

# SEARCHLIGHT

Essential information for property professionals

Issue 26, May 2015

*Welcome to the Spring edition of Searchlight. Inside we explore the SuDS saga, help you choose the right environmental search, and give you the chance to win £250 of Amazon vouchers with our water themed quiz.*



## SuDS SOAP OPERA

In this issue of Searchlight, we take a look at the protracted, controversial implementation of sustainable drainage systems (SuDS), and what it means for both homebuyers and developers.

Following the Pitt Review into the cause of 2007's flooding, it was concluded that sustainable drainage systems would be the most effective way in preventing similar occurrences in the future.

Sustainable drainage systems, or SuDS for short, provide alternative methods for the disposal of rainwater. The sewerage network is designed to provide drainage under normal conditions, but can get overloaded in times of heavy rainfall, leading to flooding. SuDS are designed to alleviate pressure on the sewerage system, using methods such as balancing ponds and permeable paving to provide alternative drainage solutions. SuDS slow the rate of surface water run-off

and improve infiltration, mimicking natural drainage in both rural and urban areas. They are being used more widely in new developments and, as well as reducing the cause and impact of flooding they can remove pollutants from urban run-off at the source. As such, in reducing flooding as well as environmental contaminants, they reduce the challenges and risks to homeowners and lenders. As an added bonus, SuDS combine waste water management with green space, with benefits for amenity, recreation and wildlife. DEFRA had been working towards SuDS being included in all future developments for some time. The legislative vehicle for this is the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 and it was originally intended

that SuDS would become the responsibility of Sustainable Drainage Adopting Bodies (SABs), run by local authorities, commencing in April 2014.

However alarm bells started to ring in January last year when DEFRA Minister Dan Rogerson announced that:

*"... regrettably, it is looking increasingly unlikely that we will be in a position to ensure that the scheme comes into force this April, which was our preferred date for implementation as stated previously."*

Continued overleaf.

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# SuDS SOAP OPERA... CONTINUED

Traditionally, surface water drainage charges are payable to a water company. As SuDS do not use the public sewerage system, there was an issue regarding who would charge for and maintain these new systems. DEFRA were intending to launch a consultation on the charging mechanism for funding long-term SuDS maintenance in March 2014. This was delayed and adapted for release in September.

When it eventually arrived, the consultation suggested a quite different approach designed in response to councils, and increasingly developers, concerns about the formation of SABs.

It was deemed a less radical method for implementation was required, namely local planning authorities. The reasoning in the consultation document was simple:

*"...the system proposed by Government builds on the existing planning system, which developers and local authorities are already using. Policy changes to the planning system can also be introduced relatively quickly ensuring that sustainable drainage systems flood risk benefits can be brought forward as soon as possible".*

This proposal was implemented from April this year by Communities secretary Eric Pickles. Local planning policies and decisions relating to major developments – defined as "developments of 10 dwellings or more; or equivalent non-residential or mixed development" – must now ensure that SuDS are in place, unless demonstrated to be inappropriate.

The statement also announced a further consultation on the proposal to make Lead Local Flood Authorities (LLFAs)

a statutory consultee on all planning applications for surface water drainage. Local planning authorities will be expected to consult the relevant LLFA on the management of surface water. The LLFA will have to be satisfied that the proposed minimum standards of operation are appropriate and ensure that there are clear arrangements in place for ongoing maintenance over the lifetime of the development. They will also ensure the proposed maintenance and operational requirements of the drainage system are economically proportionate.

SuDS are not new to planners. There has been a requirement for some time in the current national policy that all new developments in areas at risk of flooding should give priority to the use of sustainable drainage systems, and this will continue to apply.

The way SuDS are being implemented has not been universally accepted. During the consultation period, 62% of respondents objected to the process. One of the primary reasons for this concern is a level of uncertainty about the responsibility for the upkeep and maintenance of SuDS going forward. The proposal is that planning conditions should require a maintenance regime to be in place. The document pointed out that the maintenance Companies – often set-up managed public spaces on new developments – could extend their remit to cover SuDS. Alternatively, water and sewerage companies could be responsible, with the costs recovered through water charges.

