

# BlueBox Newsletter

Technical briefing for surveyors, energy assessors and property professionals *Issue Six April 2009*

## New HomeBuyer Report Service Practice Notes published

*As described in Issue Four of the BlueBox Newsletter, the 3rd edition of the RICS HomeBuyer Service (HBR) will officially be launched on 1 July 2009. To help surveyors prepare for this event, a sample of the new HBR format and the supporting Practice Notes have been published on the RICS website.*

The practice notes include the report documentation, and:

- choosing between surveys;
- a description of the RICS HomeBuyer Report Service and Standard Terms of Engagement;
- leasehold properties advice;
- the report form and checklists.



Improvements to the new HBR format and documentation include a crisp, modern style and reader-friendly design, including use of colour, adoption of colour coded condition ratings, use of plain English with the addition of new 'What to do next' advice, and a house diagram.

The RICS is also developing new tailor-made standard paragraphs, along with dynamic new online report-writing software, which launches in

### What's in this issue?

Welcome to the sixth issue of our newsletter. It includes:

- More on the new HomeBuyer Report;
- Information on the new Gas Safe Register;
- Update on Data Gatherers
- Changes to responsibilities for private sewers

If you have any comments on this newsletter or would like to make a contribution, please contact the BlueBox *partners* office on 0845 260 3500.

the summer 2009. You can download a copy from the RICS website at [www.rics.org/Practiceareas/Property/Residential/Valuation/](http://www.rics.org/Practiceareas/Property/Residential/Valuation/)

## The CPT/BlueBox *partners* HBR seminars—be ready for July.

Over the last few months, the RICS has been running a number of 'awareness raising' seminars. Jointly presented by BlueBox *partners* director Phil Parnham, these have been attended by over 900 surveyors. "As good as they are, the road show can only scratch the surface" said Phil. "The use of condition ratings and the new approach to reporting makes this a very different animal".

The joint CPT and BlueBox *partners* one-day Homebuyer seminars have been designed to plug this gap. The day will begin with Ian Rock (author of *The Victorian House Manual*) reviewing the current state of the market, with the rest of the day focused on condition rating and report writing using a number of realistic case studies. To help participants get the most out of the day, the package will include selected pre-course material together with post-course electronic copies of all the material used.

The seminars will be run across the country on the following dates:

- Solihull 14th May
- Barnsley 2nd June
- Haydock 9th June
- Bristol 16th June
- London 25th June

For more information on these seminars and our other activities visit:

<http://www.cptevents2.co.uk/>

[http://www.blueboxpartners.com/courses/new\\_homebuyer.asp](http://www.blueboxpartners.com/courses/new_homebuyer.asp)

# The new Gas Safe Register— no, it's not an April Fool!

Although many surveyors may think it has been the best kept secret of the century, with effect from 1st April, CORGI will no longer be responsible for the gas engineer registration scheme in Great Britain. Instead, it will be replaced by the new Gas Safe Register. Operated by Capita on behalf of the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), the Gas Safe Register is the **only** approved gas engineer registration scheme under the Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1998. All gas engineers wanting to undertake domestic and certain other gas work will need to be registered with this scheme in order to lawfully carry out any work on gas fittings, which includes gas appliances.

## News to you?

Feedback from surveyors during our training seminars suggests that most were unaware of this change. This suggests two things:

- The Gas Safe publicity campaign was poor and failed to come to the notice of the surveying community, or;
- The surveying community are bad at keeping in touch with new developments.

We suspect it is a combination of the two.

The Gas Safe Register will maintain an up-to-date register of gas engineers who are qualified to install or repair gas fittings and appliances. It will also have systems in place to check the competence of gas engineers, inspect their work and to deal with complaints about unsafe gas work.

The operation of the Gas Safe Register will be overseen by the HSE as the regulator with responsibility for gas safety. In the context of domestic gas safety this means that in order to ensure that gas engineers are lawfully able to carry out gas work, domestic users of gas should ask for a Gas Safe Registered Engineer and not any other. The CORGI register will no longer count for those purposes.

