

Your Guide to Building Over or Near Public Sewers

September 2025



YorkshireWater

Introduction

Planning a dream extension? Or maybe a new conservatory or garage in the garden?

Before you dive into your project, it's important to know if there are any sewer pipes or drains around your property that could impact your plans.

As a homeowner, there are certain obligations you have to protect public sewer pipes that may lie within your property's boundary, and certain restrictions on the building work you can carry out over or near these pipes.

We've put this guide together to help you understand the different considerations you need to make before starting your building work.

For more guidance on building over or near sewers and drains



Watch our video guide:

youtube.com/watch?v_hxDhjBw9raQ

Everything you need to know about sewer build-overs:

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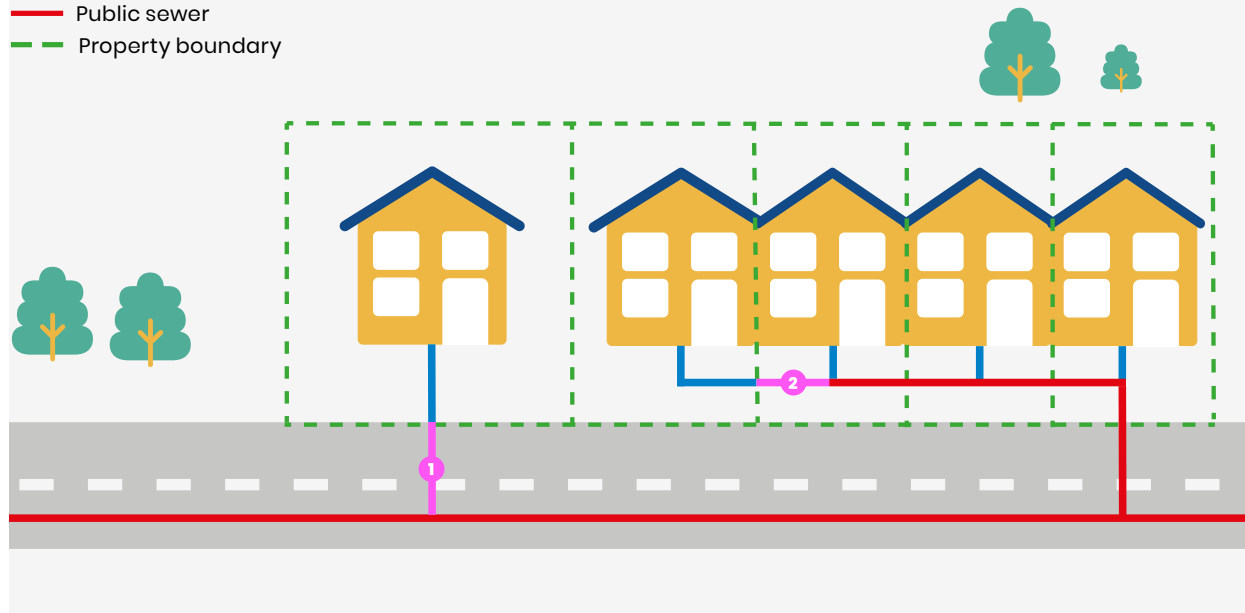
1. What pipes are on your property?

There are three types of pipe you need to be aware of:

- **Private drain** — a pipe that serves just your home, located inside the boundary of your property. This is your responsibility to maintain.
- **Lateral drain** — a pipe that serves just your home but is located either in the public road or your neighbour's garden. If the lateral drain was communicating with the public sewer before **1 July 2011**, it's likely to be part of the public network (our responsibility). If it was connected after this date, it's likely to be private (your responsibility), unless the pipe was formally adopted by us.
- **Public sewer** — a pipe that carries wastewater away from multiple properties via the public sewer network (our responsibility).