DCLG and DEFRA have argued that a "suite of viable maintenance options will need to be available to developers

to ensure that at least one option is open to them in every case to enable them to satisfy a planning condition." However, it was also made very clear that "Committed sums paid by developers for maintenance of sustainable drainage must not be the default option; they do not provide a long term solution and we would expect this route to be appropriate only in a limited number of cases." Further guidance on this issue is expected shortly.

So what does this mean to conveyancers? It was originally thought that customers would have been able to refer to the local authority's CON29 form to determine whether a property drains via SuDS. An updated CON29 form had been proposed with a new question on SuDS, and the Law Society originally aimed to complete this for April 2015. However the Law Society have recently stated that these changes have now been delayed indefinitely.

The CON29DW will continue to answer the question about a property being connected to surface water drainage. Where new properties do not discharge via the public sewer, the search will draw customers' attention to the possibility of post-2014 properties being served by SuDS.

Whatever the mechanism that emerges by which customers ascertain a property's surface water arrangements, Severn Trent Searches will ensure that conveyancers will be kept informed to ensure understanding of the issues arising from this change.

## OUR LATEST CUSTOMER SERVICE RESULTS

We've been working hard to deliver great customer service and thought we'd share some of our latest figures with you.

Making sure our customers get the great service they deserve is really important to us. To help us in this, we keep detailed records of our performance, along with independently collected customer feedback. We've recently been looking at our results for 2014/15, and pleased to say that they're amongst the best we've ever had.

One of the most important measures we keep is our search turnaround times. Customers often need their CON29DW back quickly, and we've made substantial investments in our systems to ensure we can complete these as efficiently and accurately as possible.

Over the last year we've completed 96.3% of these within one working day. For the few searches we're unable to return within a day, we've completed 98% within three working days and 98.7% within five days.

Our most recent customer feedback has also been impressive. Our latest Net Promoter Score – which indicates whether a customer would recommend our company – saw us achieve a maximum 100%. Obviously this is a fantastic achievement, so a big thank you if you were one of the customers surveyed.

We place a great emphasis on ensuring our customers get the service they deserve and expect, so obviously we're very pleased with these results. However, we're never content to sit on our laurels, so always welcome any feedback from our customers. If you've any comments about our service – good or bad, please let us know by calling 0115 971 3550 or email [business@severntrentsearches.com](mailto:business@severntrentsearches.com)

# ENVIRONMENTAL SEARCH CONTENT

With nearly 40 different residential and commercial environmental reports to choose from, it can be confusing knowing which is right for your client.

We've therefore compiled a handy table which provides an at-a-glance guide to our range of searches. However, because different environmental searches specialise in different areas, we'd like you to bear in mind that this is intended as a rough guide only.

For example, whilst we may have highlighted that an environmental search contains information on coal mining, it won't contain the same level of detail as a specialist coal search. Because of this, we'd always recommend visiting [www.severntrentsearches.com](http://www.severntrentsearches.com) or calling us on 0115 971 3550 for more information if you're unsure which search you need.

## RESIDENTIAL

	Assessment	Coal Mining	Contaminated Land	Energy	Flood Risk	Ground Stability	HS2 and Crossrail	Neighborhood Intelligence	Planning	Radon	Subsidence
Argyll Energy and Infrastructure				✓			✓				
Coal Mining		✓									✓
Envirosearch Residential	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
FCI Flood	✓				✓						
FCI Energy and Infrastructure	✓			✓			✓				
FCI Essential	✓		✓		✓					✓	
FCI Standard	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓				✓	
FCI Premium	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	
Ground Stability		✓				✓					✓
Groundsure Energy				✓							
Groundsure Flood					✓						
Groundsure Homebuyers	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓			✓	✓
Groundsure Homescreen	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓			✓	✓
Groundsure HS2 and Crossrail							✓				
Groundsure HS2 and Energy				✓			✓				
Groundsure Planning								✓	✓	✓	
Homecheck Flood					✓						
Homecheck Professional	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓				✓	✓
Plansearch									✓		
Plansearch Plus								✓	✓		
Subsidence											✓