## Data Gatherers — update

In BlueBox Newsletter Five and on our website, we reported on a letter sent out by the CLG about changes to the regulations that cast doubt over the future use of unqualified Data Gatherers. Unsurprisingly, the CLG received a variety of 'feedback' and an email sent by the civil servant responsible included the following information:

*'...I am also sorry that it wasn't made clearer that my letter to the Assessment Centres....set out proposed changes and was designed to generate a discussion on this subject rather than act as a trigger for the immediate ban on data collection by those other than qualified assessors. Until we have considered all the comments .....and come to a final view on how data collection by non-accredited assessors should proceed, the extant arrangements, which have been in place before my letter, remain in place.'*

Although we are not fluent in 'government-speak', we assume that this means 'carry on as before until we change our minds again'. Does this sound cynical? We hope it does!

If you use, or are a non-accredited Data Gatherer we would advise you to contact your Accreditation Centre to see how they are interpreting the current confusion. If you want to put your views to the section of the CLG responsible, please contact the Head of Energy Performance of Buildings Team on 0207 944 4400.



From a surveyor's view point this has little impact on our work. When recommending a specialist we should use the phrase 'Gas Safe Register' rather than 'CORGI'. Because engineers have a range of qualifications that allow them to carry out only specific types of gas work, it is important to check what work they are qualified to do before they commence work.

This information is on the back of the engineer's Gas Safe Register ID card. The website claims Gas Safe registered engineers are professionals and will be happy to show their ID card when asked.

For the future, part of the Gas Safe Register's role is to review the whole of the gas related competent persons scheme — so watch out for more changes.

For more information, see [www.gassaferegister.co.uk](http://www.gassaferegister.co.uk)

## Private sewers— planned changes in responsibility for 2011

Yet another 'best kept secret' (or another example of how badly informed we are) is the planned transfer of ownership of all private sewers and drains to local water company ownership from April 2011. In 2001, prompted by the concerns of householders, the Department for the environment, food and rural affairs (Defra) launched an extensive review of private sewers that looked at how this transfer could be achieved. A further consultation in 2003 revealed a 'high level of support' for the proposal.

Defra estimated that up to 50 per cent of properties in England and Wales are connected to a private sewer. They define a private sewer as one which is not a 'public' sewer (i.e. owned by a statutory Water and Sewerage Company) and is generally collectively owned and maintained by the owners of the premises it serves, though often extending beyond the property boundary into the public highway. Figure One (from the Defra website) shows the current situation. The green lines represent drains that are the sole responsibility of the property it serves; the purple lines are the private sewers and the red line is the public sewer that is the responsibility of the local water company. However, things are never

that simple. Looking at Figure One, the purple private sewer from the junction with property B's drain down to the point where property C's drain joins, is the responsibility of A and B even though it is mostly under the garden of C (are you still with us?). Yet the purple private sewer that runs along the side of property E towards the public highway is the responsibility of all the properties.

There are no comprehensive records of where private sewers are located or what condition they are in, and most surveyors know what a problem this situation can cause. For example:

- When a blockage occurs in the private sewer on plot E, everyone will be responsible. Although most people are understanding and cooperative, the motivation of owner A to resolve the problem may be different to that of owner E who may be paddling around in the smelly stuff!
- If the drain needs lining or even replacing, the debates will be more earnest!
- Where the blockage continues, the local authority will have to step in for public health reasons and carry out the work. They will then counter charge the responsible owners. In one situation involving 14 owners, the junction of the private and public sewer became blocked. The sewerage backed up and because no quick agreement could be reached, the council carried out the work. This then descended into a complex web of claims and counterclaims that