Key

- Private drain
- Lateral drain in (1) a public road or (2) a neighbour's garden
- Public sewer
- Property boundary





2. Who owns the pipes?

How to check who owns the drains and sewer pipes serving your home:

- Check which water company bills you for wastewater services — this will probably be Yorkshire Water but it could be an independent provider known as a [new appointee or variant \(NAV\)](#) if there's one operating in your area.
- Check your property's deeds — if your property was built after 1 July 2011, the developer may not have asked us to take ownership of the drainage network.
- Contact your builder, estate agent, the previous owner or your local council for any information they may have about the property's drainage network.
- Ask your neighbour if they're aware of any shared pipes and if they have any plans showing the shared drainage arrangements.
- Have a look around your property — is there a manhole cover, access point or shared gully in your yard or garden? There may be a public or private sewer underneath.
- Access [our public sewer records](#) — keep in mind that not all sewer pipes are recorded, so these may not be 100% accurate.
- Consider getting a [drainage survey](#) done by a competent contractor to find out exactly what's in the ground.





3. What if there's a public sewer in your land?

It's important to understand you are not permitted to build over or within 3 metres of a public sewer or public lateral drain without our prior written approval

If you're applying for Building Regulations approval, your **local authority building control** will consult with us on your behalf about your building proposal — make sure to ask them for a copy of our response.

Alternatively, you can make a **sewer build-over enquiry** directly to us for an upfront fee. You'll need to provide your building plans, including the existing and proposed drainage arrangements. We'll do a technical assessment of your plans and send you either our acceptance of your building proposal or, if the drainage system is likely to be affected, our objections.

If you receive an objection letter, don't worry, we'll explain the reasons and share some alternative options with you. Alternatives might include changing your design plans to avoid building over the sewer, or, if this isn't possible, making a minor alteration to the sewer system, subject to our acceptance.

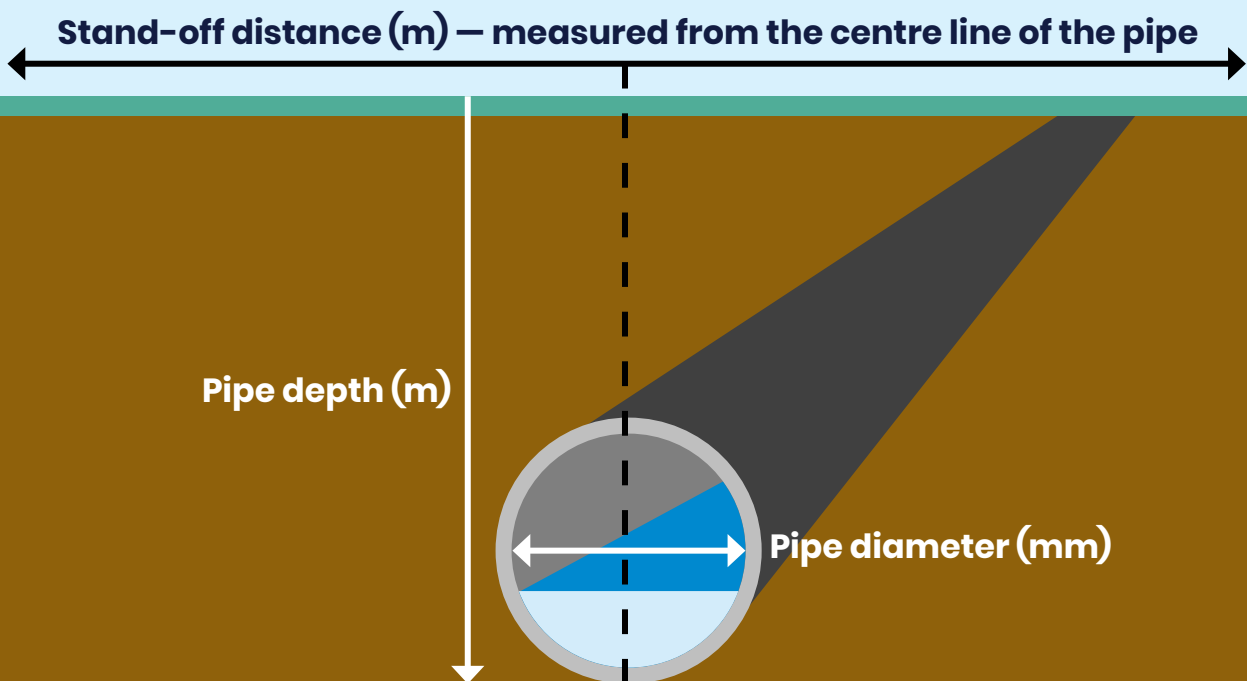
If the sewer in question is of critical importance (due to its size, location or type) or it's damaged in some way, it's important to note that you will not be permitted to build over or near to it.





