

SEARCHLIGHT

Essential information for property professionals

Issue 28, May 2016

ALL CHANGE FOR THE CON29DW



We're making some changes to our drainage and water searches, incorporating the latest industry developments along with even more useful information for homeowners.

For more than a decade, the CON29DW has been the trusted source of drainage and water information for conveyancers and homebuyers alike. Since its launch in 2002, the search has been produced by the water companies of England and Wales, using information derived directly from their records. It is the only drainage and water search produced in conjunction with - and approved by - the Law Society.

Now, we're making some refinements to the search, designed to bring it up to date. We'll be replacing some questions with new ones, as well as introducing more information regarding the ongoing transfer of private sewers into public ownership. These changes will be introduced in June, and will also be reflected in our range of commercial drainage and water searches, as well as in searches compiled by other water companies.

It's not the first time the CON29DW has been revised. In 2007, with the advent of Home Information Packs (HIPs), the search was expanded to its current 23 questions. After the coalition government scrapped HIPs, these questions were retained, and the search was reorganised, dividing information into four different sections.

These new changes aren't as radical as the previous overhaul, but do nonetheless provide important new information for consumers.

Continued overleaf

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ALL CHANGE FOR THE CON29DW - CONTINUED

Firstly, questions 3.5 and 3.6, which deal with water quality and water standards, will be replaced. These questions were introduced as part of HIPs, at the request of the government. Water companies, along with the Law Society, have long argued that this information is largely irrelevant to homebuyers. Problems with water quality are exceedingly rare, and usually temporary. Question 3.5 also refers to water supply zones, which typically include thousands of properties, and a single failure at a property in a zone will produce a negative answer for all. Water quality information will continue to be available on Severn Trent Water's website.

In their place will be a new question, relating to water hardness. This is something of greater interest to homebuyers, as it can have practical implications. Hard water is found in chalk and limestone areas, although as water companies move water around their network, the geological make up of an area may not be a reliable indicator that you're in a hard water area. Although there is some evidence that it can aggravate eczema in certain individuals, it's not otherwise hazardous to human health. It can however cause a build-up of limescale around taps as well as in household appliances such as kettles and washing machines.

Next, we'll be renumbering our three commercial searches – Basic, Standard and Extra – bringing the question numbers in line with the CON29DW.

We'll also be making some further changes regarding the sewer transfer. By October this year, the majority of pumping stations serving multiple properties will be publically owned. As happened with sewers, this has been part of the transfer process which began in 2011. However, with pumping stations, there will be regular inspections and

maintenance, meaning that having one on or close to your land may be disruptive. Because of this, we are introducing two questions into searches relating to pumping stations, indicating both whether one is located within a property boundary, or within 50 metres.

From April last year, Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) became the standard method for disposing of surface water for new developments. Although these aren't the responsibility of water companies, we'll be adding information into questions 2.2 and 2.3 – which relate to surface water connection and charges – to indicate if we're aware the property drains via a SuDS. Likewise, we'll also be adding this information into question 2.6, which relates to sewer adoptions. These systems will usually be maintained by the local authority, and as such, surface water drainage will be excluded from any section 104 adoption agreements with water companies.

The final substantial change will be with question 4.1, which provides details of the sewerage and water undertakers serving a property. As these can sometimes be different companies, we're splitting it into two separate questions. There's also a few other minor changes occurring throughout the searches, designed to provide clearer, more comprehensive information.

We're convinced these changes to our drainage and water searches will provide even more valuable information for both conveyancers and homebuyers. If you'd like any further information regarding any of these changes, please email business@severntrentsearches.com

For full details of the changes please visit www.severntrentsearches.com/con29dw-changes/

TAXING TIME FOR LOCAL AUTHORITIES

The government is due to introduce VAT on local authority searches from July.

The current exemption of local authority searches from tax is due to come to an end in July with the introduction of VAT for the CON29 element of searches.

Originally proposed to be introduced in February, HMRC later delayed implementation in order to allow local authorities time to properly prepare for the new arrangements. The new date of 4th July coincides with the introduction of The Law Society's revised CON29 form.

At present, HMRC's proposals only relate to both the CON29R and O elements of searches, with the LLC1 remaining exempt. The CIPFA VAT committee, which advises the government, has however proposed that the entire search should remain exempt from VAT. Michael Revis, chairman of the committee stated "HMRC are still considering the CIPFA submission for continued non-business treatment. A response is expected prior to the 4th July 2016 implementation date."

