

SEARCHLIGHT

Essential information for property professionals Issue 25, Nov 2014

A LOOK BACK...

Welcome to the 25th edition of Searchlight. Since we launched back in 2002, we've covered some tumultuous times in the housing and conveyancing sectors. In this issue, we look back on the big stories Searchlight has covered over the last 12 years.

Our first issue, back in November 2002, talked about a newly launched search called the CON29DW. Ever since Severn Trent Searches launched in 2000, we'd provided drainage searches. However the new, expanded CON29DW was developed in conjunction with the Law Society, and saw the format standardised across water companies. Besides the CON29DW, the debut issue, which ran for just two pages, introduced some other searches we'd just started to provide – coal mining, flood and Envirossearches.

From 2003, Searchlight established its now familiar bi-annual format. As our business expanded, we

introduced a whole range of new searches, not least our brand new commercial drainage and water search. It also saw the debut of the Searchlight competition, by far our most popular feature!

The following year saw us introduce local authority searches, which quickly became one of our biggest-selling products. We also celebrated our 100,000th online order, and reported that around 50% of our orders came via our website. Times have certainly changed - nowadays virtually all our orders are received electronically.

2005 saw the debut of our popular Ask The Experts column. The very first question also related to e-conveyancing, asking if we were able to return searches electronically. This is something which, at the time, we were unable to do. The service was introduced shortly afterwards however, and we now deliver over 95% of our searches this way. We also started providing Groundsure's range of environmental searches, search insurance, and first started working with local authorities to offer their searches at over the counter prices.

[Continued overleaf.](#)



It's the winter issue of Searchlight. For our 25th issue, we take a look back at the events we've covered over the last 12 years as well as looking forward, with news on exciting new products, the latest on the Land Registry's proposals and our redesigned website. All this and a competition to win a Christmas hamper worth £250.

SEVERN TRENT SEARCHES

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A LOOK BACK... CONTINUED

Another emerging news story in 2005, and one which would dominate both Searchlight and the industry for the next few years was Home Information Packs (HIPs). We charted their protracted development up to their eventual launch in 2007. The packs underwent many changes, not least the removal of their centrepiece Home Condition Report prior to launch. Then with moving dates, a staggered introduction and baffling set of rules, they were a constant source of frustration to many in the industry, so much so that every issue of Searchlight up to their eventual suspension contained a comprehensive update on the latest developments.

2006 saw us continue to expand our range of products, adding multi-site CON29DWs. It also saw us reach our milestone one millionth CON29DW order – an event that saw us treating both a lucky customer and their client to a £1000 holiday voucher.

When HIPs eventually launched in 2007, their introduction was phased. Initially the controversial packs were only required for larger properties, before being rolled out to all homes. Their launch saw the introduction of a greatly expanded CON29DW. Roughly doubling the number of questions and answers, the revised search added information on water pressure, quality, sewer flooding, and a range of other information, all of which we retained following the suspension of HIPs. That year also saw the introduction to Searchlight of occasional profiles of the various teams here at Severn Trent Searches – something we still threaten them with on a regular basis!

In 2008 we had unhappier news to report, with the downward turn of the housing market. It was a bad time for the industry, and it took several years for the market to recover to pre-crash levels.

2009 saw us launch our new three tier commercial search, with different searches tailored to different size and value properties. We'd already expanded the search the previous year, including all the additional information from the revised CON29DW, and our new model has now become the standard across the searches industry.

There was some relief for the industry when the new Government suspended the much-maligned HIPs the day after the 2010 election. We'd pre-empted this in Searchlight a few months earlier, with a story quoting future housing minister Grant Shapps' intention to scrap the controversial packs.

Despite the upset caused by the HIPs debacle, Severn Trent Searches continued to grow. Searchlight reported on our innovative range of discount search packages, as well as the launch of SearchFAQT, a website devoted to answering any questions customers may have about drainage and water searches.

Besides moving offices to the centre of Nottingham and expanding our product range to include both subsidence and HS2 searches, 2011 saw us cover another story that would have a great effect on the water industry. The Private Drains and Sewers transfer (or PDaS for short) had been proposed for several years: indeed Searchlight initially covered it a couple of years earlier. In 2011 the first stage of the transfer occurred, and thousands of sewers and drains were transferred into the ownership of water companies overnight. Aware that this could cause numerous headaches for our customers, Searchlight was a major part of our communications strategy for the project. It advised customers of the details of the transfer, as well as informing them how the changes would affect both them and our clients. As with HIPs, the project was beset with red tape. So much so that when we last provided an update on the story a year ago, it was to report that DEFRA had been unable to progress the second, final stage of the transfer (a situation that hasn't changed since).