4. How close to a public sewer can you build?

We have a set of minimum stand-off distances for public sewers and lateral drains. Building work is restricted within these minimum distances to protect and maintain access to the public pipework.



Minimum stand-off distances for public sewers and lateral drains

		Pipe depth (m)					
		<3	3-4	4-5	5-6	6-7	7.5+
Pipe diameter (mm)	<150	3m	3m	4m	5m	6m	4m
	150-299	3m	3m	4m	5m	6m	4m
	300 449	3m	3m	4m	5m	6m	4m
	450-600	3.5m	4m	5m	6m	6m	4m
	601-749	3.5m	4m	5m	6m	6m	4m
	750 924	4m	5m	5m	6.5m	6m	5m
	925 1000	5m	5m	6m	6.5m	6.5m	5m
	1,001 1,124	5m	5m	6m	6.5m	6.5m	5m
	1,125 1,399	5m	5m	6.5m	6.5m	6.5m	5m
	1,400+	5m	5m	6.5m	6.5m	6.5m	6m
Box culverts and large tanks		4m from centre line / 2m from outside edge	5m from centre line / 2.5m from outside edge	6m from centre line / 2.5m from outside edge			



5. Does your plan meet Building Regulations?

Part H4 of Building Regulations sets out the assessment criteria for building over or near public sewers and lateral drains.

If you know the answer is ‘yes’ to any of the questions below, or you’re at all unsure, please [contact us](#) before you start any work:

- Is your building footprint within 3 metres of a public sewer that is greater than 225mm in diameter and/or deeper than 3 metres in the ground?
- Is there an existing manhole cover, access point or shared gully inside your building footprint?
- Does your building footprint span over more than 10 metres of a public sewer or lateral drain?
- Will your building foundations put additional load on a public sewer or lateral drain?
- Do you plan to alter an existing, shared drainage system?
- Is there a critical or damaged sewer system near where you’re proposing to build?





6. Altering or diverting a public sewer

If there's a public sewer or lateral drain in the way of your development, you may be able to get it altered or diverted.

If the issue is a public sewer pipe in your garden, yard or driveway that you're not able to build over or near, a minor alteration would normally be needed. Minor alterations typically apply to sewer pipes and drains that are up to 225mm in diameter, less than 3 metres deep and where no more than 20m of the pipe length needs diverting.

If the pipe you need to alter is of critical importance and not a gravity system, or is larger than 225mm in diameter or more than 3 metres deep, you may need to apply for a [sewer diversion](#).

The need for a minor alteration would generally come to light after a sewer build-over enquiry or consultation with your local authority building control. You can find more information on what details we need on our [sewer build-over webpage](#).

Please don't attempt to make an alteration or diversion to the public sewer system without our prior written approval. The public sewer system is lawfully retained in its existing position and, as the sewerage undertaker, we are entitled to have it remain so without any disturbance so that we can carry out our statutory duties.





7. What if you need a sewer connection?

If you need a new connection to a public sewer, you'll need to apply to us at least 21 days in advance, and wait for our approval before your connection can go ahead.

You can find our sewer connection application form and further guidance on our [sewer connection webpage](#).

