

FRIENDS OF THE DART

---

# Household River Care Manual

How your home can help the River Dart. Practical, do-able actions for everyone living in the catchment, with the evidence behind every one.

---

**Version 1.1 · August 2026**

Produced by Friends of the Dart, funded by the Environment Agency and the Devon Environment Fund.

Read it online, page by page, at [care.friendsofthedart.org](https://care.friendsofthedart.org)

# Contents

This is the reference edition: the full manual, with the evidence and sources behind every message. A shorter web version of the same guidance, one page per topic, is at [care.friendsofthedart.org](https://care.friendsofthedart.org), and a household flyer carries the headline actions. Numbers in the text, like <sup>1</sup>, point to the reference list at the back.

|                                                        |    |
|--------------------------------------------------------|----|
| 1. Welcome: why the Dart needs you                     | 3  |
| 2. How your home connects to the river                 | 4  |
| 3. Ten things you can do this weekend                  | 5  |
| Make a pledge today                                    | 6  |
| 4. In the kitchen                                      | 7  |
| 5. In the bathroom                                     | 8  |
| 6. Medicines and chemicals                             | 9  |
| 7. Your water use                                      | 10 |
| 8. Your drive and garden                               | 12 |
| 9. Your drains and pipes                               | 14 |
| 10. Off-mains homes: septic tanks and treatment plants | 15 |
| 11. Dogs and the river                                 | 17 |
| 12. For local businesses                               | 19 |
| 13. Your community and the Dart                        | 20 |
| 14. Your river-friendly home pledge                    | 21 |
| 15. Where to get help                                  | 23 |
| 16. Quick reference                                    | 24 |
| References and sources                                 | 25 |

## See pollution? Report it.

**Pollution in or entering any watercourse, dead or gasping fish, an unusual flow, smell or colour: call the Environment Agency's 24-hour incident hotline on 0800 80 70 60, or report online via GOV.UK ("Report an environmental problem") <sup>72</sup>.** Ask for your incident reference number and keep it; follow up if you want to hear the outcome. Chapter 13 explains what details to note.

**0800 80 70 60**

# Welcome: why the Dart needs you

*Why this matters for the Dart: the river's new bathing waters are already telling us that what leaves our homes ends up in the water.*

In May 2024 the Dart made a little history. When the government announced 27 new designated bathing waters across England, the River Dart was on the list <sup>1</sup>, and four stretches of the river and estuary now carry official bathing water status: Steamer Quay at Totnes, Stoke Gabriel, Dittisham, and Warfleet Creek near Dartmouth <sup>2</sup>. They were among the first non-coastal bathing waters ever designated in Devon <sup>3</sup>. Designation matters because it legally requires the Environment Agency to test the water regularly through the bathing season for *E. coli* and intestinal enterococci, two bacteria that indicate faecal pollution, and to publish an annual classification, from Excellent down to Poor <sup>77</sup>.

The first results are a mixed picture. In the 2025 classifications, Warfleet Creek kept its Excellent rating and Dittisham improved from Good to Excellent, but Steamer Quay remained Poor and Stoke Gabriel fell from Sufficient to Poor <sup>4 5</sup>. As Friends of the Dart reported, of the three bathing waters rated Poor across the whole South West, two are on the Dart <sup>4</sup>.

Some of the pressure on the river comes from farming, some from wildlife, and a good deal from the sewerage system. There are 44 sites on the Dart where South West Water holds a permit to release storm sewage into the river <sup>8</sup>, and the water company's own data for Steamer Quay shows sixteen storm overflows affecting that one bathing water, with the Totnes sewage treatment works overflow alone spilling 177 times in 2024 <sup>7</sup>. South West Water has chosen the Dart, with the Tavy, for its WaterFit pilot, which aims to secure river bathing water status and publishes near real-time storm overflow data for the river <sup>6 74</sup>.

But a surprising amount of the pressure starts at home: in kitchens, bathrooms, driveways, septic tanks and on dog walks across the catchment. That is what this manual is about. Friends of the Dart is a community interest company that works to minimise pollution of the river through evidence and collaboration <sup>10</sup>, and our volunteers now test water quality at 31 sites across the catchment, twice a month, in wet and dry weather <sup>11</sup>. The evidence tells us the river needs help from everyone who lives here. Every action in this manual is something you can do at home, and every one of them, multiplied across thousands of Dart households, shows up in the water.

# How your home connects to the river

*Why this matters for the Dart: once you know which pipe goes where, most of the advice in this manual becomes obvious.*

**The key fact: most outdoor drains, road gullies and yard drains do not go to a sewage works. They usually go straight to a stream or river, untreated.**

Nearly every home is served by two entirely separate drainage systems, and the difference between them explains almost everything in this manual.

1. The **foul sewer** carries wastewater from your toilet, sinks, bath, shower, washing machine and dishwasher to a sewage treatment works, where it is treated before the cleaned water is returned to a river or the sea.
1. **Surface water drains** carry rainwater from your roof, drive and road gullies. In most places they discharge directly into the nearest watercourse rather than to a treatment works <sup>13</sup>. That is why community schemes paint a yellow fish beside roadside drains, as a reminder that "only rain down the drain": whatever enters a surface water drain can end up in the river exactly as it went in <sup>15</sup>. In Devon, the Litter Free Coast and Sea partnership puts it plainly: many roadside gullies "go directly to a watercourse or the sea" <sup>16</sup>.

Two complications are worth knowing about. In many older towns the two systems were built as one **combined sewer**, carrying sewage and rainwater in the same pipe. In heavy rain these pipes can be overwhelmed, so they are fitted with relief valves called **storm overflows** (you may also hear "combined sewer overflows" or CSOs), which release diluted, untreated sewage into the river rather than letting it back up into homes. Across England in 2024, storm overflows spilled 450,398 times, for a total of more than 3.6 million hours <sup>9</sup>. Everything you do to keep fat, wet wipes and rainwater out of the sewers makes these overflows operate less often.

The second complication is the **misconnection**. A misconnection occurs when wastewater pipes from appliances such as washing machines, dishwashers or toilets are incorrectly connected to surface water drains instead of the foul sewer. As a result, polluted water is discharged directly into rivers whenever those appliances are used <sup>13</sup>. Defra figures suggest up to 500,000 UK homes may have misconnections <sup>14</sup>. Chapter 9 shows you how to check your own home.

So the rule of thumb for the whole manual is this: everything that goes down an inside drain should be as river-friendly as possible, because sewage works cannot remove everything; and nothing but rain should ever go down an outside one.

# Ten things you can do this weekend

*A quick start. Every action here is free or cheap, takes minutes, and is explained fully in the chapter shown.*

1. **Start a fat jar.** Keep an old jar or tub by the cooker, pour cooled fat and oil into it, and bin it when full. Nothing greasy down the sink. (Chapter 4)
2. **Fit a sink strainer** to catch food scraps before they go down the plughole. (Chapter 4)
3. **Put a bin in the bathroom** and agree the house rule: only pee, poo and paper get flushed. Wipes and period products go in the bin, every time. (Chapter 5)
4. **Round up old medicines** from the back of the cabinet and take them to any pharmacy. Never flush them or pour them away <sup>30 31</sup>. (Chapter 6)
5. **Do a five-minute leak check.** Listen for a hissing loo cistern; a leaky loo can waste between 200 and 400 litres a day <sup>40</sup>. (Chapter 7)
6. **Order a water butt** for your downpipe, so your roof water helps the garden instead of rushing to the drain. (Chapters 7 and 8)
7. **Move the car wash onto grass or gravel**, or use a commercial car wash, so dirty, soapy water soaks away instead of running to a surface drain <sup>17</sup>. (Chapter 8)
8. **Check the date of your dog's last flea treatment.** After a spot-on treatment, no swimming for at least four days, and ask your vet whether routine treatment is needed at all <sup>55</sup>. (Chapter 11)
9. **Bag it and bin it.** Dog poo, any public or household bin. (Chapter 11)
10. **Put the river in your pocket.** Download the Safer Seas & Rivers Service app for pollution alerts <sup>69</sup>, and save the Environment Agency's 24-hour incident hotline: 0800 80 70 60 <sup>72</sup>. (Chapter 13)

