

# Bridgnorth

DISTRICT COUNCIL



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**Your Ref:**  
**Our Ref:** DMP/NJH  
**Contact:** Mr. Parish  
**E-Mail:** Dparish@bridgnorth-dc.gov.uk  
**Direct Line:** (01746) 713219  
**Date:** 26<sup>th</sup> February 2007

Bridgnorth Sewage Action Group,  
c/o 4 St. Giles Terrace,  
Chetton,  
Bridgnorth,  
Shropshire. WV16 6UG

**For the attention of Mr. J. White**

Dear Mr. White,

## **Sewage Treatment Plants**

I refer to your letter dated 18<sup>th</sup> February 2007 regarding the proposed financing of the repairs to sewage treatment plants, addressed to the Chief Executive, a copy of which has been forwarded to me for investigation and reply. I also refer to your email of 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2007.

Please note the following responses are provided to correspond with the points in your letter and I have added item numbers 18, 19 and 20 to respond to the points in your email.

1. Your point is correct, however it should be noted that we have spent extensive amounts of money on work to sewage treatment plants over recent years using money from the Housing Revenue Account to redress the imbalance in income received through the annual charges. Effectively, this means that the Council has subsidised these works.
2. The sites are monitored from time to time by the Environment Agency and they have not indicated that they have taken samples which are unsatisfactory. The programme of work that is now in hand is being undertaken with the aims of meeting health and safety requirements and of ensuring that failures to comply with Environment Agency standards do not occur. It is imperative therefore that this programme of work should proceed as planned. The lack of any notices of non-compliance from the Environment Agency and the programme of work in hand would indicate that the plants are being managed well.
- 3/4. I am not sure which site(s) you are referring to in these points. Please provide further information and I will investigate and respond separately.

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**Chief Executive**  
John Harmeston FCCA, CPFA



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5. I am not sure what your point is here as many of the recommendations are in connection with meeting health and safety requirements whilst others are in relation to the operation of the plant. The cost of both elements should be recharged to users.
6. The brief is based on preparing a specification which will ensure that the plants provide an effective sewage treatment operation, compliant with health and safety and Environment Agency requirements in the short, medium and long term. The prices were obtained through a competitive tender and we are satisfied that it represents best value. The actual costs of the work will not be known until the works are completed.
7. The health and safety issues identified in a report in late 2004 were not ignored. Arrangements were made to provide the necessary budget during the following financial year 2005/06 to carry out the first phase of the work which involved improvements to security and accesses and this has been fully implemented. The next step was to prepare a detailed specification for the repairs and put a budget forward for the next phase of the work in 2006/07 to undertake the current programme of work. The phasing of the work was an appropriate approach and enabled sufficient time for consultation with residents and members of the Council. The current programme is proceeding and we are satisfied with the overall progress of what is a very complex project.
8. Every reasonable effort has been made to provide information and there are examples of this with meetings, correspondence, issuing copies of reports and specifications. As mentioned in a previous point, the actual costs will not be known until the work programme has been completed.
9. The objective of the Council is to complete the current programme of capital work and continue the ongoing annual programme of inspection and routine maintenance. As mentioned previously, the cost of the ongoing routine inspection and maintenance has, in the past, exceeded the total revenue available from charges. The capital costs require to be recharged to the users of the plants and this would be the case whether the work had been carried out now or in a previous year. It is correct and proper that all of these costs should be recovered in full from the users.
10. The Council has responsibility for the plants and we consider that the strategy we have adopted is in the best interests of the users of the systems, and placing a high priority on ensuring these systems provide a reliable and compliant means of effluent disposal, along with providing a safe and healthy environment for maintenance operatives and the general public. We have taken a long term view of the economic implications and consider the work being undertaken will significantly reduce the risk of there being a need for any major overhaul or repair for many years into the future.
11. We have complied fully with the Freedom of Information Act. Where you believe we have not complied then you can appeal to the Chief Executive, John Harmeston, at the above address in the first instance. If you remain dissatisfied after that then you can appeal to the Information Commissioner.

