

SURREY HEATH BOROUGH COUNCIL

General Information on Flooding

Until recent changes (over the past 10 years), Surrey Heath Borough Council worked as agents for the drainage authority (Thames Water Utilities Ltd), as agents for the Highway authority within the Borough (Surrey County Council) and as the Land Drainage Authority. These responsibilities changed in April 1997 with the loss of the drainage agency and again in 2002 with the loss of the Highway agency.

With the loss of the public drainage system management contract and the ending of the Surrey County Highways contract, Surrey Heath Borough Council are now only responsible for non-main river Land Drainage systems.

Contact details of the authorities responsible are as follows:

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- Main rivers
Environment Agency - **Telephone Number: 08708 506 506**
 - Highways and highway drainage
Surrey County Council - **Telephone Number: 08456 009 009**
 - All public Foul and Surface Water Sewers (not private systems)
Thames Water – **Telephone Number: 08459 200 800**
 - Ordinary water courses
Land Drainage Authority – **Telephone Number: 01276 707100**
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Depending on Land Registry/Conveyance information owners/residents have various responsibilities as follows:

Foul Drainage:

- i) To properly maintain any pipework up to its public sewer connection.
- ii) To take all reasonable precaution to restrict surface water ingress into any foul water system (by standing water or connection).
- ii) To properly maintain any sewage treatment plants, septic tanks and cesspits in accordance with environmental health and building regulations (mainly applies to the more rural areas of the Borough).

Surface Water Drainage – Rainwater:

- i) To properly maintain pipe work to a public sewer where there is specific written agreement/permission to drain some or all surface water from specified land.
- ii) As a riparian owner of a watercourse (ditch, stream etc) within the property or as an adjacent owner (watercourse alongside property follows or falls within the boundaries) to properly maintain all such watercourses in accordance with Land Drainage Act 1991.
- iii) To properly maintain gutters, rainwater pipes, water butts, storage tanks, overflow systems and any other similar to a suitable drainage outfall.

General information on onsite disposal

Soakaways

Where properties were constructed with soakaways as means of surface waster disposal, such soakaways must be maintained to ensure they work to the maximum designed capacity.

- i) Underground tanks and any well constructed brick or concrete ring soakaways often have access covers so they can be cleaned out to ensure a fully maintained working capacity.

- ii) Partially filled soakaways (generally a hole excavated and filled with rubble) can easily become ineffective within 10 years if excessive silt enters the system. Any connecting pipework from open gullies or guttering allows leaves and debris to enter the soakaway. If soakaways at a property are inefficient or not working, replacement 'maintainable' soakaways may be needed to ensure adequate capacity. Soakaways should be sited at least 5 metres away from dwelling 1 metre from boundary.

Water Storage/Harvesting System – recycling

Drinking water is a valuable resource and any type of rainwater recycling is encouraged as a useable water source which can help reduce flooding of properties by its retention. These can be simply installed in the form of rainwater butts used for garden watering or more sustainable systems that store suitable volumes of water (generally below ground) for flushing toilets supplying washing machines, car washing, garden watering etc.

These recycling systems require a suitable overflow connection to discharge excess water into the properties original surface water disposal system or new soakaway systems.

Property Alternations

For over 70 years dwellings have been constructed to comply with Public Health and Building Regulations.

Town and Country Planning Act 1947 and subsequent amendments and guidance have regulated new building and alternations to properties for 60 years.

Alterations to land and properties may need formal approval and may need to comply with current regulations to avoid the possibility of becoming a nuisance with the possible detrimental effect to neighbours.

Surrey Heath Borough Council can enforce remedial works under various legislation but additionally, any landowner can be sued for damages in the Civil Courts by other landowners/members of the public if their action/inaction is harmful to property, land or person. Some examples of breaches of regulations are as follows:

- Constructing or altering buildings and failing to discharge foul water and rainwater in accordance with regulations.
- Deliberately discharging rainwater from connections or surface water from patios into foul water systems.
- Allowing rainwater to enter foul water systems via waste gullies, broken or poorly fitting inspection covers.
- Enlarging or forming land surfaced driveways without proper drainage allowing additional water to flow onto public footpath/carriageway.

- Landscaping work discharging surface water onto public highways or into adjoining neighbours.
- Any remodelling of land which could be deemed to cause nuisance (detrimental effect/flooding) of any surrounding land or property.

Property Protection

Land owners are responsible for the management and maintenance of buildings so they are not a danger or a nuisance to others.

Property owners or tenants generally have obligations to mortgagees or others who have a vested interest in the property. In order not to invalidate insurances, owners may need to comply with certain protection measures or policy conditions.

Risks to Properties from Flooding

For over 50 years, as part of the planning permission and approval process, the siting of new dwellings is considered in relation to flood risks based on average rainfall statistics and EA flood information. Building Regulations are ~~descriptive~~ prescriptive on construction details to minimise risk of flood water entry throughout the year based on an average rainfall event.

Properties constructed below road level, near rivers, water courses, ponds or those that have been flooded in the past, need to be assessed by their owners. Owners should undertake any precautionary measures to minimise water entering the living space.

Surrey Heath Borough Council will give general advice through its website and publications. The Environment Agency also provides similar information and Flood Warning Advice.

Surrey Heath Borough Councils Drainage Engineer will endeavour to give general advice where several properties have been affected by exceptional rainfall flooding. Any comments on private problems will be purely advisory and the Engineer cannot undertake the provision of details, specifications or suggest contractors. The responsibility to safeguard any property against flooding rests with the land or property owner.

Watercourses (Ditches, Streams, Lakes etc)

Surrey Heath Borough Councils Drainage Engineer will advise Riparian Owners of a watercourse of their maintenance obligation and will formally notify landowners or occupants that fail to meet their duties.

Historically, and especially around older settlements in the Borough, watercourses were excavated for a purpose. Mechanical excavation of these watercourses was unlikely and means that older watercourses are either natural or serve a meaningful purpose:

- i) To drain land in order to achieve a desired water content within the soil to suit specific agricultural, horticultural or other working objections.
- ii) To drain around dwellings to reduce ground water table and subsequently minimise rising damp.
- iii) To divert water away from buildings.

- iv) To inter-connect stock watering ponds to watercourses.
- v) To drain public highways or reduce excessive flooding of highways from higher adjoining land.

Whilst generally all ditches should be maintained, some may be less important due to subsequent new infrastructure on or around the land. In some cases it is in the wider public interest that water is retained on some open spaces of land and in gardens to minimise run off at times of heavy/extreme rainfall. Some ditches may be needed to temporarily hold back water flows and can therefore be constructed with controlled outlets. Any deliberate or accidental blockage of watercourses, along with any unauthorised alterations undertaken, should be notified to the Borough Drainage Engineer for attention. The dumping of any waste within a watercourse (or placed in such a way that would inevitably end up in the watercourse) is classed as fly-tipping and is subject to prosecution by Surrey Heath as a criminal offence.

This paper is for general information **purposes**.