



Surrey Heath Borough Council
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Shaun Macdonald
Leader of the Council

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Rt Hon Dr Thérèse Coffey MP
Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs
Nobel House
17 Smith Square
London SW1P 3JR

7 November 2023

Emailed to: enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk & therese.coffey.mp@parliament.uk

Dear Thérèse

Thames Water Sewage Treatment Works Camberley – A betrayal of trust

I am writing in relation to the persistent and intolerable stench that was forced upon the residents of Surrey Heath throughout the Summer. This was the direct consequence of the decision made by Thames Water to import sewage sludge into their Camberley Sewage Treatment Works and hold this in open tanks during one of the hottest Summers on record, without any odour mitigation in place.

Our residents in St Michaels and Watchetts Wards were directly impacted by foul odour with records indicating that complaints were received by the Council as early as June 2023 and continued until the imported sewage processing was finally completed on the 25 September 2023. The 11,600 residents and adjacent businesses were all detrimentally affected by the actions of Thames Water with many people unable to open windows or enjoy the summer weather due to the offensive and relentless odour emanating from Thames Water's Camberley Plant.

Elected Councillors representing St Michaels and Watchetts Wards and our local MP met with representatives of Thames Water on the 27 September. During that meeting the impact on residents was clearly articulated by Surrey Heath Councillors and in response to this, representatives from Thames Water gave their commitment that a meaningful financial contribution would be provided to recognise the devastating impact their company's actions have had on the lives of local residents. The financial contribution was to fund a project to benefit young people living in the affected wards.

In October, Councillors received a letter from James Bentley, Operations Director at Thames Water reneging on the verbal agreement given to our Councillors and instead offering "labour in support of a project". This substitute offer is quite frankly insulting and will be seen as a further betrayal of trust by Thames Water. It fails to recognise the unbearable summer for so many of our residents due to the inconsiderate and inappropriate actions of Thames Water. We firmly believe that had it not been for the intervention of our Councillors and Officers, Thames Water would have continued to disregard the severe impact of their actions on our community.

Given what has happened, and following a motion to our full Council last week which was agreed by all Members, I have formally requested that Thames Water honour the commitment already made to make a financial contribution to a local community project. Given the summer of misery that has been caused, so many of our residents see this as an important gesture and is the least that Thames Water should do.

Please can I ask for your help in holding Thames Water to account for their actions and pressing them to honour their commitment to make a meaningful financial contribution to a community project in the local area.

I look forward to your reply.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Shaun Macdonald', written in a cursive style.

Cllr Shaun Macdonald
Leader of the Council