

Appendix K





Service Margins

Adoptable Highway -Information

As part of the ongoing construction and adoption process associated with the 'new build' residential estates within the Borough of Swindon, issues relating to the service margins are frequently encountered that are of a safety concern to the general public or may cause a delay to the adoption of a housing development. One of the most frequent issues with service margins is where inappropriate planting or structures have been constructed over the buried services.

It has been identified that there are some locations within your housing estate where inappropriate planting or structures have been constructed over the service margin and mitigation works will need to be undertaken by the Developer to bring the development infrastructure up to a safe and appropriate standard suitable for adoption by Swindon Borough Council.

Swindon Borough Council will assist the Developer to assess the current situation within the residential area and to recommend suitable alternative measures to resolve the service margin issues. Swindon Borough Council will also be party to the consultation between the developer and the owners from the properties affected by the works to ensure that all parties are in agreement with the proposed alterations to be undertaken and the timescales for implementation.

For your reference, please see the details and images below to provide you with information about service margins. This Information Sheet covers the following topics:

- What are service margins
- What features / materials are unacceptable in service margins
- Why certain features / materials are unacceptable
- Acceptable features / materials in service margins

What are Service Margins?

Service margins are introduced typically alongside Shared Surface Roads (SSR) and in some circumstances in the absence of a footway adjacent to a road. As the name suggests, the service margin is a strip of land, approximately 1-2m wide, where the respective utility companies lay their apparatus that services the respective residential area. Utilities' equipment and apparatus, such as telecommunication cables, gas pipes, water pipes and electricity cables are buried at varying depths and locations within the service margins. A typical layout and content of service margin is shown below (Figure 1):

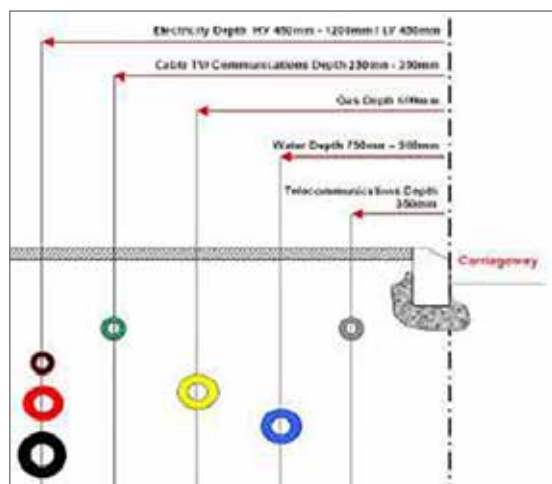


Figure 1: Typical Services Layout within Service Margin

These areas are set aside in order for the various statutory undertakers to either maintain/repair any existing apparatus or install new apparatus in the future. The inclusion and arrangement of service margins enables statutory undertaker works to be undertaken without too much effect to traffic movement. To secure the access arrangements to the buried services beneath and to maintain the area in a safe and tidy condition the service margin is included as part of the area of the residential development offered for adoption.

They are not included in the purchase of fronting properties as 'additional garden'. The sketch below (Figure 2) shows a typical cross section through a shared surface road highlighting the extent of the area included for adoption by the Local Highways Authority and the extent of the front garden conveyed to the private individual.

