

# Our catchment plan.

Providing safe and reliable wastewater  
services in Swindon.



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## About our plan

We want to tell you about our plan to improve our sewerage network in the Swindon catchment, so it can cope with current and future demands. We're doing this because some of our customers in Swindon have experienced flooding and restricted use of their bathrooms.

Flooding is unacceptable, that's why we treat all instances with the highest priority. If one of our sewers causes a problem, we'll do everything we can to put this right as soon as possible. We're committed to addressing these issues across our region and we'll continue to work with our customers and other drainage stakeholders to do so.

Our plan explains:

- the sewer issues some of our customers are experiencing, and their causes
- what we're doing to address these issues, and who else is involved
- our recommendations for continuing to provide safe and reliable wastewater services in the catchment now, and in the future.

At the back of this document you'll also find definitions for some of the words and phrases we use in our plan.

## The Swindon catchment

The Swindon catchment extends from the large town of Swindon to a number of its surrounding villages, including South Marston, Wroughton, Overtown and Chisledon. Every day, our sewerage network in Swindon serves around 210,000 customers and is supported by Swindon Sewage Treatment Works (STW), which is located to the west of the town.

Our sewerage network consists of:

- foul sewers - these take water from showers, toilets, sinks and appliances to Swindon STW, where it's cleaned
- combined sewers - these take the same domestic flows as foul sewers and also collect rainwater that falls on properties, roads and other paved areas.
- surface water sewers - these collect rainwater that falls on properties, roads and other paved areas, and drain it into local rivers.

Our network has been vastly improved and extended since it was constructed, yet it remains under increasing pressure.



The Swindon catchment\*

\* Source: Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database right (2015) <https://www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk>

# Sewer flooding

Sewer flooding is caused by a number of factors including:

- more intense rainfall events
- population growth
- loss of green spaces that previously provided natural drainage
- pipework misconnections and blockages
- groundwater entering our sewers.

Combined, these can result in unwanted flow from the sewerage network into:

- customer homes and businesses, causing sewer flooding
- roads, causing congestion and closures.

During heavy rainfall the Swindon sewerage network can become overwhelmed in some locations. Property misconnections and urban creep across the catchment has increased the flows into our foul system. Our network is currently dealing with flows from more properties, roads and other paved areas than it was originally built to cope with.

In the future, the catchment's population is estimated to continue to rise, and also we predict that rainfall events will continue to get more intense. We need to improve our sewerage network to address sewer flooding so it can cope with the current and future demands of the Swindon catchment.



# Our catchment plan.

## What we're doing

We've already consulted with some of our customers and stakeholders, to support the creation of our plan. We'll continue to share it to make sure that the work we do is affordable for our customers, and meets their needs.

We've adopted the good practice Drainage Strategy Framework\*, commissioned by the Environment Agency and Ofwat, the water industry regulators. We're also using this framework to make plans for other catchments, so that we're consistent in our approach to addressing issues across our region.

Our catchment plan has followed the 4-stage process shown in the diagram. We've summarised below the work undertaken at each stage of this process. We'll keep consulting with our customers and stakeholders as we complete Stage 3 and commence Stage 4.



\* [www.ofwat.gov.uk/publication/drainage-strategy-framework-for-water-and-sewerage-companies-to-prepare-drainage-strategies/](http://www.ofwat.gov.uk/publication/drainage-strategy-framework-for-water-and-sewerage-companies-to-prepare-drainage-strategies/).

\*\* The estimated delivery timeline is dependent on factors including weather conditions, risks and costs, and is, therefore, open to change.

### Drainage Strategy Framework stages and timescales

#### • Stage 1 - Initialise / prepare

We gathered all the information that helps us to produce our plan. We surveyed the sewers and rivers, and collected data on pollution and flooding incidents. We also modelled the performance of the existing drainage systems in the catchment.

#### • Stage 2 - Risk assessment

We investigated and analysed the information, to identify the risks in the catchment and to understand the causes of the problems we found.

#### • Stage 3 - Option appraisal

We developed a number of options to address the catchment risks and tested them using our models. We assessed the costs and benefits of each option and chose the ones we want to implement.

