

Blockages

On receipt of an enquiry the Council will carry out a visual survey to establish where the blockage is located and identify all the properties connected upstream of the obstruction.

A legal notice will then be served on the owners of all these properties requiring them to clear the blockage within 48 hours. If the obstruction is not cleared within this deadline, then the Council will appoint a drainage contractor to undertake the necessary works, this could be to pressure jet the sewer to remove the blockage. The cost of this default work, including the Council's own costs will be recovered in equal proportions from the persons who received the notices.

Structural Defects

Blockages can also be caused by structural defects, including displaced joints, tree root penetration or collapse due to localised ground movement. If this happens the Council can serve a notice to all users of the sewer, requiring remedial works to be undertaken by a certain date.

If the requirements of the notice are not carried out, the Council will appoint a contractor to undertake the works. The cost of this default work will be recovered from the owners of the properties, plus an administration charge will be added.

Blocked Drains and Sewers



For further information please contact us:

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A Guide To The Responsibilities Of House Owners

When drains and sewers become blocked there is often confusion about who has responsibility. This leaflet has been produced to help householders when they are affected by a blockage.

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A decorative graphic of a grey pipe network runs across the top and down the right side of the page. It features several 90-degree elbows and a horizontal section at the top. The pipe is rendered with shading to give it a three-dimensional appearance.

Whose Responsibility

It is common for a very large number of houses to be connected to a system of drainage pipe work that leads eventually to a sewage treatment plant. If a pipe within that system becomes blocked or damaged we first have to find out precisely where the defect has occurred and then identify who has responsibility for maintaining that part of the sewerage system. Depending upon the circumstances some or all of the following may be liable for the cost of remedying any blockages/defects:

- Individual House Owners
- Thames Water PLC
- Your Landlord

Public Sewer Network

The majority of households in Spelthorne are on 'mains drainage'. This means that they are connected to a system of 'public sewers' owned and maintained by Thames Water PLC. Your annual water and sewerage rate includes the cost of repairing public sewers.

If you are aware of a damaged or blocked public sewer call Thames Water PLC on **0845 9200 800** - they will fix the problem free of charge.

Thames Water PLC is **not** responsible for maintaining any pipes or structures, which do not fall within the legal definition of a public sewer.

Everyone on mains drainage is connected to the extensive network of public sewers, the waste from nearly all of these houses first drains through a section of privately owned underground pipe work before it reaches the public sewer. The responsibility and liability for maintenance of this private section is shared jointly by all persons who drain through it. This can be a considerable distance even if the join is outside the curtilage of the properties it serves.

Spelthorne Council is not responsible for the cost of maintaining private sewers that serve ex-Council dwellings. Therefore if you own an ex-Council house that has been sold under the 'Right to Buy Scheme' you will be liable for a proportion of the cost of maintaining the section of the private sewer serving your property. If you are an A2 Dominion Housing Group tenant then they are responsible.

Which Sewers are Public?

The legal definition of a public sewer is exceptionally complicated as it results from a variety of laws dating back to 1875, but the following rule of thumb generally applies:

- Any sewer that was constructed before 1 October 1937 **and** serves two or more premises will be public, **or**;
- Any sewer that has been formerly 'adopted' by the 'sewerage undertaker' – Thames Water Plc.

Private Sewers and Drains

Most properties are connected by some kind of private underground pipe work to carry their waste into the mains public sewer.

- If only one property uses this section of private pipe it is legally known as a 'drain'.
- If two or more properties are connected to the pipe it is legally known as a 'private sewer'.

If a blockage occurs in a section of private sewer the owners of all those houses that are connected to the sewer upstream of the blockage are jointly and equally responsible for arranging and paying for the clearance of the obstruction. If there are only two or three households affected, owners may be able to come to an informal agreement to share the costs incurred.

If you are connected to a private sewer you may be responsible for a proportion of the cost even if the defect is not on your property.

Why does the Council become involved?

In some cases there may be a large number of houses sharing the private sewer and it may then become impractical for those owners to informally agree when works of repair or cleansing are required.

If a defect or obstruction occurs in a drain or sewer and it is not rectified, the Council has the legal power to require that blockages are cleared and/or repairs carried out.