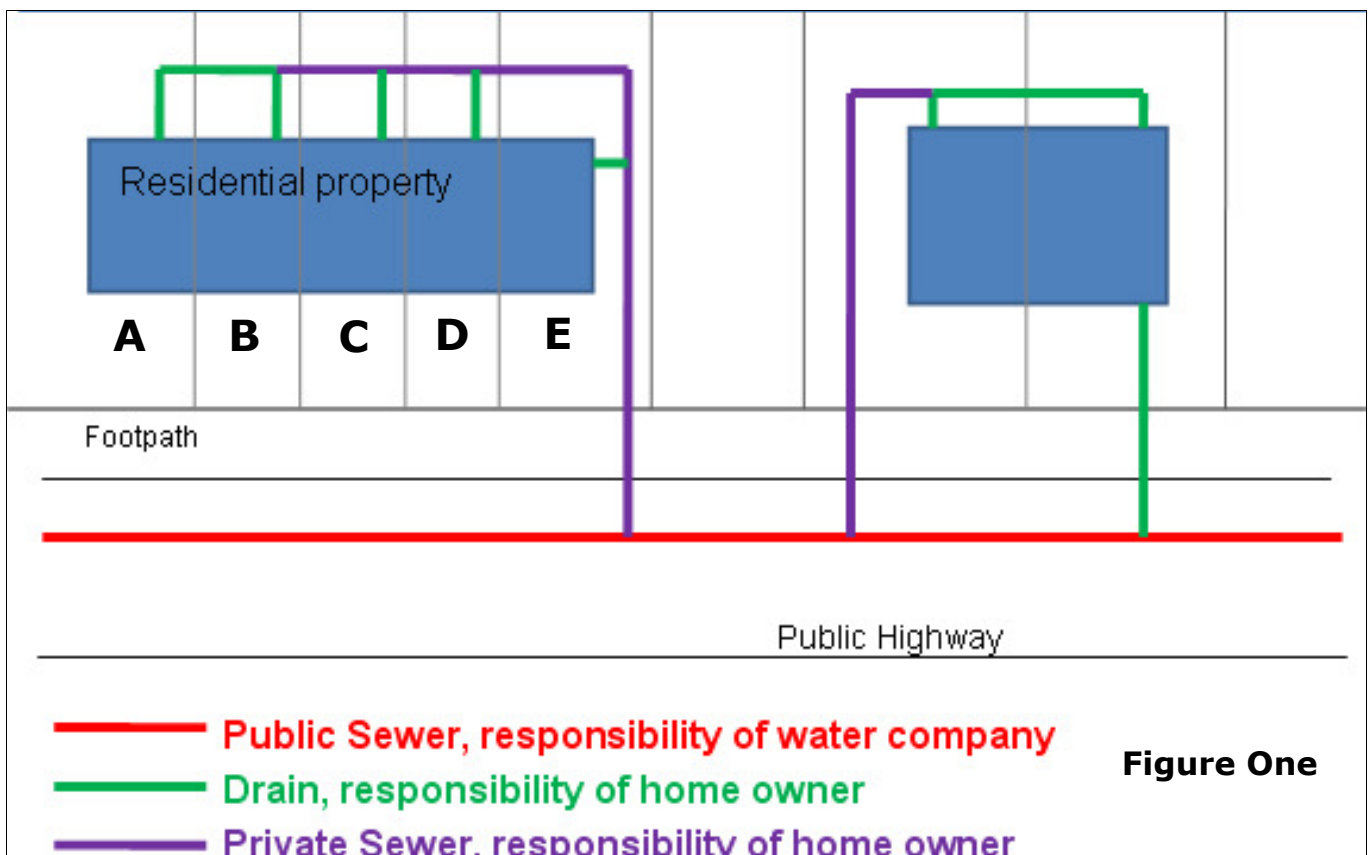
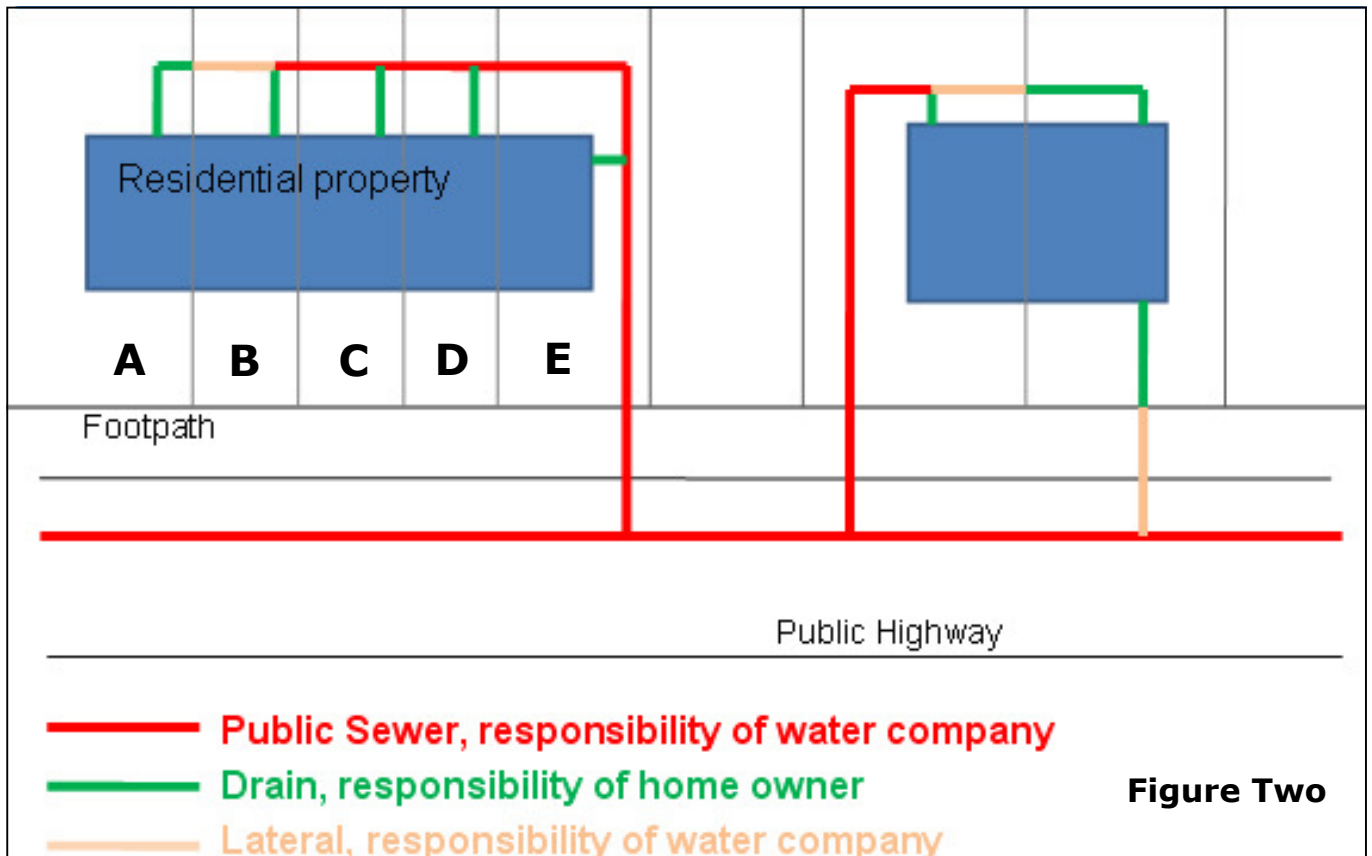