#### • Stage 4 - Intervention

This is when we implement our chosen options. We'll need to work with our customers and other stakeholders to gain their help and support, for the work we propose.



## Our completed investigations

We've completed detailed research within the Swindon catchment to identify the root causes of sewer flooding. Our investigations have included:

- physical inspection and CCTV surveys of sewers and manholes
- using our survey findings to evaluate the health and capacity of the catchment's sewers and manholes
- flow and depth monitors to assess the performance of our network and test the accuracy of our modelling work
- surveys to identify the source of surface water flows into the foul system
- predicting the level of flooding risk present across the catchment
- catchment modelling to help us to understand and test the causes of flooding and to develop methods to address them
- analysis of 200 customer questionnaires about sewer flooding.

## Our catchment findings

### Current issues

There are a broad range of flooding issues within the Swindon catchment, and root causes which include:

- heavier and more intense rainfall events happening more often
- population growth, high-density urban development and paving-over of gardens, creating a large combined watertight area
- property misconnections, leading to many homes and businesses discharging to the wrong sewer; as illustrated in the image on the next page
- deterioration within our sewerage network and blockages caused by fat, oil and grease deposits, resulting in flooding and operational issues.

### What we've found

Overall our catchment findings tell us that:

- our foul sewers have become overloaded in heavy rainfall, as property misconnections have allowed surface water to drain into them. Our foul sewers were not designed to cope with surface water
- groundwater has entered some of our sewerage network, creating further capacity issues in those sewers
- large amounts of debris is present in our sewers. This has affected the performance of our sewers by slowing their flows, which has increased the sediment they collect.