## COMMERCIAL

	Assessment	Coal Mining	Contaminated Land	Energy	Flood Risk	Ground Stability	HS2 and Crossrail	Neighborhood Intelligence	Planning	Radon	Subsidence
Argyll Energy and Infrastructure				✓			✓				
Coal Mining		✓									✓
FCI Energy and Infrastructure	✓			✓			✓				
FCI Standard	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓				✓	
FCI Premium	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	
Ground Stability		✓				✓					✓
Groundsure Energy				✓							
Groundsure Floodview	✓				✓						
Groundsure HS2 and Crossrail							✓				
Groundsure Planview							✓	✓	✓	✓	
Groundsure Review	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓				✓	✓
Groundsure Screening	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓				✓	✓
Sitecheck Data		✓	✓		✓	✓				✓	
Sitecheck Assess	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓				✓	
Sitecheck Combined	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓				✓	✓
Sitecheck Flood	✓				✓						
Sitecheck Planning								✓	✓		
Sitesolutions Brief	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓				✓	✓
Sitesolutions Commercial	✓	✓	✓			✓				✓	✓
Sitesolutions Combined	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓				✓	✓



# THE CON29DW - AN ESSENTIAL PURCHASE

We think the CON29DW is essential in any home move. Here's why:

The CON29DW is one of the most popular conveyancing searches in the UK. It's the official drainage and water search, provided by the water companies of England and Wales. The search is recommended by the Law Society, and is performed in the vast majority of house purchases.

## CON29DW DRAINAGE AND WATER ENQUIRY

First introduced in 2002, the CON29DW has undergone many changes over the years before arriving in its present form. The search, which is divided into four sections – maps, drainage, water and billing – answers 23 questions. It shows the location of all water company apparatus around a property, along with connection and billing status. In addition, there's information on a variety of topics such as adoption agreements, water quality and pressure, sewer flooding and nearby treatment works. All the answers in the search, many of which are exclusive to the CON29DW, are derived directly from official water company records.

The CON29DW also offers you full protection should something go wrong. It comes with our guarantee that, should a mistake occur, we'll do what we can to put it right. A recent example occurred with a property just outside Newark. Due to an error in Severn Trent Water's records, we incorrectly advised that the property was connected to the public sewer, when in fact it drained to a septic tank. After arranging an inspection of the tank, we voluntarily completed £7000 of work at the property to establish a new connection to the public sewer.

We believe the CON29DW is an essential product in any home purchase. It's the most comprehensive, accurate drainage and water search on the market, and offers full protection for both homebuyers and their conveyancers.

To learn more about the CON29DW, please visit  
[www.severntrentsearches.com](http://www.severntrentsearches.com)

## LAW SOCIETY DINNERS



Owen Davies presenting an award to Eversheds LLP

We've recently been attending a number of annual dinners and award ceremonies hosted by local Law Societies.

Severn Trent Searches sponsor a number of Law Societies throughout the Midlands. Whenever possible, we attend their annual dinners and other events they host, giving us an opportunity to catch up with both them and our customers.

In March we attended the Birmingham Law Society's Legal Awards at the International Convention Centre, with guest speaker Brian Moore. A former England rugby player turned commentator, Moore is also a qualified solicitor, and kept the audience entertained with a near the knuckle speech. We also had the pleasure of sponsoring the award for Corporate Social Responsibility And Pro Bono Lawyer Of The Year, awarded to Ian Henery of Ian Henery Solicitors.