2012 saw us celebrate the 10th anniversary of the CON29DW and look at the growing importance of social media. We also celebrated a special achievement for one of our team when a choir from Severn Trent won BBC2's 'Sing While You Work' competition. The programme, fronted by Gareth Malone, saw teams from various businesses compete against each other, with the Severn Trent team, including our own John Puxty, emerging victorious.

Besides the ongoing problems with PDaS, in 2013 we covered the changing law regarding chancel liability which, although less of an issue than previously, is still a major cause of concern for conveyancers. This year we've looked at another big, controversial change to the industry, with our previous issue focussing on the upcoming transfer of Land Charges searches to the Land Registry.

It's been a rollercoaster 12 years, which has seen the industry change beyond recognition. The shift towards electronic conveyancing, the crash and subsequent recovery of the housing market, HIPs, PDaS and the Land Registry's proposals have all had a tremendous impact. Closer to home, we've seen our business grow from a small department within Severn Trent Water, to a major player in the searches industry. We've enjoyed covering it all for you. Thanks for reading.

INTRODUCING OUR NEW ENVIRONMENTAL SEARCHES

We are delighted to announce an innovative new range of Environmental Reports from Future Climate Info.

Working in partnership with CLS – who provide the market-leading Chancelcheck – Future Climate Info offers conveyancers an all-in-one environmental report, with a unique modular approach, meaning you can choose which information to include.

Their range of three reports – Essential, Standard and Premium - all include standard environmental information such as contaminated

land, historical land use and radon gas, along with flood information. The Standard report also adds in ground stability data, whereas Premium offers all of this alongside Energy and Infrastructure information, including HS2, wind farms and shale gas exploration.

A professional opinion by accredited Environmental Surveyors is provided on all elements of the report, not just contaminated land. In addition all reports comply with Law Society Guidance and Practice Notes (inc Flood) and are PCCB compliant. Each report is also backed by £10 million Professional Indemnity Insurance for peace of mind.

Please visit www.severntrentsearches.com for further information on these, or any of our other searches.

ASK THE EXPERTS



We realise that some of the information in the CON29DW can be complicated. Fortunately, our team of experts is always on hand to offer advice on any questions you may have. Here's a selection of some of the most common questions they've received recently...

Q: My clients believe there is an agreement in place with Severn Trent, resulting in their property being granted a free supply of water. Can you confirm if this is the case and send me a copy of the agreement?

A: Such historic agreements are rare, but have occasionally been granted for various reasons. For example, water extraction from a bore hole may have resulted in the previous private supply to the property being adversely affected, or the property owner may have sold off part of their land to Severn Trent. Consequently, Severn Trent may have come to an agreement with the owner to supply the property with free mains water. However, Severn Trent usually has the right to terminate such agreements if they are no longer applicable. In addition, agreements represent an arrangement between Severn Trent Water and the owner, they do not relate to the property itself. These agreements are therefore not usually valid in perpetuity but generally only during the time of ownership by the person named in the agreement. Once the property changes hands, the agreement is usually terminated and appropriate charges levied by the company. It would be the responsibility of the owner to produce a copy of the agreement if they believe it to still be valid.

Q: My client is interested to know if a water meter would save them money in their new property. How would they be able to tell if it would be beneficial switching?

A: With a water meter you only pay for the water you use, which is often cheaper. Severn Trent Water's billing department can be contacted on 0345 7500 500 and they will be happy to advise whether you are likely to benefit. Alternatively, independent price comparison websites can be used to calculate your likely water consumption rate and the annual costs

of the water and sewerage charges compared to the unmeasured charges. The water consumption rate will, of course, be largely dependent upon the number of people living permanently at the property. It is worth noting that if a meter is installed, the method of charging can be reverted back to an unmeasured basis either within 12 months of the installation date, or within 30 days of your second bill.

Q: Question 4.4 - current basis of charge - refers to water and sewerage charges being unmeasured and related to the rateable value (RV) of the property. Could you please explain what this means?