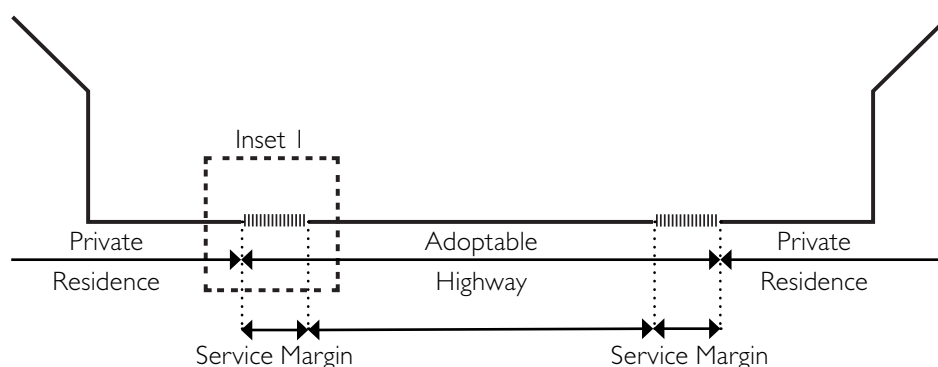


Figure 2: Typical Shared Surface Cross Section

The service margins, like the carriageway and other highway infrastructure offered for adoption, are the responsibility of the developer to maintain up until the point of adoption by the Local Highway Authority. Unfortunately the service margins are sometimes not clearly defined / demarcated on the ground and as a result residents take it upon themselves to maintain the service margins as an extension to their garden. In many cases, significant changes are undertaken which would deem them unsuitable for highway adoption.

Why alterations are not permitted

Examples of unacceptable features within service margins are paving slabs, walls, hedges, trees, certain planting, rockery, loose gravel or any structure. Paving slabs and unauthorised alterations of the service margin are not acceptable within publicly maintained service margins for several reasons. These include:

Vehicular Damage

Vehicular traffic over slabs (such as delivery vans, lawnmowers, etc) may cause them to break, which in itself creates maintenance issues (if adopted, at a cost to the tax payer) and increased personal injury claims against the Highway Authority in relation to trips and falls.

Personal Injury Claims

Increased potential for personal injury claims against the Highway Authority in relation to trips, falls, injuries, etc as a result of falling over unauthorised planting, ornaments, etc

Damage to Buried Services -Damage may be caused to services during planting installation / margin alteration or later in the plant's life, especially if the vegetation/trees have large roots.

Access to Services

The New Roads & Street Works Act (NRSWA) 1991 gives powers to ensure that the utility companies have adequate facilities for immediate repair and maintenance of their equipment and apparatus. They are under no obligation to replace any trees, plants or decorative features – purely just to replace grass service margins with grass and a consolidated surface for paths / hard surfaces. This could result in the local resident affected becoming upset that what they believed was their property not being reinstated back as how it was prior to any works being undertaken.

Personal Safety

Figure 1 (above) highlights an indicative layout and depth of the services buried within a service margin. This sketch shows that is expected to find services (especially telecommunication and low voltage electrical cables) within 250mm of the ground level.

These fairly shallow services are potential hazards for residents digging holes for trees and vegetation.

Highway Safety

Horizontal forward visibility splays are designed within residential developments to ensure that drivers have sufficient warning of any other vehicles, cyclists or pedestrians that maybe within the carriageway ahead. If vegetation has been planted within these visibility splays, it may grow to a height that would obscure and restrict the forward visibility of drivers. This could lead to collisions between vehicles or vehicles and pedestrians.

Acceptable Planting

Some types of low level planting (shallow roots, no thorns, no prickles non-spreading & nonpoisonous) that are not likely to constitute a danger to persons or animals may be appropriate within the service margin.

Approved species / materials

Grass (with concrete edging as demarcation)

Block paving

Planting. Suggested species (list not exhaustive):

Some annual bedding, e.g. pansies, bellis perennis, polyanthus, petunia

Groundcover species, e.g. Ajuga reptans, Calluna vulgaris, Cotoneaster adpressus and dammeri, Erica carnea or cinerea, Hebe pagei, Hedera helix, Hypericum calycinum, Lamium maculate, Sarcococca humilis and Vinca major & minor.

Examples – Not Acceptable



Fig. 1 – Paving slabs, fencing & enclosed highway



Fig. 2 – Deep roots, enclosed highway & restricted forward visibility



Fig. 3 – Loose gravel

Examples – Acceptable



Fig. 4 – Grass



Fig. 5 – Block Paving



Fig. 6 – Suitable Planting