The following day we attended the annual dinner and awards ceremony held by the Nottingham Law Society. Held at Nottingham's Colwick Hall, attendees were treated to a speech by Gary Bell QC, presenter of BBC1's The Legalizer. Severn Trent Searches' Owen Davies presented the Contribution To The Community award to Eversheds LLP.

April saw us attend Derby Law Society's annual dinner. The evening, held at Pride Park, was a huge success. Former Goodie Tim Brooke-Taylor was the guest speaker and delivered a hilarious speech.

The final, upcoming (at time of going to press) event on our social calendar is May's Leicestershire Legal Awards, at which we're proud to be sponsoring the prestigious Law Firm Of The Year award. From the standard set by previous events, they've got a lot to live up to!

Although we are unfortunately unable to attend all the events we're invited to, we'd like to extend a big thank you to all the law societies we work alongside. It's a pleasure working with you.

## GOT A QUESTION FOR US?

Ask The Experts is taking a break, but will be back in our winter edition. If you've got a question you'd like answering, please email it to [business@severntrentsearches.com](mailto:business@severntrentsearches.com) and you may see it in our next issue!



# POOL YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Take a dip in our watery quiz and win £250 of Amazon vouchers

To the right are 20 water-themed songs and films, with the water related part of the title missing. All you've got to do is complete the titles. For example, if the clue was "Singin' In The \_\_\_\_" the answer would, of course be "Rain". Simply fill in the missing words and send to us by **Friday 12th June 2015**, and you could win £250 of Amazon vouchers. Don't worry if you don't get them all, send us as many as you can get. Who knows, you may have the top score!



Send your completed competition to us at:

Searchlight 26 competition  
Severn Trent Searches  
PO BOX 10155  
Nottingham  
NG1 9HQ  
or  
DX 723860 Nottingham 43.

Alternatively you can email it to:  
[business@severntrentsearches.com](mailto:business@severntrentsearches.com)  
or fax 0115 971 3551. Competition closes Friday 12th June 2015.

Please include your name, the name of your firm, contact telephone number, and your email address.

The winner will be notified and the prize delivered shortly after the closing date of the competition. Terms and conditions apply – these can be found on the 'News' page of our website at [www.severntrentsearches.com/category/news](http://www.severntrentsearches.com/category/news)

**Need some help?**  
Follow us on Twitter or like us on Facebook and we'll post a few clues  
Twitter: @STSearches  
Facebook: [Facebook.com/SevernTrentSearches](https://www.facebook.com/SevernTrentSearches)

Your Name .....

Firm Name .....

Telephone Number .....

Email Address .....

Songs

1

Beyond the \_\_\_\_

2

\_\_\_\_\_ over troubled water

3

Cry me a \_\_\_\_\_

4

The \_\_\_\_ is high

5

Smoke on the \_\_\_\_\_

6

\_\_\_\_\_ keep falling on my head

7

Sittin' on the dock of the \_\_\_\_

8

\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_ baby

9

It's \_\_\_\_\_ men

10

Orinoco \_\_\_\_\_

11

\_\_\_\_\_ ' USA

Films

12

Death on the \_\_\_\_

13

\_\_\_\_\_ dogs

14

\_\_\_\_\_ eleven

15

The little \_\_\_\_\_

16

The \_\_\_\_ busters

17

Creature from the black \_\_\_\_\_

18

On the \_\_\_\_\_

Songs and Films

19

Yellow \_\_\_\_\_

20

Purple \_\_\_\_\_

## HELP FOR HOMEOWNERS

Did you know that, besides searches, we offer a variety of other products to help homeowners?

For many years, Severn Trent have introduced HomeServe, who offer a variety of plumbing and drainage insurance policies. Problems with private pipework at a property can be costly and disruptive. HomeServe provide various plumbing and drainage related solutions, along with an emergency repair service.