A: Unmeasured charges are calculated using a fixed unit cost for both the water and sewerage services and multiplying this figure by the RV of the property. The fixed rate charge is different for water and sewerage services and changes every year, and is also different depending upon where within the Severn Trent region the property is located. For details of these fixed rates, please refer to Severn Trent Water's scheme of charges, which is available on their website.

Q: If Question 4.4 of the CON29DW relates to the water and sewer charges at the property, why is there an additional charge for surface water drainage mentioned in Question 2.3?

A: Not all properties are billed for surface water drainage, hence it having a separate question in the CON29DW. The charge in question 4.4 is the overall cost for the property, including surface water, if applicable.

Q: Question 2.5 asks is the property within 100ft of the nearest public sewer. What is the significance of this?

A: This question may be of particular interest if the property is not connected to the public foul sewerage system. If a

property lies within 100ft (30.48m) of a public sewer, then the local authority has powers to instruct the owner to connect into the nearest public foul system at their own expense. This is only usually done where there is a potential public health concern, for example if the property's existing drainage facilities are inadequate or in a poor state of repair. This question also indicates whether the owner may be responsible for a substantial length of private pipework. However, following the private sewer transfer in 2011 the majority of pipework outside property boundaries is now the responsibility of water companies, so this is of less concern than previously.

Q: Question 2.7 of my search confirms that Severn Trent has approved or been consulted about plans to build over or close to a public sewer. However, there is no extension at the property which is built over the sewer. Can you explain this reply?

A: This question considers whether Severn Trent have been consulted regarding building work at the property. Therefore, any query made to Severn Trent Water's build-over team will generate a positive response. It may refer to any kind of written or telephone enquiry to this department in the past, regardless of whether any plans to proceed with the development continued or not. The build-over teams work closely with the council planning departments, and enquiries will often be made by them on the homeowner's behalf.

Got a question you'd like to ask our experts? Email your queries to us at: enquiries@severntrentsearches.com or write to us at:

Ask the Experts, Severn Trent Searches, PO Box 10155, Nottingham, NG1 9HQ

SAVE MONEY ON YOUR FAVOURITE SEARCHES

Did you know you can save 10% on a range of our most popular searches? When ordering a CON29DW Drainage and Water Enquiry alongside either a local authority, coal or Chancelcheck report, you can save money on a wide range of additional searches.



These discounts apply to many of our most popular searches, including Envirosearch Residential, Groundsure Homebuyers, and Chancelcheck. In fact, nearly our entire range of environmental searches is available at less than the standard retail price. Have a look at the table below to see just some of the fantastic savings you could make:

| Product | Full price (inc. VAT) | Discounted price | Saving |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|------------------|--------|
| Envirosearch Residential | £58.80 | £52.92 | £5.88 |
| Chancelcheck | £24.00 | £21.60 | £2.40 |
| Groundsure Homebuyers | £55.20 | £49.68 | £5.52 |
| Energy and Infrastructure | £18.00 | £16.20 | £1.80 |

Getting the discount is easy. When placing your order online, after you've entered your address and reference number, you'll be asked to select your products. Simply click on the tab marked 'Packages', choose your two main searches, and you'll automatically be offered discounts on a range of other products. And yes, if you want to add other, non-discounted searches to your order, you can still do so by selecting either the 'Residential' or 'Commercial' tab at the top of the screen.

For a full list of discounted products and prices, please visit the 'Residential Searches' page of our website at seventrentsearches.com/residential-searches

AN UPDATE FROM THE LAND REGISTRY

When the Land Registry announced their plans to take responsibility for the LLC1 element of local authority searches, the proposals were met with a mixed response from within the conveyancing industry. Here they explain why they believe the proposals will benefit both industry professionals and the public, as well as updating us on their progress:

The Land Registry is making it easier to register a property in England and Wales.

Land Registry's aim is to provide a central, digital service for Local Land Charges to ultimately improve access, standardise fees and decrease turnaround times for property professionals and the public.

This forms an important part of Land Registry's Business Strategy to transform and modernise land registration in England and Wales by providing efficiencies in conveyancing.

The legislative measures form part of the Infrastructure Bill for Land Registry to become the sole registering authority for Local Land Charges (LLC). This involves the necessary changes to the Land Registration Act 2002 and Local Land Charges Act 1975. The Bill is expected to complete passage through Parliament by March 2015.

The Land Registry's online blog features all the latest updates. Please contact the team if you have any questions: llcproject@landregistry.gsi.gov.uk



SPOT THE DIFFERENCE - WIN A HAMPER!