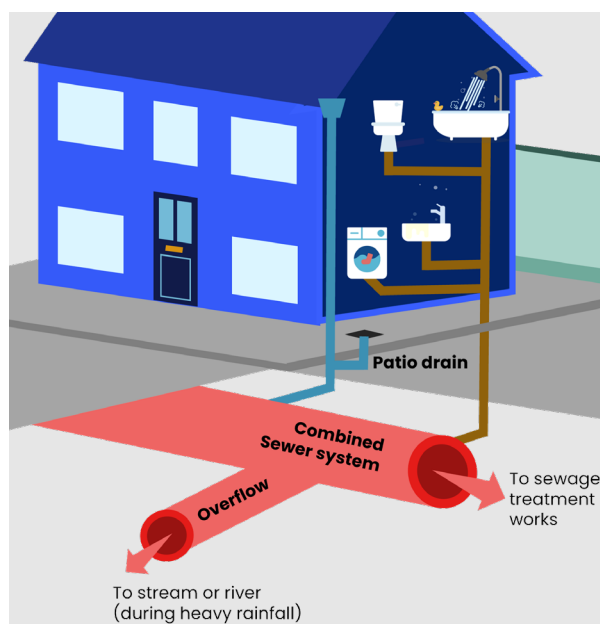
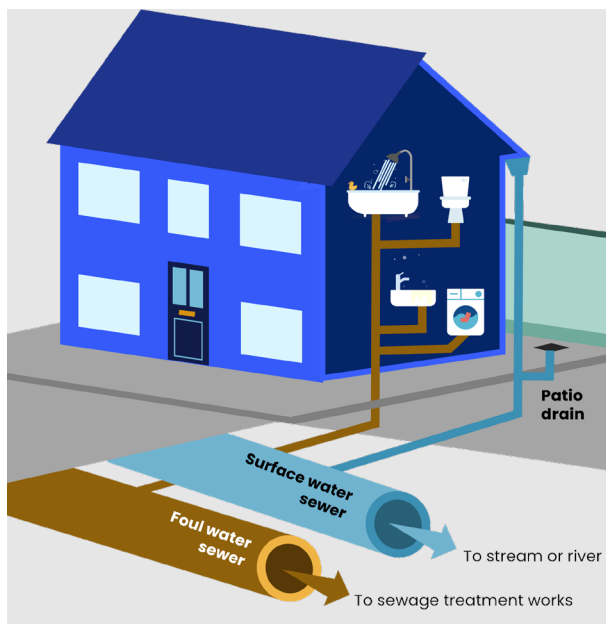
Before you apply, it's important to understand what kind of public sewer you're proposing to connect to:

- **Foul water sewer** — takes wastewater from toilets, baths, showers, sinks, etc.
- **Surface water sewer** — takes rainwater from roofs, driveways and paved areas.
- **Combined sewer** — takes both wastewater and rainwater away.

To avoid pollution events, misconnections and illegal connections, foul water can only be discharged into a foul water sewer or combined sewer. Likewise, surface water can only be discharged into a surface water sewer or combined sewer.