These policies aren't exclusively for buyers of new properties. Any homeowner can take out HomeServe's cover for assistance in a water related emergency. Full details of these services are available on the Severn Trent Property Solutions website. Besides details of HomeServe policies, there's information on some of our reports - such as planning and flood searches - that are regularly purchased by existing homeowners. There are also a variety of water saving tips, as well as free products designed to reduce your water consumption – very useful if you're on a water meter.

For further information on any of these products, please visit [www.severntrentpropertysolutions.com](http://www.severntrentpropertysolutions.com)

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Email: [enquiries@severntrentsearches.com](mailto:enquiries@severntrentsearches.com)  
Follow us on Twitter: @STSearches  
Find us on Facebook: [Facebook.com/SevernTrentSearches](https://www.facebook.com/SevernTrentSearches)

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## MEET OWEN

Get to know our Business  
Development Manager a little better.



If you've ever attended one of our CPDs or seen us at an event, chances are you've met Owen. He's our Business Development Manager, and since joining Severn Trent Searches in 2001 he's regularly been out and about, meeting customers and other experts within the industry. Besides helping to develop the CON29DW into the market-leading search it is today, Owen also regularly performs CPD presentations for our customers on a variety of drainage and water related

issues. We thought we'd give you a chance to get to know him a little better:

### How would you define your job?

Business Development Manager is one of those made up job titles that covers a multitude of sins. In essence though it is my responsibility to ensure that we have fantastic relationships with all of our customers and suppliers.

### What's the most interesting part of your role?

Meeting people and building relationships.

### Are there any industry changes coming up you think customers should be aware of?

The biggest change on the horizon is the opening up of the commercial water market so commercial customers can choose their water supplier from April 2017. This will no doubt pave the way for the same to happen in the domestic market at some point in the not too distant future.

### What do you like doing in your spare time?

I love the outdoors so anything that involves fresh air and great views is fine by me. I'm desperately trying to encourage my kids to be the same, with occasional success. I am of course conveniently forgetting that when I was a child and my parents dragged me along on walks I moaned continuously as well!

### What's the most embarrassing thing that's ever happened to you at work?

I once borrowed a colleague's car to get to an appointment and proceeded to crash it at relatively high speed into a stationary lorry in the work car park. Sadly it was in plain view of the entire office who quickly came out to offer sympathetic howls of laughter and general mickey-taking!

We regularly arrange CPD events for our customers, which are advertised in the CPD Events section of [severntrentsearches.com](http://severntrentsearches.com). Alternatively, we are able to visit your offices to deliver the presentation if more convenient. Please call us on 0115 971 3550 or email [business@severntrentsearches.com](mailto:business@severntrentsearches.com) for more information.

## NEW ORDERING SITE ON THE WAY

Order your searches online? Our  
ordering site is getting a revamp.

We've got some good news for customers who order their searches online. Our ordering website is to get a major upgrade, with a host of new features, making it even easier to place and track your orders.

"Our ordering platform has remained virtually unchanged since we launched it back in 2008" says Mark Jarvis, Operations Director of Severn Trent Searches "The current site is a useful tool, but we want to incorporate the latest technology, which will enable customers access to a wider range of features, and a lot more control over their orders."

The new site, scheduled to launch in 2016, will include a host of new features. We've been talking to customers – both in person and through online surveys - about what they'd like to see from the new site, and they've suggested a number of ideas which we could incorporate. Everything from mapping tools, to customised search packages, displaying latest turnaround times, report recommendations and live chat features have all been suggested. Whilst we won't be able to incorporate all of your recommendations, your contributions have proved invaluable.

"This new ordering site will help us provide the best possible service to our customers" says Mark. "We've just completed a substantial upgrade of our internal systems, and this next step should ensure customers continue to experience the high standards they've come to expect from Severn Trent Searches."

If you have any suggestions for our new site, please email them to [business@severntrentsearches.com](mailto:business@severntrentsearches.com). Who knows, you may see your suggestion come to life on our website!