Spot the differences between the two pictures for a chance to win a Fortnum and Mason food hamper worth £250.



Difference one

Difference two

Difference three

Difference four

Difference five

Your Name

Firm Name

Telephone Number

There are five differences between the two pictures above. Simply find the differences, and send them to us before Friday 12th December to be in with the chance to win a fabulous Christmas hamper. As it's Christmas, we've made the first one really easy for you!

Send your completed competition to us at **Searchlight 25 competition, Severn Trent Searches, PO BOX 10155, Nottingham, NG1 9HQ** or **DX 723860 Nottingham 43.**

Alternatively you can fax it to **0115 971 3551** or email to: business@severntrentsearches.com. Either way, be sure to include your name, the name of your firm, and your contact telephone number.

The winner will be notified and hamper 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

WHAT DO YOU THINK OF OUR NEW WEBSITE?

Since we launched our new website in October we've received a lot of positive feedback from customers.

We've given it a complete overhaul, introducing a cleaner, modern design, as well as making substantial improvements to the navigation menus and accessibility. We've added a new feature enabling you to sort table data in ascending or descending order, making it easier to view prices or local authority turnaround times.

A major new area of the website is the download centre. It contains everything from sample searches to order forms and product cards, offering everything you could need, all in one place.

We've also made it far easier to access our ordering site, with larger, clearer buttons, alongside ones to apply for both monthly and credit card accounts.

The site supports the latest web browsers, including Chrome, Firefox and Internet Explorer. It's also been designed to be fully compatible with a multitude of devices, such as laptops, tablets and smart phones.

We think it's a huge improvement, and what we've heard from customers so far would suggest you agree. But we'd like to know

your views. Do you like the new site? Is there anything you'd like to see added? Did the previous website do anything better? There's a feedback form on our website at www.severntrentsearches.com/feedback. Please let us know what you think. You never know, we may well incorporate some of your suggestions!



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AN OUT OF THIS WORLD CPD

A long time ago (ok, October) in a galaxy far, far away (ok, Leicester) we held an event with a difference.

Every year we put on a CPD training event for our customers, and this year we decided to make it a bit special.

Held in the futuristic surroundings of the National Space Centre, this year's event was one of our most popular to date. Over 70 solicitors, conveyancers and other assorted alien lifeforms gathered to learn all about the CON29DW, its implications, and a surprising bit of trivia.

The National Space Centre is actually built on a former Severn Trent Water site, and was donated by the Company in the late 1990s. In fact, the former sewage pumping station is still located next to the Space Centre, and has been turned into the city's science and technology museum.

Delegates were then taken on a warp speed tour (see what we did there?) through the world of water and drainage by Severn Trent Searches' Business Development Manager Owen Davies. They also received talks from both Landmark and the Land Registry before concluding the day with complimentary admission to the centre.

If you'd like to attend one of our future events, or would like us to arrange one at your offices, either visit the CPD page of our website at www.severntrentsearches.com/category/cpd-events, or email business@severntrentsearches.com.

If you'd like to attend one of our past events, we'd recommend getting yourself a TARDIS (ok, we'll stop the space jokes now).



image courtesy of
The National Space Centre, Leicester

MORE EXCELLENT CUSTOMER FEEDBACK

The results of our latest customer survey are in, and we're pleased to say it's good news.

We like to know what our customers think of us, and that's why we undertake regular Voice Of The Customer (VOC) research. The most recent survey, conducted in July gave us a score of 4.85, along with a Net Promoter Score of 85.

Voice Of The Customer looks at overall customer satisfaction, rating a company on a scale of one to five. Net Promoter Score looks at how likely customers are to promote a company to a colleague. Obviously to score so highly, and to know we're well-regarded by our customers, means a great deal to us.

Our previous VOC score, back in January gave us 4.68. So how have we improved? Quite simply, by listening to what our customers had to say and acting on it quickly. For example, last year, feedback from customers told us they'd like a better indication of how long our searches would take to deliver. We've implemented this, publishing up to date information on our website, using social media such as Facebook and Twitter to advise of any issues, and proactively phoning customers where there are likely to be delays.

In short, we've listened to our customers and been able to make changes to our processes based on what you've told us. Voice Of The Customer is proving an invaluable tool to our business, not just to measure how we are performing, but more importantly to make sure we're providing our customers with the service they both expect and deserve.