# Make a pledge today

*The River Dart needs you. Pick one pledge, or all of them, and sign up on the Friends of the Dart pledge page. Every pledge, counted across the catchment, helps us show funders what this community is doing for its river.*

**The dog pledge.** We bag and bin, everywhere, every time, and after any spot-on flea treatment our dog stays out of the water for at least four days. (Chapter 11)

**The kitchen pledge.** We keep a fat jar, and no fat, oil or grease goes down our sink. (Chapter 4)

**The bathroom pledge.** There is a bin beside every loo, and only pee, poo and paper get flushed in this house. (Chapter 5)

**The rainwater pledge.** We will install a water butt or divert a downpipe, so our roof water helps the garden instead of the sewer. (Chapters 7 and 8)

**The septic pledge** (for off-mains homes). We know which system we have, it does not discharge to a watercourse, and it is emptied at least once a year. (Chapter 10)

**The drains pledge.** We will check our home for misconnections, and nothing but rain goes down our outside drains. (Chapter 9)

## In the kitchen

*Why this matters for the Dart: what leaves your kitchen sink either burdens the sewage works upstream of the river, or blocks the sewers so they overflow into it.*

**The rule: never pour fat, oil or grease down the sink, however small the amount.**

The kitchen sink feels like a disposal point, but it is really the start of a long, narrow pipe to the sewage works, and it is easily defeated. British households pour enough fat down their drains every year to fill seven Olympic swimming pools, as our neighbouring charity the Westcountry Rivers Trust points out <sup>18</sup>. Warm fat flows; cold fat sets. Combined with wet wipes in the sewer, it builds the congealed blockages known as fatbergs. There are around 300,000 sewer blockages in the UK every year <sup>20</sup>, and when a sewer blocks, the sewage backs up and escapes wherever it can: into homes, gardens, streets, and through storm overflows into rivers like the Dart.

**Cool it, scrape it, bin it.** Pour cooking fat, oil and grease into an old jar, tin, yoghurt pot or foil, let it cool and harden, and put it in the bin. Save or freeze leftover gravy for another meal, or soak small amounts up with kitchen roll and bin it <sup>19</sup>. Why it helps the Dart: fat that never enters the sewer can never help block it, and blocked sewers are a direct cause of sewage escaping to watercourses. How hard: easy, and free.

**Fit a sink strainer.** A simple mesh strainer in the plughole catches food scraps before they enter the drain <sup>19</sup>. Empty it into the bin or food caddy. Why it helps the Dart: food waste feeds sewer blockages and adds to the load the sewage works has to treat. How hard: easy, costs a pound or two.

**Scrape plates before washing.** Scrape leftovers into the food caddy or compost rather than rinsing them down the sink. Why it helps the Dart: the same logic as the strainer, one step earlier. How hard: easy.

**Choose phosphate-free and gentler cleaning products.** Phosphorus is a nutrient, and rivers can have far too much of a good thing. When excess phosphorus reaches a river it can drive excessive growth of algae and water plants, which chokes the channel and starves the water of oxygen at night, harming fish and insect life <sup>22</sup>. This over-enrichment is called **eutrophication**. Phosphorus is the most common reason English rivers fail their water quality standards: in the Environment Agency's assessment, 55% of river water bodies were at less than good status for phosphorus <sup>22</sup>, and government analysis confirms that excess phosphorus is a significant factor in rivers failing to meet good ecological status <sup>24</sup>. The law has already removed most phosphates from consumer laundry detergent (from mid 2013) and dishwasher detergent (from the start of 2017) <sup>23</sup>, but other cleaning products vary, so look for "phosphate-free" on the label and use the dose the packet recommends rather than a generous glug. If you are on a septic tank, this matters double: harsh bleaches and antibacterial products kill the bacteria your tank relies on to treat sewage at all <sup>25</sup>. Why it helps the Dart: less phosphorus and fewer harsh chemicals into the foul sewer means less reaching the river in treated effluent and overflow spills. How hard: easy, a swap next time you shop.

**Keep the really nasty stuff out entirely.** Paint, white spirit, motor oil and other chemicals should never go down any sink or drain <sup>25</sup> <sup>26</sup>. Chapter 6 explains where they should go instead.

One last kitchen thought: the dishwasher and washing machine live here too, and running them with full loads saves water as well as energy. Chapter 7 explains why that helps the river.

## In the bathroom

*Why this matters for the Dart: the toilet is the shortest route from your house to the river when the system fails, and wipes are the main reason it fails.*

### The rule: only flush the 3Ps: pee, poo and paper.

Water companies across the country, including South West Water, ask customers to remember the "3Ps": nothing should go down the loo except pee, paper and poo <sup>6</sup>. Everything else is an "unflushable", and the list is longer than most people think: wet wipes, period products, nappies, cotton buds, dental floss, contact lenses, plasters and razor blades all belong in the bin <sup>29</sup>.

Wet wipes deserve special mention because they are the single worst offender. Unlike toilet paper, most wipes are made with plastic or strong fibres and do not break down in the sewer. The Environment Agency reports that wipes make up more than 90% of the material causing sewers to block <sup>21</sup>, and Water UK, the body representing the water companies, reports that 75% of drain blockages are caused by people flushing wet wipes <sup>20</sup>. Even wipes labelled "flushable" are best binned; the water industry's Bin the Wipe campaign asks for exactly one change of habit, wipes in the bin, and notes that blockages cost around £200 million a year to clear <sup>27</sup>. When those blockages happen, sewage escapes, and on a river with 44 permitted overflow sites <sup>8</sup> the Dart needs no extra help spilling.

The "flushable" label itself deserves scepticism. A UK laboratory study found synthetic plastic polymers, including polyester and polyethylene, in wipes labelled flushable, and concluded that such wipes could be a source of microplastic fibres in wastewater <sup>75</sup>. And when Canadian researchers tested 101 single-use products against sewer flushability criteria, including 23 marketed as flushable, not one passed the disintegration tests <sup>76</sup>.

The plastic problem does not stay in the pipes. The environmental charity City to Sea reports that wet wipes found on UK beaches increased by more than 700% in a decade, and that 1 to 2 billion period products are flushed every year in the UK <sup>28</sup>. Flushed plastics block sewers, become beach and riverbed litter, and carry bacteria with them.

**Put a bin in the bathroom.** Most flushed unflushables are flushed because the bin is in another room. A small lidded bin next to the loo, with a liner, removes the temptation. Why it helps the Dart: every wipe binned is one that can never block a sewer or end up on the riverbank at Totnes. How hard: easy.

**Bin wipes, even "flushable" ones.** If you use wipes for skincare, cleaning or children, keep using them; just bin them <sup>27</sup>. Why it helps the Dart: wipes are the main ingredient of the blockages that cause sewage to escape. How hard: easy.

**Bin period products.** Pads, tampons and applicators go in the bin, at home and away. Some people also switch to reusables, but the river only asks that nothing is flushed <sup>28</sup> <sup>29</sup>. Why it helps the Dart: period products are among the most common flushed plastics found on beaches <sup>28</sup>. How hard: easy.

**Never flush medicines.** Old pills, liquid medicines and ointments must never go down the loo or the sink. They get their own chapter next, because the fix is wonderfully simple.

**Spread the habit.** If you run a holiday let, café or pub, your visitors' flushing habits become the Dart's problem; chapter 12 includes a ready-made way to ask nicely.