Key

- Foul water sewer
- Surface water sewer
- Combined sewer

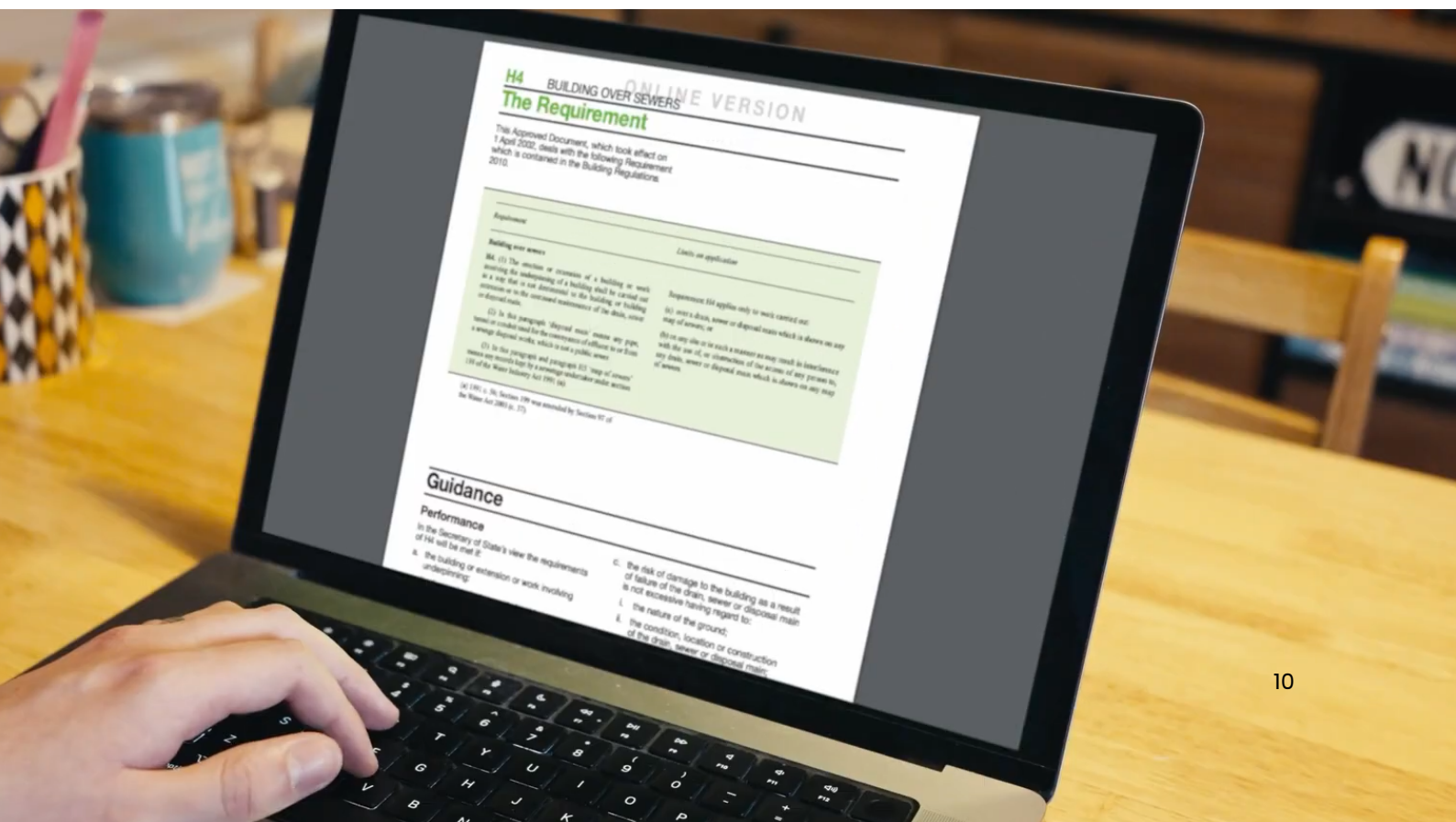




8. Useful guides and resources

We've put together a list of links and resources mentioned in this guide, and some others you may find useful too:

- [Water UK build-over guide for homeowners](#) — further guidance for homeowners on building over or near sewers by Water UK, the trade association for the water industry
- [Part H4 of Building Regulations](#) — the official Building Regulations guidance on building over or near sewers
- [Yorkshire Water sewer build-over enquiries](#) — send us an enquiry about your building proposal
- [Yorkshire Water sewer connections](#) — apply for our approval to make a connection to the public sewer network
- [WaterSafe approved contractors](#) — an independent directory of drainage contractors
- [Checkatrade drainage surveys](#) — an independent directory of drainage surveyors





9. How to contact us

Our Developer Services team is here to help



Give us a call: **0345 120 84 82 (option 1)**



Email us:

technical.sewerage@yorkshirewater.co.uk



Write to us:

Developer Services,
Yorkshire Water Services Ltd,
PO Box 52, Bradford, BD3 7YD

We're available Monday to Friday 8am to 5pm.
We're closed on weekends and bank holidays.



yorkshirewater.com

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