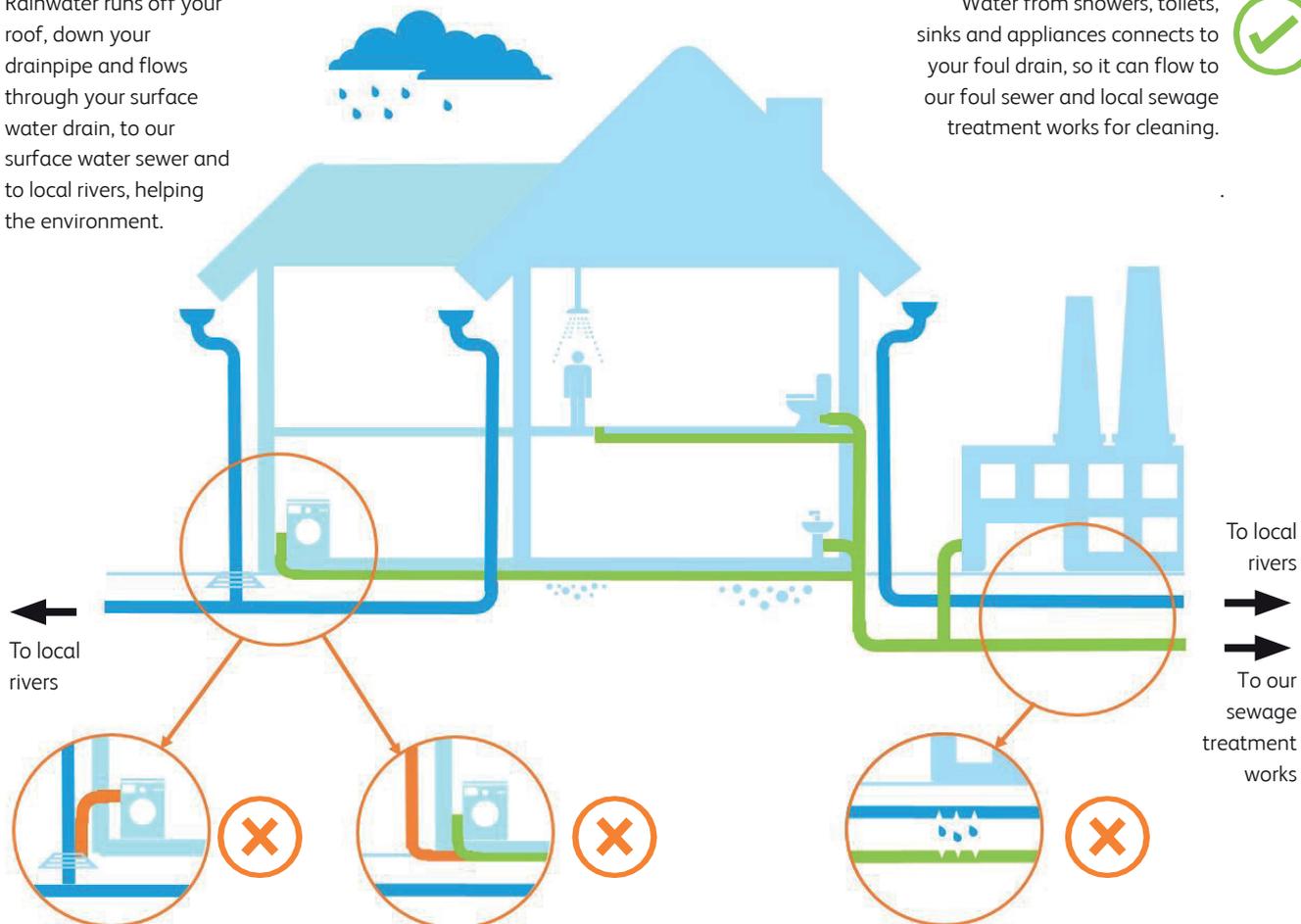
## Property misconnection problems



Rainwater runs off your roof, down your drainpipe and flows through your surface water drain, to our surface water sewer and to local rivers, helping the environment.



Water from showers, toilets, sinks and appliances connects to your foul drain, so it can flow to our foul sewer and local sewage treatment works for cleaning.



To local rivers

To local rivers  
To our sewage treatment works

Appliances should never be plumbed into your drainpipe. This sends waste into the local river killing wildlife.

Drainpipes should never be connected to your foul drain. This sends rainwater to our foul sewer, overloading it and causing sewer flooding.

Poor condition sewers can sometimes let flows transfer between them, causing flooding or pollution. Where we find this happening, and it's our responsibility, we'll fix them.

### Future risks

To make sure our work is effective and sustainable we're also addressing within our plan the future challenges facing the catchment, which include:

- urban creep - loss of green space increasing the strain on our sewerage network when it rains heavily. Our modelling suggests urban creep rates in Swindon are slightly higher than the regional average
- climate change - some recent analysis suggests rainfall could become 20% more intensive by the 2050's\*, increasing the potential for flooding.
- wetter winters may also mean groundwater levels could be higher more often, with more water getting into our system
- population growth - there are significant areas of new development in the catchment
- changes in customer behaviour - property misconnections are substantial within the catchment and flushing or pouring the wrong items into sewers has led to blockage-related sewer flooding.

Addressing the current issues and future risks will be complex. We'll also need to work in partnership with all stakeholders responsible for drainage in the catchment. We'll also need to gain customer support for the work we propose.

\* UK Climate Change Risk Assessment 2017: Evidence Report: Flood Risk, Appendix C – Climate Change Projections October 2015.



## Who can help?

There are a number of stakeholders who, like us, have important drainage responsibilities. They also play an essential role in addressing flooding in our catchment, and include:

**Local Authorities:** In some locations flooding occurs from multiple sources. We need Swindon Borough Council (with Environment Agency funding), to address highway and surface water flooding. This will complement the work we're doing to help our network perform efficiently.

**Customers:** Our customers have an important role to play in ensuring that their properties, including any future improvements, are correctly connected. They can also ease the pressure on our sewerage network by reducing the runoff from the roofs and driveways of their properties, and through supporting our campaign to 'Bin it, don't block it!'. Our customers can also help us by reporting any internal flooding or overflow from manholes.

**Environment Agency:** Is the principal flooding risk management operating authority in England. It has operational responsibility for managing the risk of flooding from main rivers, reservoirs, estuaries and the sea. The Environment Agency is an important stakeholder as it provides partnership working support for funding to other flooding risk management authorities, through their local regional flood and coastal committees.



### Stakeholders with drainage responsibilities

We're seeking to work in partnership with all stakeholders to make sure that together, we deliver and maintain the most sustainable sewer flooding interventions. Just as our drainage responsibilities are focused on removing and treating wastewater, and draining the surface water from our customers' properties, other stakeholders' responsibilities include:

- managing local flood risk on riverbanks
- groundwater
- land and highways
- maintaining private drains.

