications | Up to and including 150mm sewers | £169.50 |
| Class 2 Applications | 225-300mm sewers | £194.70 |
| Class 3 Applications | Sewers greater than 300mm or non-domestic developments | At Cost |

In cases of added complexity such as where:

- The sewer has a formal easement preventing over building (this is shown in the deeds of a modern property).
- The sewer depth exceeds 3 metres.
- The sewer is a pressurised pumping main.
- Strategic sewers, or those which require future upgrading, are affected.
- Piling or ground stabilisation works are required.

You must contact us for technical advice, before submitting a Class 3 application.

What happens when you issue me with a build over approval?

The approval will clearly advise if it's our provisional approval (pre build) or a final approval (post build).

The provisional approval provides you with our permission to proceed with your building works, as agreed with us, and in line with the conditions set out in the approval.

The final approval is a very important document that you need to retain and keep with the deeds of your property. It's especially relevant when you come to sell your house.

What is covered by a self-certification application?

By submitting a self-certification application you are confirming that you have undertaken the necessary checks and are able to meet the requirements laid out in the application form.

No technical evaluation of your proposals will be performed by us as you are asserting that your building works will have no negative impact on the public sewer or the ongoing maintenance of the sewer drain.

We issue our approval, which gives you our permission for your work to go ahead, based on the information that you have provided.

If your proposed work doesn't meet the self-certification criteria, you believe that you will require technical guidance regarding your work or would prefer to go through the formal application process then you can submit the alternative application form to build over or close to a public sewer.

What happens if I provide incorrect information on the self-certification application?

It's the responsibility of the homeowner and applicant to undertake the necessary checks to accurately and fully complete the self-declaration.

If any of the information you've included on your self-certification declaration is found to be incorrect your approval letter becomes invalid. You'll then have to submit an Application to Build Over or Close to a Public Sewer. You'll need to submit plans, the difference in the application fee and supplementary information.

This also means your building work will have to stop until we provide a new approval. That's why it's so important that when you submit a Self-Certification Application you are confident that all your information is correct. If we have incurred any costs based on the incorrect information and the issue of the invalid approval letter, such as operational costs for inspecting the sewer, you will be responsible for these costs.

What if I cannot complete all of the self-certification checklist?

It's really important that you are able to confidently complete all sections of this self-certification declaration.

It is the responsibility of the homeowner and applicant to undertake the necessary checks to accurately and fully complete the self-declaration. If we were to incur any costs based on the incorrect information and the issue of an invalid approval letter, such as operational costs for inspecting a sewer, you would be responsible for these costs.

If you aren't able to confidently complete all self-certification criteria then please instead complete an 'Application to Build Over or Close to a Public Sewer' and we will support you in obtaining our consent via a formal build-over agreement.

You may also choose to use this process should you prefer us to evaluate your proposals thoroughly.

Can you assess my self-certification application for me?

A self-certification application is your declaration to us and based on the information you provide being correct.

We don't perform any technical evaluation of your proposed building works. We will issue an approval for your building works based solely on the information you have provided. It is your responsibility to make sure that the information provided in the form is correct.

If you'd prefer for us to evaluate your proposals you can submit an Application to Build Over or Close to a Public Sewer.

When can I/can't I use the self-certification process?

The self-certification process is appropriate for works at a single domestic property when it involves pipes of 150mm diameter or less.

The table below lets you know what cannot be considered for the self-certification process. If your proposed work falls within the 'No' category you will need to submit an application to build over or close to a public sewer.

| Proposed Work | No |
|---|----|
| Building over a pressurised sewer | ✓ |
| Building close to a pressurised sewer | ✓ |
| Building over a pitch fibre pipe (material) | ✓ |
| Building close to a pitch fibre pipe (material) | ✓ |
| Building over sewers 300mm diameter or greater | ✓ |
| Building close to sewers 300mm diameter or greater | ✓ |
| Building over/close to sewers up to 225mm | ✓ |
| Manholes, inspection chambers or rodding eyes within extensions or within 500mm of an extension | ✓ |
| Sewers with a Legal Easement (this may be identified within your property Deeds). | ✓ |
| Using a raft foundation for building works | ✓ |
| Using a piled foundation for building works | ✓ |

How much will it cost to self-certify?

The self-certification fee is £65.00 (compared to the formal build over or close to application fee that is £169.50).

Where can I get a copy of the sewer records from?

You can contact our team in the **West** on 01902 793550 or **East** on 02477 716843. View our handy [map](#) which shows if it's out West or West area office that will progress your application

If we have any pipes/assets shown on our records we can provide you with a copy, but please do note that

these records are to be used as a general guide only and should not be relied upon when making architectural drawings, excavating etc.

How can I find the position and confirm the condition of the public sewer?

To protect both the public sewer and your property it is necessary for you to establish the position of the sewer relative to your proposed work and the condition of the sewer.

So that you know what information you will require for your self-certification application, you will need to determine whether your proposed building works are going to be over the public sewer, or whether they will be close to the public sewer ('close' to the public sewer is defined as anything within 3 metres).

In order to obtain a rough line of the public sewer you can look for inspection chambers. If multiple properties in a row of houses have similarly located inspection chambers on their properties (e.g. all have a chamber 2 metres from the rear wall of house in centre of the garden), then it is likely that a sewer is running between these inspection chambers. In order to confirm this, a competently trained individual (e.g. your builder) can open the inspection chamber to look at where the channel flows.