## Medicines and chemicals

*Why this matters for the Dart: sewage works were never designed to remove medicines, so what you flush or pour reaches the river in measurable amounts.*

**The rule: unused medicines go back to any pharmacy. Paint, solvents and garden chemicals go to the recycling centre. None of it goes down any drain, sink or toilet.**

Modern sewage treatment removes a great deal, but medicines are designed to be biologically active at tiny doses, and they slip through. The water industry's Chemical Investigations Programme, which examined 74 substances at more than 600 sewage treatment works, found that although treatment substantially reduces the concentrations of many substances, "even the residual concentrations can be high in relation to the stringent water quality standards", and it flagged some painkillers, antibiotics and steroid hormones as of potential concern <sup>32</sup>. Scientists call these leftovers **pharmaceutical micropollutants**: traces of drugs, far too dilute to see, but measurable in rivers and biologically active for the creatures living there.

This is not a distant, big-city problem. A University of York led global study of 258 rivers, published in 2022, found pharmaceutical concentrations above levels considered safe for aquatic organisms at a quarter of all sites sampled <sup>33</sup> <sup>34</sup>. Closer to home, research by the University of York and the Rivers Trust found pharmaceuticals at 52 of 54 sites monitored across England's ten national parks, and some rivers on Exmoor and in the Peak District had higher concentrations than major cities <sup>35</sup>. Friends of the Dart's own Phase 2 water quality testing has included screening for pharmaceuticals in the Dart catchment <sup>11</sup>.

**Take unused medicines back to the pharmacy.** Gather up out-of-date tablets, unused prescriptions, syrups, creams and inhalers and hand them in at any community pharmacy. This is not a favour they do you: accepting unwanted medicines for safe disposal is an NHS essential service that all pharmacies in England provide <sup>31</sup>. As Cornwall Council's guidance puts it, do not flush medicines down the toilet, because doing so "can have an impact on our rivers and seas" <sup>30</sup>. Why it helps the Dart: returned medicines are incinerated safely instead of dissolving into the sewage stream, and researchers see accessible take-back schemes as a key way to keep pharmaceuticals out of wastewater <sup>36</sup>. How hard: easy, next time you pass a chemist.

**Never bin liquid medicines down the sink either.** The sink and the loo lead to the same place. Return liquids in their bottles to the pharmacy <sup>30</sup>. How hard: easy.

**Take paint, solvents and chemicals to the recycling centre.** Leftover paint, white spirit, brush cleaner, engine oil, weedkiller and pesticides should go to a household waste recycling centre that accepts hazardous waste; GOV.UK has a postcode finder for your local service <sup>37</sup>. Never pour them down a sink, an outside drain or onto the ground: an outside drain very likely leads straight to a watercourse (chapter 2), and even via the foul sewer these substances harm the treatment process. Let water-based paint dry out in the tin before disposal, and keep lids on solvents. Why it helps the Dart: a single litre of solvent or oil can pollute a long stretch of a small stream, and the Dart's tributaries are small streams. How hard: easy to moderate; it needs a car trip.

**Store garden and DIY chemicals where they cannot spill.** Keep them in original containers, off the floor, away from drains and watercourses, and buy only what you will use. Why it helps the Dart: most chemical pollution incidents start as storage and handling accidents, not deliberate tipping. How hard: easy.

## Your water use

*Why this matters for the Dart: the water in your taps is taken from the environment, and every litre you save is a litre that can stay in a Devon river, and a litre the sewage works never has to handle.*

The average person in England and Wales uses 143 litres of water a day <sup>38</sup>. It arrives so reliably that it is easy to forget where it comes from: rivers, reservoirs and groundwater. Using water efficiently means less water needs to be taken (the technical word is **abstraction**) from rivers and aquifers, which protects the wildlife that lives in and depends on them <sup>38</sup>. This is directly relevant here: the Environment Agency's catchment data for the Dart lists surface water abstraction by the water industry as a pressure affecting the river's flow <sup>42</sup>. And almost everything you use indoors leaves as wastewater, so saving water also shrinks the load on the sewage works and sewers that overflow into the river when overwhelmed.

The classifications tell us the Dart's problem is not hypothetical, so here are the savings that add up fastest.

**Fix the leaky loo.** A toilet cistern that trickles or hisses between flushes can waste between 200 and 400 litres every single day <sup>40</sup>, often invisibly. A simple test: put a dry piece of toilet paper against the back of the pan an hour after flushing; if it wets or tears, you have a leak. Most leaky loos are a cheap flush-valve or washer fix. Why it helps the Dart: it is probably the single biggest hidden water waste in any home. How hard: easy to spot; the repair is easy for a plumber and moderate for a confident DIYer.

**Shorten the shower.** The average showerhead uses about 12 litres a minute, and the average shower lasts around 10 minutes, which can mean up to 150 litres per shower <sup>38</sup>. Waterwise, the UK's water efficiency charity, suggests keeping showers under four minutes <sup>39</sup>. A shower timer or a four-song playlist does the trick. Why it helps the Dart: showers are one of the biggest water uses in the home, and every litre saved is abstraction and treatment avoided. How hard: easy.

**Turn the tap off while brushing.** A running tap wastes approximately 6 litres a minute <sup>38</sup>. Why it helps the Dart: small, but twice a day, every day, for everyone in the house. How hard: easy.

**Run full loads.** Fill the dishwasher completely before switching it on, and do the same with the washing machine; and only boil the water you need in the kettle <sup>39</sup>. Why it helps the Dart: fewer cycles means less water abstracted and less wastewater to treat. How hard: easy.

**Ask about free water-saving devices.** South West Water provides free water-saving devices to customers <sup>18</sup>. Why it helps the Dart: free is a good price for saving thousands of litres a year. How hard: easy.

**Install a water butt.** A water butt collects rainwater from a downpipe for garden use. The Royal Horticultural Society notes that even the roof of a small shed can collect 2,500 to 3,500 litres of rainwater a year in the drier parts of England, enough to fill ten or more standard 240-litre water butts <sup>41</sup>; a Devon house roof, with Devon rain, will do considerably better. Use it for watering, rinsing tools and washing wellies. Why it helps the Dart twice over: it replaces tap water (less abstraction), and it holds back roof water that would otherwise rush into drains and combined sewers during storms, which is exactly when overflows spill (chapter 8 continues this theme). How hard: easy to moderate; a butt, a stand and a downpipe diverter kit is an afternoon's job.

**Water the garden from the butt, not the hose,** and water in the evening so less evaporates <sup>41</sup>. How hard: easy.

None of this asks you to be miserly. It asks you to notice that the tap and the river are the same water, a few miles apart.

## Your drive and garden

*Why this matters for the Dart: rain that soaks into your garden arrives in the river slowly and clean; rain that races off paving arrives fast, dirty, and all at once.*

When rain falls on a natural surface, most of it soaks in. When it falls on concrete or standard paving, nearly all of it runs off, picking up oil, rubber dust, sediment and anything else in its path, and hurries into surface drains that lead to a watercourse (chapter 2). The Royal Horticultural Society notes that using non-porous materials in hard landscaping can increase rainwater run-off by as much as 50% <sup>45</sup>. Multiply that across a town and you get flashier floods, more storm overflow spills from combined sewers, and a dirtier river. The general name for features that soak up or slow down rainwater where it falls is **SuDS**, short for sustainable drainage systems. You do not need to remember the acronym; you just need a garden that drinks.

**Know the paving rule before you pave.** In England, you do not need planning permission to surface your front garden, whatever the size, if you use a permeable surface such as gravel, permeable block paving or porous asphalt, or if the water drains to a lawn or border. But laying a traditional impermeable surface of more than five square metres that does not drain to a permeable area does need planning permission <sup>43 44</sup>. Why it helps the Dart: the rule exists precisely to stop front gardens becoming run-off chutes. How hard: a planning fact to know, not a job.