Figure One



**Figure Two**

dragged on for many years;

- Even where problems do not occur, it can take a lot of work to establish the nature and extent of the joint responsibility. Where this is onerous, it can kill the deal.

Consequently, the transfer of existing private sewers is an attractive option. Figure Two shows the new arrangement from April 2011. Where a drain is for the exclusive use of an owner (the green line), it remains their sole responsibility up to the position of their boundary. It becomes a public sewer (the red line) where the drains from other properties join and so are the responsibility of the water company. For the drains that fall between the two (the light brown line), a new type has been created called the 'lateral drain'. This will also be maintained by the water authority.

Defra claims that this disparate ownership of the sewerage network causes difficulties for long term planning, which is important in

### Contact

This newsletter is published by BlueBox partners, part of the Allied Surveyors group. For more information contact us at 3 High Street, Chipping Sodbury, Bristol BS37 6BA. Tel. 0845 260 3500, email info@blueboxpartners.com, or visit our website at www.blueboxpartners.com

adapting to the effects of climate change and housing growth. They consider that transfer provides the only comprehensive solution to a range of private sewer and lateral drain problems faced by householders, and will significantly help address a lack of integrated management of the sewerage network as a whole, and provide greater efficiency of effort, environmental stewardship and expenditure.



However (there is that word again), there is no such thing as a free lunch. The costs of transfer will be met by an increase in the sewerage element of bills across the nine sewerage companies currently estimated to be around 7.5 pence to 23 pence a week.

For more information, visit <http://www.defra.gov.uk/ENVIRONMENT/water/industry/sewers/>