We take full responsibility for addressing the drainage and sewer flooding issues in our control. Outside of this, we'll fully support other stakeholders to deliver their responsibilities, including working in partnership with them to tackle issues that need a joint approach.

## Our current actions

As we work to address sewer flooding across our region, we'll continue to:

- regularly talk to our customers and make contact with them through meetings, other communications and surveys
- collaborate with regional drainage stakeholders to agree ongoing activities and joint-working. For example We'll continue to attend the Swindon Flood Risk Management meetings

- publish our catchment plans as they develop and ask for feedback from our customers and stakeholders to shape our ongoing activities
- repair our sewerage network when our investigations identify problems
- trial new technology and approaches that are innovative within our industry, to achieve the best possible drainage outcomes for our customers and their local environment

- lead and participate in industry forums, both in the UK and worldwide, to share and expand our learning with the overall aim of improving services for our customers.



# Our recommendations

Our Swindon catchment plan is currently at Stage 3, the Options Appraisal stage, of the Drainage Strategy Framework. We've used industry best practice, and our latest work on drainage innovation, to develop a number of options to address the sewer flooding happening in this area, and to prevent it in the future.

We've tested these options using our models and have selected those that have the greatest benefit to our customers, for the lowest cost to implement. We're recommending an intervention that has three phases:

### 1 Short-term activities

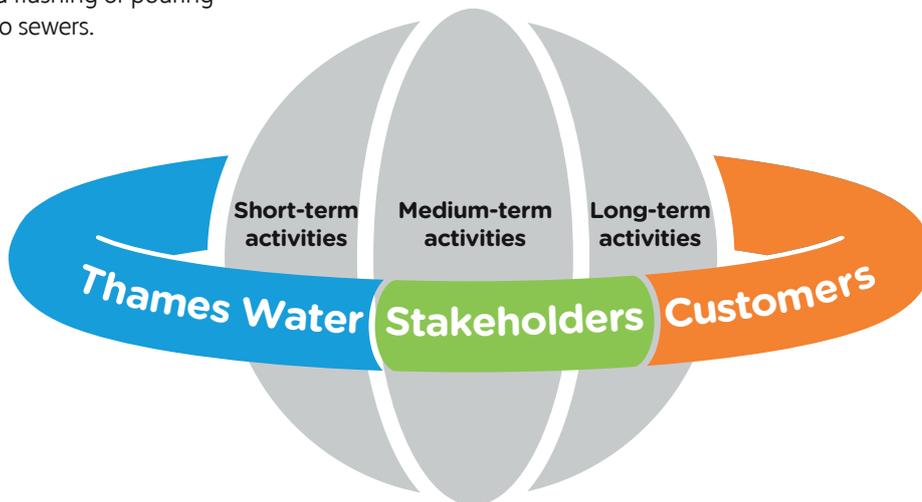
This will include all of our ongoing work to improve the operation of our sewerage network and our response to problems as they occur. We'll implement solutions at critical locations across the catchment to reduce flooding. We'll also provide advice to customers on how to avoid property misconnections and flushing or pouring the wrong items into sewers.

### 2 Medium-term activities

This will include the refurbishment of our local sewerage network to reduce foul sewer flooding. We'll work with catchment stakeholders to reduce the runoff from property roofs. This will limit the surface water flows entering our sewerage network and create more capacity.

### 3 Long-term activities

We'll review and refine our catchment approach based on the experience gained, and outcomes achieved, from our medium and short-term interventions. We'll continue to refurbish our sewerage network and work with catchment stakeholders to manage surface water and flooding.



Swindon catchment recommended option

## Next steps

Our next step is to move our catchment plan to the final stage of the good practice Drainage Strategy framework, Stage 4, Intervention. This is when we'll implement the recommended interventions for the Swindon catchment.

Implementing our plan successfully and sustainably requires us to:

- deliver all of the activities within our control
- gain agreement from stakeholders outside of our organisation, and our customers, to deliver the activities within their control
- work in partnership with stakeholders on activities that need a joint approach.