**Choose permeable surfaces for drives and paths.** Gravel, permeable block paving, reinforced grass grids and porous asphalt all let water through to the ground beneath <sup>43 45</sup>. If you are relaying a drive anyway, this is the moment. A cheaper trick from the water industry: pave only the wheel tracks and leave the rest green <sup>47</sup>. Why it helps the Dart: every square metre that drinks its own rain sends nothing to the surface drain. How hard: a bigger project when replacing a drive; the tyre-track version is moderate.

**Disconnect a downpipe into a water butt or the garden.** Where your ground slopes away from the house, a simple diverter can send roof water to a butt, a border or a lawn instead of the drain <sup>47</sup>. Why it helps the Dart: it takes your roof out of the storm surge that triggers overflow spills. How hard: easy to moderate.

**Build a rain garden.** A rain garden is a shallow planted dip that receives run-off from a roof or hard surface and lets it soak away among plants that tolerate both wet and dry spells. The RHS notes a rain garden can absorb up to 30% more water than the same area of lawn, reduces erosion by slowing heavy rainfall, and avoids the need for a soakaway <sup>46</sup>. Why it helps the Dart: it turns a run-off problem into a habitat, and it works hardest in exactly the downpours that make overflows spill. How hard: a bigger project, a weekend or two of digging, but cheap.

**Wash the car on grass or gravel, or at a commercial car wash.** Car shampoo, road grime and traffic-film remover are a potent mix, and if you wash on the road or a paved drive the dirty water runs to a surface drain and very likely to a watercourse <sup>16</sup>. Wash on grass or gravel so the water filters through the ground, or use a commercial car wash, which must dispose of its water properly <sup>17 16</sup>. Why it helps the Dart: this is one of the most common ways detergent enters rivers from homes. How hard: easy.

**Go easy on garden chemicals.** Use pesticides and weedkillers sparingly if at all, never apply them when rain is due, never near a drain, ditch or stream, and take leftovers to the recycling centre rather than

pouring them away <sup>26</sup> <sup>37</sup> . Why it helps the Dart: what rain washes off your garden is part of the river's diet.  
How hard: easy.

## Your drains and pipes

*Why this matters for the Dart: a single misconnected washing machine can pour its dirty water into a Dart tributary for years without anyone noticing.*

### The rule: only rain down the outside drain.

Chapter 2 explained the two-pipe system: foul sewer to the treatment works, surface water drain to the river. This short chapter is about making sure your own pipes obey it.

A **misconnection** is a plumbing error that joins a wastewater pipe to the surface water system, so that a sink, appliance or even a toilet discharges, untreated, into a local stream or river every time it is used <sup>13</sup>. Misconnections are usually innocent, often dating from an extension, a new bathroom or a moved kitchen, and the householder rarely knows. They are also common: Defra figures suggest up to 500,000 UK homes could be misconnected <sup>14</sup>. On a catchment like the Dart, where Friends of the Dart's testing has found several small tributaries carrying consistently high bacteria levels <sup>12</sup>, misconnections are exactly the kind of quiet, chronic source that keeps a stream dirty in dry weather.

**Check what should be connected where.** Your toilet, bath, shower, all sinks, washing machine and dishwasher should drain to the foul sewer; only rainwater from roofs, drives and paths should enter the surface water drain <sup>17</sup>.

**Do a simple home check.** On a dry day, lift the obvious clues into view. Does a washing machine or sink waste pipe run into an outside gully that also takes a downpipe? Does a gully smell of washing water or drains rather than nothing? Run a tap or the machine and watch which grating the water appears in. If anything looks doubtful, ConnectRight, the national partnership on misconnections, advises contacting your water company, your local authority or a WaterSafe-approved plumber to investigate and put it right <sup>13</sup>. Why it helps the Dart: correcting one misconnection stops a permanent, daily dribble of dirty water into a stream. How hard: the check is easy; a repair is a moderate plumbing job, and it is the owner's responsibility to fix.

**If you extend or re-plumb, say the words "foul sewer" out loud.** When builders or plumbers add a bathroom, utility room or kitchen, ask them to confirm the new wastewater connections go to the foul sewer, not the nearest convenient drain <sup>13</sup>. Why it helps the Dart: it is far cheaper to connect correctly than to trace and fix later. How hard: easy, it is one question.

**Join or run a Yellow Fish event.** The Yellow Fish scheme, run under the national Catchment Based Approach partnership, stencils a yellow fish symbol beside surface water drains with the message "only rain down the drain", and comes with a toolkit for community groups <sup>15</sup>. Why it helps the Dart: the fish makes the invisible pipe visible for every passer-by. How hard: easy, and sociable; see chapter 13.

## Off-mains homes: septic tanks and treatment plants

*Why this matters for the Dart: in a rural catchment, hundreds of homes are their own tiny sewage works, and a neglected one quietly pollutes its stream every day.*

**The rule: if your septic tank discharges directly into a stream, river or ditch, it does not meet the law and must be replaced or upgraded. And every system, however good, needs emptying regularly.**

If your home is not on mains drainage, your wastewater is treated on your own land, usually by one of three systems. A **septic tank** is a buried settlement tank that partially treats sewage and releases the liquid to a **drainage field** (a network of buried perforated pipes that lets it soak safely through the soil). A **small sewage treatment plant** (or "package treatment plant") uses a powered process to treat sewage to a much higher standard. A **cesspool** is simply a sealed holding tank with no outlet, which must be emptied whenever full <sup>48 49</sup>. It is worth finding your paperwork, or your tank lid, and knowing which you own.

In England, small private systems are governed by the Environment Agency's **general binding rules** <sup>48 49</sup>. These are the essentials.

**Septic tanks must not discharge to a watercourse.** Under the rules, a discharge to a river, stream or ditch must come from a small sewage treatment plant, not a septic tank. If your septic tank discharges directly to a watercourse, you must act as soon as possible: connect to the public foul sewer, install a drainage field so the discharge goes to ground instead, or replace the tank with a treatment plant. The Environment Agency expects plans to be in place within a reasonable timescale, usually 12 months <sup>48</sup>. This requirement is often called "the 2020 rule", because 1 January 2020 was the original compliance deadline set when the rules changed; the current guidance refers to sales made before that date <sup>48</sup>. Why it helps the Dart: a septic tank's liquid outflow is only partially treated, and piping it straight into a small stream is a permanent pollution source. How hard: a bigger project, and a significant cost, but a legal requirement, and it removes your home from the river's problem list for decades.

**Selling the house brings it to a head.** If you buy or sell a property whose septic tank discharges to a watercourse, the guidance says buyer and seller should agree who will replace or upgrade the system, as a condition of the sale. Every seller of a property with any private sewage system must also tell the new owner in writing that a discharge is in place, with a description of the system and its maintenance records <sup>48 49</sup>. How hard: paperwork, but essential.

**Stay within the size limits.** The rules allow a maximum of 2 cubic metres (2,000 litres) a day discharged to ground, or 5 cubic metres (5,000 litres) a day to a watercourse from a treatment plant; beyond that, or in certain protected locations, you need a permit <sup>48 49</sup>. For an ordinary house these limits are generous, but they matter for shared systems and holiday accommodation.

**Empty (desludge) the tank regularly.** You must have sludge removed before the tank exceeds its maximum capacity, and the guidance is to desludge at least once a year or in line with the manufacturer's instructions, using a registered waste carrier <sup>48 49</sup>. Why it helps the Dart: a full tank pushes solids out into the drainage field or watercourse, and a clogged drainage field cannot be repaired cheaply. How hard: easy, one phone call a year; expect a modest cost and keep the receipts with the house documents.

**Buy the right kit if you replace anything.** New or replacement equipment must meet the relevant British Standards, BS EN 12566 for tanks and small sewage treatment plants and BS 6297:2007 for drainage fields <sup>48 49</sup>.

