

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

John Harmeston
Chief Executive
Bridgnorth District Council
(By Hand)

18th February 2007

Dear Mr Harmeston,

I am writing this open letter to you to ensure that you are fully aware of the details of the handling of the proposed financing of the Bridgnorth District Council owned sewerage works of several communities who are not on main drainage.

May I earnestly request that you find the time to read this rather lengthy document and give it your serious consideration.

1. It appears that no capital money has been spent on works other than fencing in the last five years.
2. Mismanagement of the operations has resulted in pollution, i.e. final effluent below the consent figures as laid down by the Environment Agency, which is a very serious situation.
3. Mismanagement of one particular site by not replacing a blower system, has resulted in an unnecessary expenditure of around £8,000 to replace a Reed Bed which should not have been necessary. This blower has still not been replaced and the ineffective treatment is continuing and as a consequence the new Reed Bed being contaminated and the final discharge effluent is still polluting.
4. Bridgnorth District Council has commissioned a consultant from Telford and Wrekin Council as an expert to inspect, report and recommend remedial action. His comments clearly show that he is not an expert as he has completely omitted recommending installing an essential part of the treatment process, which is missing.
5. Most of the Consultants recommendations are in connection with Health and Safety, and nothing to do with improving the performance of the Works.
6. It appears that his brief has no reference to budgeting and economy and the suggested Capital Cost to each site is ridiculously high.

7. The Health and Safety issues were dominant in his reports given to Bridgnorth District Council in 2004, now three years ago, and yet Bridgnorth District Council has completely ignored their implementation. Bridgnorth District Council must have some legal obligation to comply with Health and Safety conditions.
8. All the communities affected have requested detailed information on the specific specification and costs of each item on each site. Despite many letters this has been only partly supplied — and most questions have been ignored.
9. The legal department seems to have only one objective and that is: “*To clear all the backlog of work and costs*”. Much of this work should have been carried out in the last five years on an ongoing annual budget expenditure. But since this has obviously not been done, it is now proposed that these debts should be passed on to the residents.
10. The works and costs suggested disregard economic considerations and are gold-plated which is fine if someone else is paying!
11. The replies to the residents’ letters have not complied with the Freedom of Information Act and **the** only consistent reply has been stating that Bridgnorth District Council **will** carry out this work and the residents will pay.
12. The head of the legal department has totally ignored the legal clause in most of the conveyance documents which state that all work and costs of work to be done shall be discussed and agreed by both parties before commencement of work. This is not acceptable and an injunction is being considered to stop the work being done before the agreement is made.
13. The communities have been offered the option of taking over the works and maintaining them. However, despite many requests, not enough facts have been received to enable a considered decision to be made. Instead, they have been under constant pressure to sign a legal document with unrealistic dead-lines.
14. Part of the decision should be based on the existing work being brought up to an acceptable standard (which contractually they should already be) and not being inflicted with a backlog of debts.
15. Apart from the capital cost, the new annual sewerage charges have been notified as being two-and-a-half times previous years. This is an unreasonable percentage increase and is totally unacceptable. The Head of the Legal Department obviously has only one schedule “to offload the Treatment Works and the Bridgnorth District Council debts to the residents.” He seems to have chosen to ignore:
 - a. Legal conveyancing conditions
 - b. Technical faults concerning the treatment process
 - c. Freedom of Information Act
 - d. Financial implications to residents many of whom are pensioners (**some over 80 years old**)

- e. Effluent discharge requirements. Environment Agency pollution fines can be £20,000
 - f. Health and Safety issues
16. All these issues are being swept aside and his schedule is bulldozing through to achieve his aim. He has mentioned that he is leaving Bridgnorth District Council after May 2007, and will therefore leave the flack to all the remaining officers and council members to sort out.
17. At a meeting last week with one of our members, a technical consultant employed by our member, Alan Workman from BDC and a gentleman from Telford & Wrekin; the work that was being proposed was ridiculed and at the end of the meeting the Telford representative was asked by BDC to completely re-write the specification. Given that this meeting showed that the standard of work from the consultants employed by BDC had not been acceptable; we demand that
- a. Bridgnorth District Council immediately halt all work pending further investigation
 - b. That our technical consultant is given access to all the other plants before any further work is carried out to carry out a survey of each plant
 - c. That when this survey is complete a meeting is held between our technical consultant and Bridgnorth District Council to agree the work that is required

I apologise for the length of this document but felt that you needed to be aware of all the background to our demands and what a “can of worms” exists.

I would be pleased to receive a call within the next three days and before any further work is done to arrange to discuss the matter. Unless we have your confirmation that you agree to this course of action, a number of members are planning to commence proceedings to instigate an injunction.

Yours Sincerely

Justin White
Chair, Bridgnorth Sewage Action Group

cc. Chairman Of The Council – Mrs C L Cooper
Leader Of The Council – Mrs R E J Yeomans
Various Local Councillors
Shropshire Star
Bridgnorth Journal