We understand that each stakeholder has different drivers, funding criteria and approaches. So, we'll be supportive, and work in partnership with them, to make sure agreed interventions are implemented and their benefits delivered for our customers.



# Stage 4 Intervention\* >>> 2018 onwards\*\*



\* www.ofwat.gov.uk/publication/drainage-strategy-framework-for-water-and-sewerage-companies-to-prepare-drainage-strategies/.  
 \*\*The estimated delivery timeline is dependent on factors including weather conditions, risks and costs, and is, therefore, open to change.



# Frequently asked questions.

## Your questions answered

We're committed to listening to, consulting and collaborating with our customer and stakeholders on our sewerage network activities and plans. We've addressed key feedback and

questions raised by customers and stakeholders in the Swindon catchment, and by customers affected by flooding throughout our region, in this section. We've also included customer and

stakeholder feedback into our detailed catchment plan, as far as possible, and is relevant to the Drainage Strategy Framework.

## General questions

**Q1**  
**Will following the 4-stage drainage strategy process delay essential work in our area?**

### Answer

Essential work will continue in the Swindon area throughout our catchment plan investigations. We'll also continue to carry out repair works on our sewerage network if, through our investigations, we identify issues that increase the risk of flooding or pollution.

The 4-stage drainage strategy process has been commissioned and recommended as good practice by the Environment Agency and Ofwat, our industry regulators. It's allowed us to better understand the root causes of the sewer flooding in the catchment, and to predict future issues. It's very important for us to complete the process, to help us to focus our work and investments. Following this more detailed process is important to make sure we're implementing the most effective and sustainable drainage solution for the Swindon catchment.

**Q2**  
**Why are costs a consideration when making plans to address sewer flooding and pollution?**

### Answer

Every day we serve 15 million customers across London and the Thames Valley. Providing the essential service, and getting it right, is our focus every day and we never forget it's paid for by our customers.

We prioritise investment across our sewerage network to meet our customers' needs. Every five years we agree with Ofwat, our economic regulator, the amount we can charge all of our customers to deliver service improvements, including reducing the risk of sewer flooding and pollution. We calculate this amount by talking to our customers to find out how much they would be willing to pay for service improvements, and how they feel they should be prioritised.

We also estimate the customer benefits from these improvements, and those from other major projects, before we start any work, to make sure they always outweigh the costs to our customers.



# Drainage work questions

## Q1 What drainage-related work are you carrying out in our area, and when is it happening?

### Answer

We've developed our catchment plan for Swindon and have outlined our next steps. The following actions have already been undertaken, or are underway, in the catchment:

- physical inspection and CCTV surveys of sewers and manholes
- using our survey findings to evaluate the health and capacity of the catchment's sewers and manholes
- flow and depth monitors to assess the performance of our network and test the accuracy of our modelling work
- surveys to identify the source of surface water flows into the foul system
- predicting the level of flooding risk present across the catchment
- catchment modelling to help us to understand and test the causes of flooding and to develop methods to address them
- analysis of 200 customer questionnaires about sewer flooding.
- innovative solution analysis, including sustainable drainage systems (SuDS), and approaches to maximise the capacity of our sewerage network.

## Q2 Are you renovating the sewers in our area?

### Answer

Our current work has not identified sewers in disrepair in the catchment at this time. However, we'll renovate catchment sewers if our medium and long-term activities identify any damage as a result of age, or other activities. We'll also target and repair sewer problems that are reported to us, prioritising those that have the greatest impact on the service we provide to our customers.

## Q3 What are you doing about defective private drainage and surface water connections?

### Answer

Our investigations have identified misconnected private property drainage within the Swindon catchment. This means that a number of homes and businesses are discharging to the wrong sewer. By connecting a surface water drain to a foul sewer, these properties are contributing to the current sewer flooding issues. To address this problem we'll target misconnected private properties and raise repair requirements with the responsible stakeholder.



# Drainage work questions

**Q4**  
**Are you working with the Highway Authority to resolve blocked gullies, drains and ditches, and with landowners to reduce field runoff, as both affect drainage and our sewers?**

**Answer**

There are other stakeholders who, like us, have important drainage responsibilities and therefore, play an essential role in resolving sewer flooding issues in this catchment area. Highways maintenance activities and agricultural land maintenance practices sit outside of our responsibilities. However, we'll work with the responsible stakeholders to highlight these issues, where there is a major impact on our sewerage network.