**Run a "See and Smell" check every few months.** Catchment charities running septic tank campaigns suggest simple self-checks between emptyings <sup>51 50</sup>: drains slow to clear or toilets backing up; spongy ground or unusually lush grass and vegetation over the drainage field; and dark, smelly liquid, or anything containing solids, at the discharge pipe <sup>51</sup>. Any of these suggests the system is failing. Why it helps the Dart: failing systems announce themselves early to anyone who looks. How hard: easy.

**Protect the bacteria that do the work.** A septic system is a living thing: bacteria digest the sewage. Do not overwhelm them with bleach, antibacterial cleaners, disinfectants or chemicals, choose phosphate-free products, and never pour fats, oils, medicines, paints or solvents down the drain <sup>25 54</sup>. Keep rainwater out of the system too; gutters and drives should never drain into it <sup>54</sup>. Why it helps the Dart: a healthy tank treats sewage properly; a poisoned one passes it through. How hard: easy.

Elsewhere in the country, funded septic upgrade schemes have been run by councils, rivers trusts and partnerships, from Wiltshire's fully funded Revamp Your Tank grants to the Our Rivers free-upgrade partnership in Norfolk <sup>52 53</sup>.

## Dogs and the river

*Why this matters for the Dart: two very different dog products end up in the water, poo and pesticide, and both are within an owner's easy control.*

**The rules: bag it and bin it, everywhere, every time. And after a spot-on flea treatment, no swimming for at least four days.**

Dogs love the Dart, and the Dart is mostly better for having them. The two problems are real but fixable.

### Poo in the water

Dog faeces carry bacteria and parasites, and rain washes what is left on paths, fields and riverbanks into the water. UK dogs produce more than 880 tonnes of mess every day, on Keep Britain Tidy's estimate <sup>62</sup>. The bacterial load is startling: Ireland's Environmental Protection Agency, whose catchment scientists have studied fouling around bathing waters, calculates that one dog poo contains enough *E. coli* to contaminate an Olympic-size swimming pool (around 3 million litres) to a level that would fail the Excellent bathing water standard, and that a single gram can contain up to 23 million faecal coliform bacteria <sup>61</sup>. Those figures are Irish, but bacteria do not respect jurisdictions, and two Dart bathing waters are currently classified Poor precisely because of bacterial counts <sup>4</sup>. Friends of the Dart's own testing measures *E. coli* across 31 sites <sup>11</sup>; every uncollected poo near a watercourse is a small, avoidable contribution to the wrong side of that ledger.

**Bag it and bin it, every time, everywhere.** Any public litter bin will take a poo bag, and so will your bin at home. Do not leave bagged poo hanging on branches or beside paths; that is litter with a delayed fuse. In the South Hams, failing to clean up after your dog is an offence under the council's public spaces protection order, with a penalty of between £100 and £1,000; you can also be fined for not carrying the means to pick up <sup>63</sup>. Why it helps the Dart: removed poo cannot wash into the river, and bathing water classifications are built from exactly the bacteria it contains. How hard: easy.

**Carry spare bags, and consider the Green Dog Walkers pledge.** Green Dog Walkers is a friendly, non-confrontational scheme run by dozens of councils: members wear a badge, always clean up, carry spare bags to share, and are courteous ambassadors rather than enforcers <sup>60</sup>. Why it helps the Dart: gentle peer example changes more behaviour than signs do. How hard: easy.

### Flea and tick treatments

This is the newer message, and it surprises most owners. Many routine flea and tick treatments, especially "spot-on" products, contain the insecticides **fipronil** and **imidacloprid**. They are excellent at killing fleas, and just as good at killing the freshwater insects that fish, birds and the whole river food web depend on. A 2021 study using Environment Agency monitoring data found fipronil in 98% of English river freshwater samples, and imidacloprid in 66%, with average fipronil concentrations exceeding chronic safety thresholds for aquatic life five-fold <sup>56</sup>. The government's own monitoring confirms concentrations in surface waters that frequently exceed toxicity thresholds for aquatic insects, and in April 2026 it launched a call for evidence on tightening how these products are sold <sup>57</sup>.

A treated dog sheds these chemicals for a long time. The Broads Authority notes that spot-on treatments can remain active for up to 90 days, and that the chemicals reach water not just when dogs swim, but when

pets are washed, when their bedding goes in the laundry, and even when you wash your hands after stroking them <sup>58</sup>.

**Follow "Plan. Apply. Protect."** This is the Veterinary Medicines Directorate's official advice for using flea and tick treatments while protecting waterways. The headline rule: do not let your pet swim in any water for at least four days after applying a spot-on treatment. Apply the product to the skin as directed, do not wash or let the animal swim immediately, and dispose of the pipette in the bin, not down the drain <sup>55</sup>. Why it helps the Dart: the days straight after treatment are when the chemical load on the coat is highest. How hard: easy, it is a calendar note.

**Ask your vet whether routine treatment is right for your dog.** The British Veterinary Association advises that topical spot-on products should not be used on pets that are likely to swim or be bathed after treatment, and encourages vets to tailor flea treatment to each animal's actual risk rather than blanket year-round dosing <sup>59</sup>. If your dog swims in the Dart weekly, say so at the consultation; tablets or a risk-based plan may suit better. Why it helps the Dart: a river full of swimming spaniels needs its owners and vets talking to each other. How hard: easy, one conversation.

## For local businesses

*Why this matters for the Dart: one commercial kitchen produces as much fat as dozens of homes, and one holiday let hosts new flushers every week.*

This chapter is for the cafés, pubs, restaurants, takeaways, B&Bs and holiday lets that make the Dart valley what it is. Your kitchens and bathrooms are plumbed into the same sewers as everyone else's, at commercial scale, so a little housekeeping goes a long way, and some of it is a legal duty rather than a courtesy.

**Fats, oils and grease are a legal matter for businesses.** Under section 111 of the Water Industry Act 1991, it is a criminal offence to discharge into a public sewer any matter likely to injure the sewer, interfere with the free flow of its contents, or prejudice the treatment and disposal of its contents; penalties can include fines and, on indictment, imprisonment <sup>64</sup>. Fat, oil and grease poured down commercial drains does exactly what the Act describes. In addition, building standards guidance for England states that drainage serving kitchens in commercial hot-food premises should be fitted with a grease separator complying with BS EN 1825-1 or other effective means of grease removal <sup>65</sup>.

**Set up a FOG routine.** Water company guidance for food businesses is consistent <sup>66</sup>: install a suitably sized grease separator ("grease trap") and have it maintained on schedule; scrape plates and pans into the food waste bin before washing; use sink strainers; collect used cooking oil in sealed containers and have it taken by a licensed waste carrier, who will typically turn it into biofuel; and train all kitchen staff so the routine survives changeovers. Why it helps the Dart: commercial FOG is a leading cause of the sewer blockages that push sewage out of overflows. How hard: moderate; mostly kit, contracts and habit.

**Get free local support.** South West Water runs a support programme for food businesses on exactly this. Working with Environmental Compliance and Services, it has visited and supported more than 2,200 food establishments across Devon and Cornwall, advising on correctly sized grease equipment, oil storage and licensed collection <sup>67</sup>. If you run a kitchen in the catchment, ask for a visit before a blockage asks first.

**Put the 3Ps in front of your customers.** Guests flush what they flush, unless you ask otherwise. A small, friendly notice in each loo, only pee, poo and paper down the loo, wipes and period products in the bin provided, plus an actual bin in every cubicle, measurably changes behaviour, which is why water companies and charities produce ready-made toilet signage; City to Sea, for example, offers a free print-and-display Unflushables poster <sup>28</sup>. Holiday lets can add a line to the welcome folder: this cottage drains to the River Dart, please flush only the 3Ps. Why it helps the Dart: in a tourism catchment, visitors' habits are part of the river's load; your bathroom is where they can be gently reset. How hard: easy.