Should CIPFA's submission be rejected, local authorities will be obliged to charge VAT from July onwards. To date, few authorities have announced whether they'll absorb

the extra cost, or add 20% VAT onto the price of the CON29. However, as local authorities are not supposed to profit from searches, there will be little leeway for them to absorb the extra cost.



Owen Davies, Business Development manager at Severn Trent Searches says "This change is one that many in the industry have been wanting for some time. It may mean that, in the short term at least, the prices of official local authority searches may increase. However, it does end the discrepancy whereby personal searches of local authority records are subject to VAT, but searches produced by authorities are exempt".

For the latest news on this matter, please visit www.severntrentsearches.com/la-vat/

HAVE YOU TRIED THE CON29DW FLOOD+?

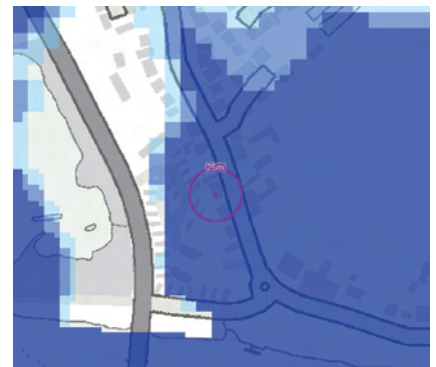
The CON29DW Flood+ combines water, drainage and flooding information all in one search. With a host of new features including a risk assessment and client care letters, it's the most comprehensive search we've ever produced.

In March we launched a new search – the CON29DW Flood+. Combining the drainage and water information from the CON29DW alongside flooding information from our colleagues at Landmark, it is the only search of its kind, and the most comprehensive drainage and water search available.

The new search has seen a complete re-design of the CON29DW. Whilst retaining all the information our customers have come to expect and trust, it has been given a makeover, giving it a more modern feel. We have added a front page summary, providing an overview of the search's findings, along with a risk assessment similar to those found in environmental searches. The new search also includes client care letters, explaining any issues raised by the search in simple terms, and offering further guidance. In addition to the CON29DW data, the search incorporates flood risk

information from Landmark, which has seen an additional five questions added to the search. The dangers of a property being at risk of river, coastal, groundwater or surface water flooding are all included, as is information on flood defences and insurance information. Between them, this builds up an invaluable picture of flood risk at a property. Whilst not as comprehensive as a dedicated flood search, the included information is comparable to that found in top-end environmental searches, and is designed to give conveyancers and homebuyers an overview in order to decide whether further investigation is warranted.

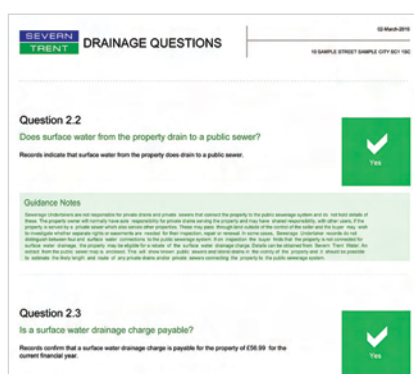
- All 23 CON29DW questions plus 5 on flooding
- Front page summary and risk assessment
- Client care letters
- Fully re-designed search
- Only £55 + VAT – just £10 more than the CON29DW



Flood data map

drainage and water searches and Landmark's market-leading flood searches, it seemed logical to combine the two, producing a unique, comprehensive search." The result is a search that – since we launched in early March – has been an instant success with customers. "The addition of flood information to the CON29DW is something that our customers really seem to appreciate" continues Owen. "The pricing of the Flood+ is also proving a big selling point. At £55 plus VAT, it is just £10 more than the standard CON29DW. With flood searches costing around £20, and environmental searches even more, this is the cheapest way for conveyancers to get an overview of flood risk. And customers seem to like the convenience of having all the information they need in one simple-to-use report."

Severn Trent Searches and Landmark Information Group have worked closely alongside one another for over a decade. We've acted as an official reseller of Landmark's range of environmental searches, which includes the bestselling Envirosearch Residential and Homecheck Flood. "Over the last few years, we have been talking about collaborating on a joint project" says Owen Davies, Business Development Manager at Severn Trent Searches. "With our knowledge of



The CON29DW Flood+ report

The CON29DW Flood+ is available now, exclusively from Severn Trent Searches. Visit www.severntrentsearches.com/floodplus/ or call 0115 971 3550 for further information.