12. We have taken all reasonable measures to consult with all of the relevant parties. Please can you indicate which plants you are referring to in this point.
13. We have taken all reasonable measures to provide information to anyone expressing an interest in taking over responsibility for the site(s) and there are plants where we have received expressions of interest and the necessary arrangements are being put in hand.
14. I am not sure what point you are making here, please refer to my comments on point 10.
15. As with any major overhaul or replacement of a property asset, it will incur a higher level of expenditure relative to the more routine annual inspection and maintenance regime. Unfortunately, under the terms of the conveyance, we are not allowed to collect contributions to build a "sinking fund" to cover such an eventuality in the way that customers pay charges to other providers of utilities. The need to carry out substantial capital work is inevitable with this type of asset and it is regrettable that we have to recover the costs of this work in a retrospective way.

You have raised other points in this item which have either been dealt with under other items or require more specific information to identify the site in question. Some of the points appear to be statements that we would not disagree with and have taken into consideration, e.g. health and safety, Environment Agency requirements, phased method of payments to the Council.

16. It is the Council's aim to implement this programme of work and it is both inappropriate and disrespectful of you to personalise the issues in relation to our Head of Legal and Democratic Services, who has worked diligently in responding to residents and members enquiries.
17. I have made enquiries with our officer representative and our consultant in relation to your description of the content of the meeting at Brick Kiln Lane. They have a different recollection to yours and I am advised that assurances were given that the views of the technical consultant employed by your member would be given consideration with regard to any possible changes to the specification. We are now in receipt of our consultant's view after giving the matter due consideration and I can advise that his advice remains the same with regard to the replacement of the unit with one of a similar style or a rotating distributor as this is the best long term strategy for the site.
  - (a) We have given the matters sufficient consideration and have no intention to halt the work.
  - (b) Your technical consultant may have access by arrangement with our Mr. Workman, but we would not permit this to interfere with our programme.

- (c) We would be pleased to receive the views of anyone qualified to offer their opinion. However, the selection of a specification for the work remains our responsibility and we have no intention of subjecting the matter to an agreement with you, your technical consultant representative or any other third party.
18. Your email referred to the comments of our Head of Legal and Democratic Services in the Shropshire Star and you have suggested that we have disregarded the result of the meeting at Brick Kiln Lane. I have dealt with this in item 17 and explained that we do not accept your assertion that it was agreed that the proposed work was unnecessary. We intend to proceed with the work in accordance with our original proposal. We are considering the suggestion that we should provide additional irrigation and if we implement this then it will be extra to our original proposal.
19. I have dealt with the matter of Environment Agency Compliance in item 2. We are not aware of any notices from the Environment Agency to advise us that the final effluent from any of the plants is unsatisfactory. Their most recent sample results showed that the test site was operating satisfactorily.
20. The programme of work will proceed as planned and we have no intention to delay the work as a result of your letter.

From the points you have carefully made it is evident that you are well aware of the complex nature of the task both in terms of management and routine maintenance of the sites, as well as the current programme of major repairs. A particular matter that is uppermost in our awareness is the question of responsibility and accountability. Failure to properly discharge those responsibilities render the Council and individual officers at risk of prosecution and in these circumstances I feel that we are absolutely justified to determine what work should be undertaken and when, until such a time as another party agrees to accept these extremely onerous obligations. Taking this into consideration I can advise you that we are very satisfied with our strategy and programme of work and all efforts will be made to continue with that.

Thank you for your observations and taking the trouble to write to us. I trust that the information I have provided is of some assistance albeit it may not meet with your approval or agreement.

Yours sincerely

  
Mr. D.M. Parish  
Director of Community Services

C.C. John Harmeston, Chief Executive  
Tom Clark, Head of Legal and Democratic Services  
Roger Mullard, Property Manager  
Jackie Reading, PA to Chief Executive  
Councillor Mrs R E J Yeomans