**If your property is off-mains, chapter 10 is yours too.** Holiday lets on septic systems need particular care: high summer occupancy, unfamiliar guests and a fragile drainage field are a poor mix. Tell guests the house rules, and desludge on schedule <sup>48</sup> <sup>49</sup>.

## Your community and the Dart

*Why this matters for the Dart: households fix what leaves their own pipes; communities fix the river.*

Everything so far has been about your own four walls. This chapter is about what Dart communities can do together, and it starts from a strong position: this river already has one of the most organised communities in the country.

**Know your bathing waters, and use them.** The Dart's four designated bathing waters at Steamer Quay, Stoke Gabriel, Dittisham and Warfleet Creek <sup>2</sup> exist because local people campaigned for designation. Designation forces regular official testing and publishes an annual classification, which in turn creates pressure for investment where classifications are Poor <sup>4 5</sup>. If your stretch of river would benefit from designation, Surfers Against Sewage publishes a free community toolkit, Protecting Wild Waters, to support groups through the campaign and the application process <sup>68</sup>.

**Check before you swim or paddle.** Two free tools show the river's status in near real time. The Safer Seas & Rivers Service app from Surfers Against Sewage sends real-time sewage discharge alerts and water quality information for around 200 UK locations <sup>69</sup>. South West Water's WaterFit Live map shows the company's storm overflows, and whether they are operating, in near real time <sup>74</sup>. Why it helps the Dart: informed river users are also the river's most motivated witnesses. How hard: easy, two downloads.

**Join the water quality testing effort.** Friends of the Dart runs one of the larger community testing programmes in the region, sampling 31 sites across the catchment twice a month for E. coli, in wet and dry weather, alongside partners including the Environment Agency and the Universities of York and Plymouth <sup>11</sup>. The data has already identified the tributaries that most need attention <sup>12</sup>. You can also train as a Riverfly monitor: the national Riverfly Partnership trains volunteers to sample river invertebrates, whose presence or absence is a sensitive, continuous indicator of water quality <sup>70</sup>. For a lighter start, River Action's Test My River guide walks community groups from simple observation through nutrient testing to bacteria testing <sup>71</sup>. Why it helps the Dart: regulators act on evidence, and volunteers now collect much of the best of it. How hard: easy to moderate, a few hours a month.

**Make it visible.** A Yellow Fish stencilling event marks the surface water drains in your town or village with the "only rain down the drain" message, using the national toolkit <sup>15</sup>. The Green Dog Walkers pledge (chapter 11) does the same social work for fouling <sup>60</sup>. Both are cheerful, family-friendly ways to move this manual's messages from paper to pavement.

**Report pollution when you see it.** If you see pollution in or entering the river, dead or gasping fish, or an unusual change in flow, smell or colour, call the Environment Agency's 24-hour incident hotline on 0800 80 70 60 <sup>72</sup>. Note what you can safely: time, exact location, what you can see and smell, and photographs if possible; charity guidance from the Rivers Trust confirms the same route <sup>73</sup>. Ask for your incident reference number and keep it, and follow up if you want to hear the outcome of your report. Sewage smells or overflowing manholes can also be reported to South West Water. Why it helps the Dart: incidents that are reported get investigated, and patterns of reports build the case for enforcement. How hard: easy, if the number is already in your phone.

# Your river-friendly home pledge

*A tick-and-sign self-audit: the full version of the pledge page at the front of this manual. Work through it honestly; nobody scores full marks first time. Each line points back to the chapter that explains it.*

## In the kitchen (chapter 4)

- ☐ We keep a fat jar or container, and no fat, oil or grease goes down the sink
- ☐ Our sink has a strainer, and plates are scraped before washing
- ☐ Our cleaning products are phosphate-free where possible, and we use the recommended dose

## In the bathroom (chapter 5)

- ☐ There is a bin beside every loo
- ☐ Only pee, poo and paper are flushed in this house, and wipes are always binned
- ☐ Guests can tell the same rules apply to them

## Medicines and chemicals (chapter 6)

- ☐ Unused medicines go back to the pharmacy, never down the loo or sink
- ☐ Paint, solvents, oils and garden chemicals go to the recycling centre, never down any drain

## Water use (chapter 7)

- ☐ We have checked the loo for leaks in the last year
- ☐ Showers are short, taps are off while brushing, and machines run full
- ☐ At least one downpipe feeds a water butt

## Drive, garden and drains (chapters 8 and 9)

- ☐ Rain falling on our property mostly soaks into it
- ☐ The car is washed on grass or gravel, or at a commercial car wash
- ☐ We know our wastewater pipes all go to the foul sewer, and we would ask a plumber to confirm any doubt

## Off-mains homes (chapter 10)

- ☐ We know which system we have, and it does not discharge directly to a watercourse
- ☐ The tank is desludged at least annually by a registered carrier, and we keep the receipts
- ☐ We protect the tank's bacteria: no bleach overload, no wipes, no fat, no chemicals

## Dogs (chapter 11)

- ☐ We bag and bin, everywhere, every time, and carry spares
- ☐ After any spot-on flea treatment, our dog stays out of the water for at least four days
- ☐ We have asked our vet whether routine flea treatment is right for our dog

### Community (chapter 13)

- [ ] The Environment Agency hotline (0800 80 70 60) is saved in our phones
- [ ] We check water quality before swimming or paddling
- [ ] At least one of us has considered volunteering for water testing, Riverfly or a Yellow Fish event

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*This household is a friend of the Dart.*

## Where to get help

**Emergencies and incidents.** Pollution in or entering any watercourse, dead or gasping fish, unusual flow, smell or colour: Environment Agency 24-hour incident hotline, 0800 80 70 60, or report online via GOV.UK ("Report an environmental problem") <sup>72</sup>. Keep your incident reference number and follow up if you want to hear the outcome.

**Sewer problems.** Blocked sewers, sewage smells, overflowing manholes, and questions about your wastewater connections: South West Water. The company's WaterFit Live map shows storm overflow activity near you <sup>74</sup>, and its rivers and bathing waters pages explain its current commitments <sup>6</sup>.

**Food business support on fats, oils and grease.** South West Water runs a support programme for food establishments across Devon and Cornwall, covering grease equipment, oil storage and licensed collection <sup>67</sup>. Water company FOG guidance for food businesses is also published openly <sup>66</sup>.

**Septic tanks and private sewage.** The general binding rules, in full, are on GOV.UK: search "general binding rules small sewage discharge", or use the two guidance pages directly <sup>48</sup> <sup>49</sup>. Your system's paperwork, and a good local tank-emptying contractor, are the other essentials.

**Misconnections.** ConnectRight explains how to check your home's connections and what to do about a suspected misconnection, including finding a WaterSafe-approved plumber <sup>13</sup>.

**Medicines.** Any community pharmacy will take back unused or out-of-date medicines; it is an NHS essential service in England <sup>31</sup>.

**Hazardous household waste.** Find your local disposal service for paints, chemicals and oils via GOV.UK <sup>37</sup>.

**Apps and maps.** Safer Seas & Rivers Service app (Surfers Against Sewage) for sewage alerts <sup>69</sup>; WaterFit Live for storm overflow status <sup>74</sup>; the Environment Agency's Swimfo service for official bathing water information.

**Friends of the Dart.** Water quality data, volunteering, and this manual's web companion: friend-softhedart.org <sup>10</sup>.

## Quick reference

### The ten things (from chapter 3)

Fat jar by the cooker. Strainer in the sink. Bin beside the loo, and only the 3Ps flushed. Old medicines back to the pharmacy. Leaky loo checked. Water butt on the downpipe. Car washed on grass, gravel or at the car wash. Four days out of the river after flea treatment. Dog poo bagged and binned. The app and the hotline (0800 80 70 60) on your phone.