TRANSFER DEADLINE DAY LOOMS FOR PUMPING STATIONS

October sees most private pumping stations transfer to water companies.

Back in 2011, the majority of private sewers in England and Wales transferred into public ownership. Thousands of kilometres of private sewers became the responsibility of water companies overnight. The transfer affected the majority of sewers and other assets connected to the public network prior to July 2011. Whilst the second phase of the transfer – covering any sewers laid since that date – is yet to materialise, we are rapidly approaching another important stage of the transfer.

Private pumping stations serving two or more properties were also part of this process. Unlike sewers, pumping stations need regular inspection and maintenance. Because of this, instead of an immediate transfer, water companies were given five years to identify, assess and adopt these stations.

The deadline for adoption is October this year, and for the past few years a dedicated team at Severn Trent Water has been working to both identify private pumping stations and

prepare them for transfer. Around 1000 have been identified and have transferred – or are in the process of transferring – to Severn Trent's ownership.

Although all pumping stations require regular inspection and maintenance, this is true to an even greater degree with ones which were privately constructed and owned, as they may not have been built to the high standards Severn Trent require.

As maintenance can cause some disruption to both homeowners and neighbours alike, we're going to be highlighting the location of formerly private pumping stations in the CON29DW (as mentioned in our lead story). We'll be adding new questions identifying both pumping stations within property boundaries, and within 50 metres, as well as regularly adding newly transferred assets to our sewer plans.

For more information about the sewer transfer, please visit www.severntrentsearches.com/sewer-transfer/

A MINE OF INFORMATION

Here's our handy guide to coal mining searches. Because things aren't always what they seem....

A search detailing mining activity around a property is one of the standard enquiries made by conveyancing solicitors. These searches, produced by the Coal Authority, contain detailed information derived directly from official records. Severn Trent Searches offers a variety of the Coal Authority's products. Here's a simple guide:

Coal Mining Report – The most common coal search, which fulfils all the requirements of the Law Society's due diligence under CON29M. The report shows historical, current and proposed mining activity near a property including the location of mineshafts, and helps determine if a property has been subject to a coal mining related subsidence damage notice or claim since 1994. Information regarding opencast mining is also included, confirming whether the property was built on a former opencast site. The report also states whether the property is located in the Cheshire Brine Subsidence Compensation District. For properties located outside a coal mining area, we can provide a certificate confirming a coal mining report isn't necessary.

£41.40* residential, £94.80 commercial.
Out of area reports £26.40

Ground Stability Report – Subsidence can occur in any area, not just those where coal mining has been prevalent. The Ground Stability Report advises whether a property is at risk from subsidence, either from man-made causes such as coal mining, or natural hazards. Combining the Coal Authority's mining data alongside information from the British Geological Survey on natural hazards such as shrink-swell clays and landslides, the report provides a detailed overview of sources of subsidence and is the most comprehensive search of its type available.

£74.04 residential, £139.20 commercial.



Coal Interpretive Report - Whilst a coal mining report will reveal the location of mining activity, it doesn't offer any interpretation of the data. The Coal Interpretive report offers expert analysis of the search results, assisting purchasers and their conveyancers in assessing possible risk from mining activity. For each mine entry, the risk assessment takes account of the geology beneath the property, assesses the accuracy of the mining records, and offers possible remedies to resultant problems.

£122.40 both residential and commercial

Subsidence Buffered Claims Report - Where mining-related subsidence occurs, property owners are sometimes entitled to make a claim for compensation. The Subsidence Buffer report discloses the number of claims within 50 metres of a property, along with the outcome of the investigation. This provides an indication as to whether the property in question may also be at risk.

£22.68 both residential and commercial

Visit www.severntrentsearches.com/mining/ for more information

*All prices inclusive of VAT

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A CAPITAL QUIZ

Match the country to its capital city to win a £250 Amazon voucher.

All eyes will be on Europe this summer. With both Euro 2016 and the small matter of the upcoming EU referendum on the horizon, we thought we'd test your knowledge of our European neighbours. Listed below are ten capital cities. Just match the city to the country on the form opposite to be in with the chance of winning a £250 Amazon voucher.



