

# Drainage and private sewers

A drain is the pipe that serves your house. If this drain then joins a drain from another property, the pipe becomes a sewer from that joint onwards.

Responsibilities for unblocking or repairing problem sections of foul sewage systems depend upon whether or not the sewer is classified as public or private, however, this is not always easy to determine.

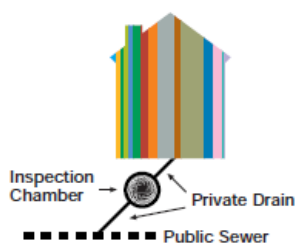
Public sewers are those that have been adopted by the sewage undertaker United Utilities and, once adopted, cleaning and maintenance of that sewer is their responsibility. Plans of some sewers are held by United Utilities.

Sewers built before 1st October 1937 are known as Section 24 sewers and are the exception to the rule. They fit the general description of private sewers but they are actually public and therefore managed by United Utilities.

A private sewer is a sewer that has not been adopted by United Utilities, nor a Section 24 Sewer and therefore is the responsibility of the persons who use the sewer to clear blockages and repair damage.

The fact that a sewer is located under a public road does not mean that it is a public sewer. Some public sewers can be found within the grounds (curtilage) of a private dwelling.

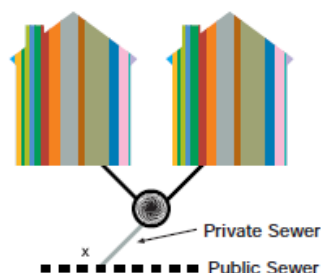
Figure 1



Your household drain may flow straight into a public sewer (figure 1). If a blockage occurs anywhere in this private drain, you have sole responsibility for clearing any blockages or carrying out any repairs up to the connection with the public sewer. Most properties have some length of private drain.

Drains from two or more properties may join together and form a private sewer, and then run some distance

Figure 2

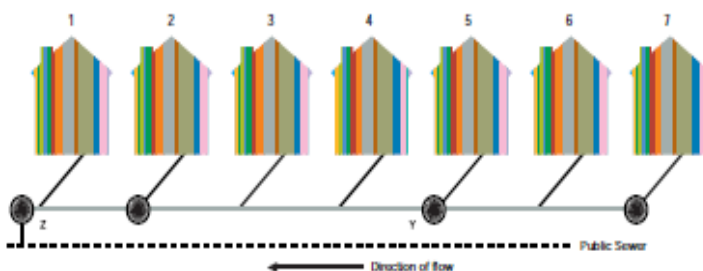


before connecting with the public sewer (figure 2). If a blockage or defect occurs at point X in the private sewer system (figure 2), the owners of the two properties would be responsible for rectifying the problem.

Note that the boundary of the property does not indicate the end of your responsibility.

Figure 3 shows how all the drains from a block of houses link up before running into a public sewer. In some cases, the drains from an estate may join a private sewer system before linking up with the public system, and this can be a considerable distance away.

Figure 3



Present legislation dictates that the owners or occupiers of premises above the point of the blockage or defect (i.e. whichever properties' effluent flows through that point) are responsible. Therefore a blockage at Inspection chamber Y would only involve properties 5, 6 and 7. A blockage at inspection chamber Z would involve all 7 properties.

## Drainage faults

The Housing & Public Health (HPH) unit investigates complaints regarding faulty drainage. Officers may carry out tests to check the integrity of the pipes. These include:

### Drainage dyes

If water is leaking into a cellar, different pipes may be dye tested. Whichever dye is later found in the cellar denotes the pipe in which the water is leaking. Further tests may be carried out to find out where on that pipe the fault is.

### Smoke tests

Smoke is admitted into a pipe and all possible exits are blocked. If smoke comes out of cracks in the paving, in the attic, via rat holes etc., this indicates that the pipe has a fault.

### Drain cameras

These are used to detect & identify exactly where on a pipe the fault is.

Officers will determine the extent of the problem, the number of properties involved and the action required to resolve the problem. This usually results in either informal or formal action being taken.

## Informal action

HPH will endeavour to inform users of the appropriate action to take, i.e.

- Use rods to clear pipes personally or with the help of a neighbour
- contact Bolton Council's Highways & Drainage Services on 01204 336612 who provide a chargeable service
- contact a local specialist drainage company.

## Formal action

The council may serve a Legal Notice, which would require the affected persons to remove obstructions from or carry out repairs to the private sewer within a specified time.

The notice or covering letter will indicate all other parties involved. If the notice is not complied with, the work will be completed by the council or private contractor and the cost for the work plus any administrative fees will be recovered. Rights of appeal are set out within the notice.

Common causes of blockages:

- Avoid fat/grease entering drains. If it does, mix with plenty of boiling water and detergent.
- sanitary items/disposable nappies - do not flush down the toilet, dispose of in the rubbish bin
- conservatories/extensions - relocate drain and avoid building over pipework/drainage systems
- tree roots - can damage pipework.

## Public sewers

United Utilities are responsible for problems relating to public sewers. They can be contacted on: 0845 6020406.

## Further help and advice

If you require any further help or advice in relation to drainage issues please contact the Housing & Public Health team on 01204 336500 or email: [housingandpublichealth@bolton.gov.uk](mailto:housingandpublichealth@bolton.gov.uk).