### Never down any drain, sink or loo

The consolidated list. If it is on this list, it goes in the bin, to the pharmacy, or to the recycling centre; never down the drain [25](#) [29](#) [30](#) [26](#).

**Never down the sink:** cooking fat, oil and grease; food scraps; paint; white spirit and solvents; engine oil; medicines; garden chemicals.

**Never down the loo:** wet wipes (including "flushable" ones); period products; nappies; cotton buds; dental floss; contact lenses; plasters; razor blades; medicines; anything that is not pee, poo or paper.

**Never down an outside drain or road gully:** anything at all except rain. Outside drains usually lead straight to a stream or the river, untreated [13](#) [16](#).

**And if you are on a septic tank:** all of the above, plus go gently with bleach and antibacterial products, because your tank is alive [25](#).

# References and sources

All URLs accessed August 2026. Non-UK sources are labelled in their entries and used for illustrative statistics only, never for UK law.

1. Defra / GOV.UK — Record number of new bathing sites get the go-ahead. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/record-number-of-new-bathing-sites-get-the-go-ahead> (accessed August 2026).
2. GOV.UK — List of current bathing waters (designated waters in England). <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/bathing-waters-list-of-designated-waters-in-england/list-of-current-bathing-waters> (accessed August 2026).
3. Kingsbridge Today — Devon's first non-coastal bathing spots rated for the first time (November 2024). <https://www.kingsbridge-today.co.uk/news/devons-first-non-coastal-bathing-spots-rated-for-first-time-743867> (accessed August 2026).
4. Friends of the Dart — Bathing Water classifications (December 2025). <https://www.friendsofthedart.org/latestnews/bathing-water-classifications> (accessed August 2026).
5. Environment Agency blog — 2025 Bathing Waters Classifications. <https://environmentagency.blog.gov.uk/2025/11/25/2025-bathing-waters-classifications/> (accessed August 2026).
6. South West Water — Rivers and bathing waters (WaterFit). <https://www.southwestwater.co.uk/environment/rivers-and-bathing-waters> (accessed August 2026).
7. South West Water — Steamer Quay, WaterFit Live bathing water page. <https://www.southwestwater.co.uk/steamer-quay> (accessed August 2026).
8. Friends of the Dart — Ten worst sites for sewage spills into the River Dart. <https://www.friendsofthedart.org/latestnews/ten-worst-sites-for-sewage-spills-into-the-river-dart> (accessed August 2026).
9. The Rivers Trust — 2024 Annual Sewage Spill Data: what does it tell us? <https://theriverstrust.org/about-us/news/2024-sewage-spill-cso-data> (accessed August 2026).
10. Friends of the Dart — Home. <https://www.friendsofthedart.org/> (accessed August 2026).
11. Friends of the Dart — River Dart Water Quality Testing. <https://www.friendsofthedart.org/water-testing> (accessed August 2026).
12. Friends of the Dart — Data Review March to September 2025. <https://www.friendsofthedart.org/data-review-march-to-september-2025> (accessed August 2026).
13. ConnectRight (National Misconnections Strategy Group) — Home. <https://www.connectright.org.uk/> (accessed August 2026).
14. Consumer Council for Water — Blog: Are you well connected? <https://www.ccw.org.uk/news/blog-are-you-well-connected/> (accessed August 2026).
15. Catchment Based Approach (CaBA) — Engaging with communities: Yellow Fish. <https://catchmentbasedapproach.org/learn/engaging-with-communities-yellow-fish/> (accessed August 2026).
16. Litter Free Coast and Sea (Dorset & East Devon) — Only Rain Down the Drain. <https://www.litterfreecoastandsea.co.uk/only-rain-down-the-drain/> (accessed August 2026).
17. Ribble Rivers Trust — Water friendly homes. <https://ribbletrust.org.uk/get-outside/water-friendly-homes/> (accessed August 2026).
18. Westcountry Rivers Trust — Six ways to look after your local river. <https://wrt.org.uk/six-ways-to-look-after-your-local-river/> (accessed August 2026).
19. Thames Water — Bin it, don't block it (festive campaign, December 2024). <https://www.thameswater.co.uk/news/2024/dec/xmas-bidbi> (accessed August 2026).
20. Water UK — Public urged to bin "harmful" wet wipes as over a fifth admit flushing them. <https://www.water.org.uk/news-views-publications/news/public-urged-bin-harmful-wet-wipes-over-fifth-admit-flushing-down> (accessed August 2026).
21. Environment Agency blog — Your toilet is not a rubbish bin: think before you flush. <https://environmentagency.blog.gov.uk/2017/12/12/your-toilet-is-not-a-rubbish-bin-think-before-you-flush> (accessed August 2026).

22. Environment Agency — State of the environment: water quality (2018). [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/709493/State\\_of\\_the\\_environment\\_water\\_quality\\_report.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/709493/State_of_the_environment_water_quality_report.pdf) (accessed August 2026).
23. EUR-Lex — Regulation (EU) No 259/2012 amending Regulation (EC) No 648/2004 as regards the use of phosphates in detergents. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32012R0259> (accessed August 2026).
24. Environment Agency / GOV.UK — Exploring phosphorus concentrations and ecological improvements in English rivers: summary. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/exploring-phosphorus-concentrations-and-ecological-improvements-in-english-rivers/exploring-phosphorus-concentrations-and-ecological-improvements-in-english-rivers-summary> (accessed August 2026).
25. Ceredigion Council / Natural Resources Wales — Septic tanks and treatment plants: how to protect our waterways. <https://www.ceredigion.gov.uk/media/21oj0www/septic-tanks-and-treatment-plants-how-to-protect-our-waterways.pdf> (accessed August 2026).
26. Don Catchment Rivers Trust — 7 steps to a river-friendly home. <https://dcrt.org.uk/7-steps-to-a-river-friendly-home/> (accessed August 2026).
27. Water UK — Bin the Wipe. <https://www.binthewipe.org/> (accessed August 2026).
28. City to Sea — Unflushables. <https://www.citytosea.org.uk/campaign/unflushables> (accessed August 2026).
29. Unblocktober — Home. <https://www.unblocktober.org/> (accessed August 2026).
30. Cornwall Council — Recycling items: medicines. <https://www.cornwall.gov.uk/rubbish-recycling-and-waste/recycling/recycling-items/medicines> (accessed August 2026).
31. Community Pharmacy England — Disposal of unwanted medicines (NHS essential service). <https://cpe.org.uk/national-pharmacy-services/essential-services/disposal-of-unwanted-medicines/> (accessed August 2026).
32. UKWIR — The Chemical Investigations Programme Phase 2, 2015–2020: initial findings. <https://ukwir.org/the-chemicals-investigation-programme-phase-2,-2015-2020> (accessed August 2026).
33. University of York — Global study finds the extent of pharmaceutical pollution in the world's rivers (Wilkinson et al., PNAS, 2022). <https://www.york.ac.uk/news-and-events/news/2022/research/global-study-pharmaceutical-pollution-rivers/> (accessed August 2026).
34. USGS — Pharmaceutical pollution of the world's rivers (abstract of Wilkinson et al., PNAS 2022). <https://www.usgs.gov/publications/pharmaceutical-pollution-worlds-rivers> (accessed August 2026).
35. Chartered Institute of Environmental Health — Rivers in national parks are polluted with pharmaceuticals (September 2024). <https://www.cieh.org/ehn/environmental-protection/2024/september/rivers-in-national-parks-are-polluted-with-pharmaceuticals/> (accessed August 2026).
36. Clean Water South / University of Southampton — Drug return initiative to tackle emerging pollutants. <https://hub.futuretowns.soton.ac.uk/activity/drug-return-initiative-to-tackle-emerging-pollutants> (accessed August 2026).
37. GOV.UK — Find a local hazardous waste disposal service. <https://www.gov.uk/hazardous-waste-disposal> (accessed August 2026).
38. Waterwise — Save water: tips and facts. <https://waterwise.org.uk/save-water/> (accessed August 2026).
39. Waterwise — The Very Last Drop: your role in saving the UK's water. <https://waterwise.org.uk/the-very-last-drop-your-role-in-saving-the-uks-water/> (accessed August 2026).
40. Waterwise — Waterwise launches Leaky Loo Challenge. <https://waterwise.org.uk/waterwise-launches-leaky-loo-challenge-with-fluidmaster-as-headline-sponsor/> (accessed August 2026).
41. Royal Horticultural Society — Water: collecting, storing and re-using. <https://www.rhs.org.uk/garden-jobs/water-collecting-storing-and-using> (accessed August 2026).
42. Environment Agency — Catchment Data Explorer: Dart (waterbody GB108046008350). <https://environment.data.gov.uk/catchment-planning/WaterBody/GB108046008350> (accessed August 2026).
43. Planning Portal — Paving your front garden. <https://www.planningportal.co.uk/permission/common-projects/paving-your-front-garden> (accessed August 2026).
44. Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government — Permitted development rights for householders: technical guidance. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/permitted-development-rights-for-householders-technical-guidance> (accessed August 2026).