CITY

MINSK

STOCKHOLM

OSLO

REYKJAVIK

BUCHAREST

HELSINKI

LISBON

MADRID

BRUSSELS

VALLETTA

Send your completed quizzes to us at:

Searchlight 28 competition

Severn Trent Searches

PO BOX 10155, Nottingham, NG1 9HQ

DX723860, Nottingham 43

COUNTRY	PORTUGAL	COUNTRY	ROMANIA
CITY	<input type="text"/>	CITY	<input type="text"/>
COUNTRY	BELGIUM	COUNTRY	FINLAND
CITY	<input type="text"/>	CITY	<input type="text"/>
COUNTRY	SWEDEN	COUNTRY	BELARUS
CITY	<input type="text"/>	CITY	<input type="text"/>
COUNTRY	NORWAY	COUNTRY	MALTA
CITY	<input type="text"/>	CITY	<input type="text"/>
COUNTRY	SPAIN	COUNTRY	ICELAND
CITY	<input type="text"/>	CITY	<input type="text"/>

Your Name

Firm Name

Telephone Number

Email Address

Alternatively, you can email your entries to business@severntrentsearches.com. Competition closes Friday 17th June 2016.

Please include your name, firm, contact telephone number and 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 our website at www.severntrentsearches.com/searchlight-28-terms/

WE'RE COMING TO NOTTINGHAM

It's nearly time for our next CPD...

It may be a few months away yet, but in October we'll be holding our next CPD seminar. This is a great opportunity to learn more about our range of searches, in particular the CON29DW Drainage and Water Enquiry. We'll be discussing the latest changes brought about by the government's sewer transfer programme, the impact of Sustainable Drainage Systems, and our new CON29DW Flood+.

It also gives customers the perfect chance to pose any questions you may have about searches directly to members of the Severn Trent Searches staff. Whether you've any general questions about the content of searches, problems with a particular property, or any comments or suggestions about our service, it's always great to meet you and hear what you've got to say.

Last year's successful seminar saw over 60 legal professionals gather in the historic surroundings of Warwick Castle to hear from our range of experts. Besides ourselves, there were presentations from Landmark Information Group on their range of environmental searches, and the Land Registry, who presented on their local land charges project.

This year we'll be a little closer to home - for us at least - hosting a seminar in our home town of Nottingham. We'll be advertising full details nearer the time, but if you'd like to reserve a place, please email events@severntrentsearches.com with your name, firm and email address. We'll also be putting full details on the CPD page of our website closer to the date: www.severntrentsearches.com/cpd/



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CUSTOMER SERVICE FEEDBACK

We asked you what you thought of our customer service. Here's what you told us:

We always like to know what our customers think of us. In February we sent out a survey to hundreds of our customers, asking what they thought of our service. We're pleased to say the results exceeded our expectations, and we thought we'd share some with you.

When asked to rate our customer service, 97% of respondents rated us as either 'good' or 'excellent', with our website being rated especially highly. Our phone team were also highly praised, with their professionalism and approachable attitude being highlighted by many customers. The quick turnaround times of our searches was also very popular. We deliver around 97% of CON29DWs within 24 hours of receipt, and are continually investing in both staff training and improved IT systems in order to further improve this.

We then asked customers which areas of our service we could improve, and were pleasantly surprised as the vast majority said they couldn't think of anything! A few did give us some feedback, the most common of which was to make it easier identifying properties outside the Severn Trent area when placing orders. This is something that we're already looking at incorporating into the next iteration of our online ordering platform.

Obviously, we're delighted to hear that our customers think so highly of us, but there's always room for improvement. That's why we've put a customer feedback form on our website, so you can tell us at any time what you think about the service you receive. Simply visit www.severntrentsearches.com/rate-our-customer-service/ and give us your comments. A big thank you to all our customers who took part in the survey.

ALDERSHOT PROJECT

Here's the latest on Severn Trent's newest venture.

In the last issue of Searchlight we outlined a project our sister company Severn Trent Connect is managing in Aldershot. A new development - named Wellesley - consisting of approximately 4,000 new homes is being constructed on former M.O.D. land. Through a process known as 'New Appointments and Variations' (or NAV for short), Severn Trent has been awarded the licence to manage drainage on the site. This process allows OFWAT to grant licences to water companies to manage sites outside of their traditional geographical areas, as in this instance.

As Severn Trent is the sewerage undertaker for this site, the CON29DW for Wellesley is being produced by ourselves. We have created a special version of the search specifically for the development, incorporating sewer information provided by the developers constructing the site.

This search is now available to order, priced **£45 + VAT**. Just order a regular CON29DW for an address on the development, and we will automatically substitute the regular search for the new, custom-made version.

Please visit www.severntrentsearches.com/con29dw/ for further information on the CON29DW



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