

Who is responsible?

When talking about underground drainage pipes, there are three main terms that need to be explained. These descriptions will try to help you determine who is responsible for the repair and maintenance of any pipe.

Drain

A drain is a pipe that carries waste water (foul or surface water) from just one property. This drain is the sole responsibility of the owner(s) of that property for its full length up to the point where the pipe either connects to another pipe from another property or another pipe connects to it. At this point the drain becomes a sewer. There are two types of sewer:

Public Sewer

A public sewer is a pipe that is the responsibility of the sewerage undertaker for the area. In the Stratford-on-Avon District this is Severn Trent Water Authority. These pipes have been adopted by Severn Trent Water Authority since they were laid or they are pipes which connect two or more properties to the public drainage system and the pipes were in use for this purpose before 1st October 1937.

Most public sewers run below the roadway, not below people's gardens. If you are unsure where you connect to a public sewer then the appropriate company has records of the public sewers in the area.

Private Sewers

A private sewer is a pipe which is taking water from more than one property, but which is not a public sewer. This sewer is the joint responsibility of each of those properties that drain into it. This responsibility continues up to the point where the private sewer (including the connection) joins a public sewer. This means that often, people are responsible for the repair and maintenance of drainage pipes that are beneath land owned by somebody else, such as a neighbour.

What can you do if you have a problem?

Usually most drainage problems are a simple, one-off blockage that, once cleared, will cause no further problems. Dependant upon the responsibility (as outlined above) the following courses of action are suggested:

Blocked Drain

If you have a blocked drain, which is the responsibility of the owner of the property, you may wish to try and unblock the drain yourself. A set of drain rods will usually be sufficient to clear the blockage and these can be hired from tool hire shops. If you do decide to do this yourself you need to be careful that you do not damage the pipes in any way.

Alternatively, you may prefer to pay someone to do the works for you. You can find specialist firms in the yellow pages.

Blocked Private Sewer

The advice is the same for a blocked private sewer but the cost of the required work should be shared equally between all of the households that drain into the affected part of the sewer (i.e. upstream of the problem).

If you are unsure then it may be possible for our officers to identify which properties are involved with the blockage.

Blocked Public Sewer

If the blocked pipe or problem is originating from a public sewer then contact Severn Trent Water Authority who will clear the blockage free of charge.

What if the problem recurs?

This may be due to unsuitable items being flushed into it, such as disposable nappies, sanitary towels or large amounts of grease. It is good practice not to put these items down the pipe. Also, it may be due to a defect in the pipe work such as a collapsed pipe, bad joint, tree roots growing in the pipe etc. If this is the case it is likely that the affected area of pipe work may have to be dug up and re-laid. This can be expensive but may be covered by your house building insurance.

You may wish to have a CCTV survey carried out of the affected pipe work to identify the location and nature of the problem. There are specialist companies who can do this for you and again, your house building insurance may cover the cost. As part of our initial help and advisory service, the Council will often do this without charge.

Our procedure

If you contact the Council's Environmental Protection service to deal with a drainage problem then the procedure laid out below will be followed:

On receipt of a drainage complaint an officer will contact you within 1 working day.

The officer will ask you:

What age is the affected property – pre 1937?

If the answer is **Yes** and adjacent properties are affected then the property may be the responsibility of Severn Trent Water Authority – contact them on 0800 783 4444.

If not then the officer will ask:

Are any of the neighbours affected?

Is there any history of problems with the drains?

Do you know how many properties are on the private sewer?

The officer will identify whether the problem is a blocked private drain, private sewer or a different problem that needs to be investigated and the officer will advise you of possible remedies. The COST OF THE REPAIRS are the responsibility of those PROPERTIES ON THE AFFECTED private sewer or private drain.

An officer will visit you if necessary, to identify who is on the affected system and advise all parties of their legal duties and responsibilities. A private contractor may be the cheapest option if all the affected neighbours agree to share the costs.

The officer may advise that works must be carried out within 2 working days of their initial inspection.

If no action has been taken then legal Notices will be served to all appropriate parties. If the work is not completed within the time limit specified the Council will carry out the works on your behalf and will then recharge all affected parties equally for the cost of the works.

The charge will include Council administration fee based on the actual time spent by officers in dealing with the problem.

These charges can differ depending on time spent and do not include the cost of the work itself.

The cost of this can vary greatly with a simple drainage clearance costing about £90

Put another way, you and your neighbours could be sharing a bill just for the benefit of us organising the work and collecting the costs.