45. Royal Horticultural Society — Permeable paving. <https://www.rhs.org.uk/garden-design/permeable-paving> (accessed August 2026).
46. Royal Horticultural Society — Rain gardens. <https://www.rhs.org.uk/garden-features/rain-gardens> (accessed August 2026).
47. Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water — How you can be part of RainScape. <https://corporate.dwrcymru.com/en/community/environment/our-projects/rainscape/how-you-can-be-part-of-rainscape> (accessed August 2026).
48. Environment Agency / GOV.UK — General binding rules: small sewage discharge to a surface water. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/general-binding-rules-small-sewage-discharge-to-a-surface-water> (accessed August 2026).
49. Environment Agency / GOV.UK — General binding rules: small sewage discharge to the ground. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/general-binding-rules-small-sewage-discharge-to-the-ground> (accessed August 2026).
50. Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust — Septic Smart (Watercress & Winterbournes). <https://www.hiwwt.org.uk/watercress-and-winterbournes/septic-smart> (accessed August 2026).
51. West Wales Rivers Trust — Septic Tank Scheme. <https://westwalesriverstrust.org/septic-tank-scheme/> (accessed August 2026).
52. Wessex Rivers Trust — Revamp Your Tank. <https://www.wessexrt.org.uk/RevampYourTank.html> (accessed August 2026).
53. Our Rivers (partnership including Norfolk Rivers Trust) — free septic tank upgrades and replacements. <https://www.ourrivers.co.uk/> (accessed August 2026).
54. North Devon Council — Septic tanks and cesspools. <https://www.northdevon.gov.uk/environment/septic-tanks-and-cesspools> (accessed August 2026).
55. Veterinary Medicines Directorate / GOV.UK — Pet owners urged to take care when using flea and tick treatments to help protect our waterways ("Plan. Apply. Protect."). <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pet-owners-urged-to-take-care-when-using-flea-and-tick-treatments-to-help-protect-our-waterways> (accessed August 2026).
56. University of Sussex — press release on Perkins et al., "Potential role of veterinary flea products in widespread pesticide contamination of English rivers", Science of the Total Environment. <https://www.sussex.ac.uk/broadcast/read/53897> (accessed August 2026).
57. GOV.UK — Call for evidence launches on pet flea and tick treatments in UK waterways (April 2026). <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/call-for-evidence-launches-on-pet-flea-and-tick-treatments-in-uk-waterways> (accessed August 2026).
58. Broads Authority — Flea treatments and their impact on water quality. <https://www.broads-authority.gov.uk/looking-after/managing-land-and-water/water-quality/flea-treatments-and-their-impact-on-water-quality> (accessed August 2026).
59. British Veterinary Association — Veterinary associations update advice on spot-on flea treatments for pets that swim in lakes and rivers. <https://www.bva.co.uk/news-and-blog/news-article/veterinary-associations-update-advice-on-spot-on-flea-treatments-for-pets-that-swim-in-lakes-and-rivers/> (accessed August 2026).
60. Chichester District Council — Green Dog Walkers scheme. <https://www.chichester.gov.uk/article/30331/Green-Dog-Walkers-scheme> (accessed August 2026).
61. EPA Catchments Unit (Ireland; statistics used illustratively, not as UK law) — Dog fouling impacts on bathing water quality. <https://www.catchments.ie/dog-fouling-impacts-on-bathing-water-quality/> (accessed August 2026).
62. Keep Britain Tidy — Dog fouling. <https://www.keepbritaintidy.org/dog-fouling> (accessed August 2026).
63. South Hams District Council — Dog fouling. <https://www.southhams.gov.uk/environment-and-nuisance/dogs/dog-fouling> (accessed August 2026).
64. legislation.gov.uk — Water Industry Act 1991, section 111 (restrictions on use of public sewers). <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1991/56/section/111> (accessed August 2026).
65. HM Government — The Building Regulations 2010, Approved Document H: drainage and waste disposal (2015 edition). [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/442889/BR\\_PDF\\_AD\\_H\\_2015.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/442889/BR_PDF_AD_H_2015.pdf) (accessed August 2026).
66. Southern Water — Managing fat, oil and grease (FOG) for food businesses. <https://www.southernwater.co.uk/help-and-support/managing-fat-oil-and-grease-fog-food-businesses/> (accessed August 2026).
67. South West Water — Bin It Don't Block It: over 2,000 food establishments supported to prevent sewer blockages. <https://www.southwestwater.co.uk/about-us/latest-news/bin-it-dont-block-it-over-2000-food-establishments-supported-to-prevent-sewer-blockages> (accessed August 2026).

- 68.** Surfers Against Sewage — Bathing Water Designation Community Toolkit. <https://www.sas.org.uk/resource/bathing-water-designation-community-toolkit/> (accessed August 2026).
- 69.** Surfers Against Sewage — Safer Seas & Rivers Service. <https://www.sas.org.uk/water-quality/sewage-pollution-alerts/safer-seas-rivers-service/> (accessed August 2026).
- 70.** The Riverfly Partnership — Home. <https://www.riverflies.org/> (accessed August 2026).
- 71.** River Action UK — Test My River (River Rescue Kit). <https://kit.riveractionuk.com/river-rescue-kit/test-my-river/> (accessed August 2026).
- 72.** GOV.UK — Report an environmental problem (Environment Agency 24-hour incident hotline 0800 80 70 60). <https://www.gov.uk/report-an-environmental-incident> (accessed August 2026).
- 73.** The Rivers Trust — How to report pollution incidents in a river. <https://theriverstrust.org/key-issues/sewage-in-rivers/how-to-report-pollution-incidents-in-a-river> (accessed August 2026).
- 74.** South West Water — WaterFit Live. <https://www.southwestwater.co.uk/environment/rivers-and-bathing-waters/waterfitlive> (accessed August 2026).
- 75.** Pantoja Munoz, L., Gonzalez Baez, A., McKinney, D. and Garelick, H. (Middlesex University) — Characterisation of "flushable" and "non-flushable" commercial wet wipes using microRaman, FTIR spectroscopy and fluorescence microscopy: to flush or not to flush. Environmental Science and Pollution Research, 2018. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11356-018-2400-9> (accessed August 2026).
- 76.** Khan, A., Orr, B. and Joksimovic, D. (Ryerson University, for the Municipal Enforcement Sewer Use Group; Canadian study, non-UK) — Defining "Flushability" for Sewer Use, 2019. <https://foecanada.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Final-Report-Flushables-April-1.pdf> (accessed August 2026).
- 77.** South West Water — Escherichia coli and intestinal enterococci. <https://www.southwestwater.co.uk/environment/rivers-and-bathing-waters/escherichia-coli-and-intestinal-enterococci> (accessed August 2026).