**Q5**  
**What are the improvement plans for Swindon Sewage Treatment Works to manage capacity?**

**Answer**

In 2015 we successfully completed a number of upgrade projects at Swindon Sewage Treatment Works (STW), to allow for the current and future growth of the catchment. These projects:

- resolved foul water flooding at homes and businesses within the Cheney Manor/Rodbourne Road area, listed on a register of properties that are at risk of flooding internally
- upgraded the inlet to the STW
- improved pipes upstream of the STW to allow for the projected increase in flow from planned new housing developments.



# Future risk questions

## Q1 Does urban creep affect this catchment?

### Answer

Our definition of urban creep is the transformation of a catchment by the paving-over or development of previously absorbent areas. When absorbent areas such as grass, are replaced with properties, extensions and driveways, this prevents surface water from soaking into the ground when it rains heavily. Instead this water flows into our sewerage network, causing it to surcharge and flood in some instances.

Urban creep is linked to misconnected pipework and changes in land use, which are having a significant impact on sewer flooding locally. Implementing our long-term activities across the catchment will increase the capacity of our network in affected areas, addressing the problems caused by urban creep. We're also monitoring planning and development applications in and around the catchment to support our drainage activities and plans.

## Q2 How are you planning for population growth and future development in the catchment?

### Answer

We define a catchment's growth as the increase in the number of new properties developed, and the rise in the number of individuals living there. The population in the Swindon catchment is set to increase with major developed planned, such as the New Eastern Villages. Relatively small increases in population and new developments, can be influential on our operations and sewer flows. As part of our drainage work in the catchment we're:

- closely monitoring development applications and assessing their likely impact on the capacity of our operations in the future
- working with property developers to make sure we can serve their new developments and avoid any problems for our existing customers.

Our existing Sewage Treatment Works currently has the capacity to manage all of the development applications submitted, and projected, for the catchment; as outlined in the latest Development Plans. We'll continue to work with all involved stakeholders to monitor local plans and planning applications. We'll incorporate current and projected developments into our business planning cycle. This way we'll be able to make sure our service is maintained for customers throughout the catchment's development.

## Q3 Why are you collecting climate change data rather than 'climate proofing' assets?

### Answer

Our business is sensitive to weather. Every day we manage the challenges that changing weather conditions has on the services we provide to our customers, including those problems created by severe weather. We're concerned about the future impact of changing weather on our business, commonly referred to as climate change, and are responding to it by:

- understanding and assessing where we can respond to these unavoidable potential impacts on our services to customers
- lowering our greenhouse gas emissions.

Since 2010 we've been improving our understanding of how climate change could impact our ability to deliver services to our customers. In 2015/16 we published a detailed review of the potential risks and impacts on our business, and how we could manage them to protect our services to our customers.

We're lowering our greenhouse gas emissions in support of the Climate Change Act 2008. We've set ourselves a voluntary and challenging goal of achieving a 34% reduction in emissions, compared to 1990, for our scope 1 and 2 emissions\* by 2020.

\* Scope 1 emissions refer to greenhouse gas emissions associated with the operation of our assets. Scope 2 emissions are emissions associated with the use of grid electricity.



## Definitions

### Foul sewers

These take water from showers, toilets, sinks and appliances to treatment works, where it's cleaned.

### Misconnection

This occurs when pipework is connected to the wrong sewer.

### Pollution

This occurs when wastewater flows from the sewerage network and contaminates neighbouring natural environments.

### Sewer flooding

This occurs when water flows from the sewerage network into customers homes and gardens, businesses, highways and open areas.

### Sewerage network

This consists of all of our foul and surface water sewers and manholes.

### Stakeholders

These are individuals, organisations or groups that are affected by our catchment plan.

### Surface water sewers

These collect rainwater that falls on properties, roads and other paved areas, and then drain the water into local rivers.

### Urban creep

This is the transformation of a catchment by the paving-over or development of previously absorbent areas.

### Wastewater

This is water that is drained by both foul and surface water sewers.