



Building over or near a public sewer



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At Thames Water we are responsible for maintaining thousands of kilometres of public sewers to ensure the safe removal of wastewater from domestic and commercial property. These sewers are often within the property boundary and in some instances run close to or underneath buildings. Building work can affect our sewers and it is Thames Water's responsibility to ensure that no damage is caused to them or restrictions placed on how we access and maintain them.

If necessary, we have the right to stop your development works and any buildings that are erected over public sewers (without prior agreement with Thames Water) may have to be taken down. To prevent this situation from arising, it is highly recommended that you contact us in the early stages of planning regarding your proposed building works.

This leaflet provides you with guidelines for dealing with public sewers on your property and advises you on how to avoid any problems or delays you may encounter when building over or near a public sewer.

Building work near to public sewers

Thames Water will need to know about any building work over or within three metres of a public sewer. This is necessary as increasing the weight above a sewer by constructing a new building may cause the sewer to collapse. A collapsed sewer can cause structural damage to the new building or its foundation and may also interrupt drainage from surrounding properties. Should such a situation occur, the sewer would need to be repaired quickly and this may involve taking down the building(s) constructed above it.

Access to carry out sewer repairs and maintenance

In order to guarantee a reliable drainage service to its customers and keep the public sewerage system in a good condition, Thames Water must have access to carry out sewer repairs and maintenance on its public sewers. Consequently, it is vital we review your proposed building works to ensure that they do not obstruct our access to the sewers.

How we can help

When you get in touch with Developer Services at Thames Water, we will discuss with you the best way of dealing with an affected sewer. During these discussions we are likely to recommend one of the following options:

1) Avoid the sewer

Modifications to your plans may mean that the work does not affect the sewer. This is often the easiest and cheapest option. We recommend you discuss this with your builder, keeping in mind that your proposed building should be at least three metres away from the sewer.

2) Divert the sewer

If your plans cannot be modified you will usually be asked to divert the sewer (if practical). In most cases where the sewer is up to 160mm diameter we may allow your builder to undertake this diversionary work. The builder will have to satisfy Thames Water that they are competent and they must be in possession of a written consent before carrying out any work. Alternatively, Thames Water may be able to provide a quotation for the work, the cost of which will need to be met by the applicant.

3) Building over or within three metres of a public sewer

Where the sewer is in a satisfactory condition, we may allow you to build over or within three metres of it. You must have our written agreement to do this and it may be necessary for Thames Water to carry out the following checks:

- A closed circuit television (CCTV) survey before you begin work, to check whether the sewer can be built over or if repair work is needed first. In most cases you will not be charged for the repair work.
- A follow-up CCTV survey when you have completed the work, to check that construction work has not damaged the sewer.
- If the sewer is less than 160mm diameter and only serves a limited number of properties, we may decide not to carry out a CCTV survey. Instead, we will use historical records of blockages, repairs and other local knowledge to ascertain the sewer's condition. Please note, Thames Water will not allow the building over of manholes, rising mains or strategic sewers.
- We make a charge for every application to build over or near a sewer. The level of charge will depend on the size of the sewer and whether a detailed survey of the sewer is necessary. In some cases, where major 'strategic' sewers are involved, a formal agreement may also be required.

The consultation process

When Thames Water is informed (Local Authority Building Control Officers consult us as part of their approval process) of a possible building over or near to a public sewer, we advise the Local Authority as to whether we will agree to the granting of permission for the proposed works. Following this initial consultation, we send out an application form to the householder or their Agent and on receipt of the completed application and plans we assess the proposed works against our records. If necessary, we liaise with the applicant to agree any required amendments to the plans, when we are satisfied we grant consent for the work and inform the Local Authority that we have no objection to their issuing approval for the building.

Diversions work(s) and repairs

In some cases, sewer repairs or diversions are required and it may be necessary to delay the start of your construction programme until any required sewer work is complete. In order to avoid delays for your builder, you may prefer to agree any relevant sewer works before submitting your plans to the Local Authority.

Completion of work(s)

On completion of your (and our) works the 'map of public sewers' is revised, the formal permission is archived and Thames Water's asset data amended. In the future, should the property be put up for sale, solicitors will want to know (as part of the 'Searches' process) whether Thames Water approved the work over/near to the sewer.

Thames Water will be responsible for the future repair and maintenance of the sewer. However, this does not include any costs of repairs to the property.

Further information

To check if there is a public sewer under your property, you can view a copy of the 'map of public sewers' at your Local Authority offices. When consulting the 'map of public sewers' you should be aware that most drainage pipes (whether on the map or not) that are shared with other properties and were built before October 1937 (April 1965 in Inner London) are public sewers.

Alternatively, you can contact us regarding your sewer query at:

Thames Water

PO Box 3189

Slough,

SL1 4WW

DX 151280 Slough 13

T 0118 923 6656

F 0118 923 6657

www.twsearches.co.uk

If you wish to carry out any building works within three metres of a public sewer, please contact Thames Water Developer Services at:

Thames Water

Developer Services – Wastewater

Clearwater Court

Vastern Road

Reading, Berkshire

RG1 8DB

T 0845 850 2777

F 0118 923 6613

E Buildovers@thameswater.co.uk