A more accurate method of locating the position of a sewer is by carrying out a Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) Survey. The position of the camera is monitored at the surface by electro-location. This method has the additional benefit of assessing the condition of the sewer which is a necessary consideration whenever building over a public sewer and in some building close to cases.

How do I undertake a CCTV survey?

If a survey is required you will need to employ the services of a specialist CCTV contractor. Please ensure that the contractor is capable of undertaking the work to the standards described below.

The survey should include:

- An inspection report to WRC standards including; sewer details such as type (foul or surface water), pipe size, pipe material, pipe depth, condition classification, drain connections, defects and recommendations as well as photographs of significant defects.
- A block plan showing the existing building(s) and if possible the proposed extension, point of entry of the CCTV into the public sewer (i.e. inspection chamber/manhole), the length of sewer surveyed, any drain connections and the location of the sewer as confirmed by direct line tracing. The plan should be to scale and dimensioned.

Please note that manhole access is necessary for a CCTV survey because it's the point from which it is carried out from. You will need to arrange manhole access prior to the CCTV contractor coming to do the survey and this may require the consent of your neighbour/s. If you are unable to find a manhole to carry out the survey from, it may be necessary to build a new manhole on the public sewer line - in this case please contact us for further information.

If you believe that a sewer shown on the sewer record is in the wrong location or does not exist, please contact us for further advice before arranging the CCTV survey.

Who can undertake a CCTV survey?

If a survey is required then you will need to employ the services of a specialist CCTV Contractor and you can choose who this is.

It is your responsibility to ensure that the contractor is capable of undertaking the work to the standard required and producing a report complying with the WRc Model Contract Document for Non Man Entry Sewer Inspection Third Edition and UK Water Industry Manual of Sewer Condition Classification Third Edition.

You do not need to gain our permission to access the manhole.

Unfortunately, if information is missing we will not be able to approve your application and this will delay your work.

Do I need permission to access your manhole for CCTV purposes?

You do not need to gain our permission.

Manhole access is usually necessary for a CCTV survey to be carried out from so if it isn't on your land you'll need to agree access arrangements with the owner/occupant e.g. a neighbour, prior to the CCTV contractor coming to do the survey.

If you are unable to find a manhole which gives access to the pipe in which you need to carry out a CCTV survey, please do get in touch so we can help you. Sometimes it's necessary to build a new manhole on the pipe in order to provide access for the CCTV camera. If this proves to be the case we will advise you on the best way to do it.

How do I determine what is 'within 3 metres of the sewer' when building close to?

The distance to the sewer should be measured from the nearest point of the building, including the foundations, to the middle of the sewer.

Depth is measured to the invert level (bottom) of the pipe.

If your foundations have less than 1 metre clearance from the public sewer then they need to be taken down to the invert level of the sewer.

Where foundations have more than 1 metre clearance from the foundations, an angle of 45 degrees can be taken from a point 1 metre clear of the sewer up to the required foundation level.

Further guidance on building close to:

- For sewers of 100mm or 150mm diameter, providing the accurate position of the sewer can be demonstrated and you can prove that the construction of the foundation will not adversely affect the public sewer, no CCTV and electro location survey will be required before the building works take place.
- For sewers of 225mm or 300mm diameter no CCTV survey will be required before the building works take place, if you can prove that the sewer is no closer than 1 metre to the new building.
- In all other cases a CCTV and electro location survey is required.
- A CCTV survey will be required on completion of your building works, in order to prove that you have not damaged the public sewer.

What do I need to do if I'm building over the sewer?

When building over the sewer you may either:

Replace all public sewer pipes within the footprint of the building, ensuring that there is manhole access for a CCTV inspection to be carried out after completion of building works. If there is no existing manhole then building a new manhole outside the footprint of the building will be necessary. You will need to pay for all of this work.

Or

Carry out a CCTV survey of the public sewer before works begin and after completion of building work. After the first CCTV survey it may be necessary for localised repairs to be made to the pipe at the householder's expense.

In either case a CCTV survey will be required on completion of your building works, in order to prove that the public sewer has not been damaged by your building works.

Who is responsible for what pipes?

Responsibilities for sewers and drains changed in October 2011. The pipe work and connecting drains from the property to the sewer or lateral drain within the boundary are the responsibility of the property owner - unless other properties drain through it.

All sewers outside of your property boundaries and any sewers shared with another property are our responsibility.

[Visit our website](#) for more information.

How can I contact you / where can I further get help?

Our teams are only a phone call away so if you are not able to find the answers you were looking for on our website then please do give us a call or send us an email:

ASSET PROTECTION WEST

Email: net.dev.west@severntrent.co.uk

Phone: 01902 793550

ASSET PROTECTION EAST

Email: net.dev.east@severntrent.co.uk

Phone: 02477 716843

(Phone lines are open Monday to Thursday 8:30am-5:00pm and Friday 8:30am-4:30pm)

Not sure which if it's the East or West team you need? Don't worry - we've a handy [map](#) which shows if it's our west or east team that would progress your application.

Is there any independent guidance available?

Yes. Water UK have produced a guide to help homeowners who are thinking of extending their homes or building a conservatory or garage that you may find beneficial. You can access this via [our website](#) or visit the [Water UK website](#).