

**Surrey Heath Borough Council**  
**External Partnerships Select Committee**

**28 November 2023**

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**Camberley Sewage Treatment Works**

<b>Portfolio Holder:</b>	<b>Cllr Morgan Rise, Net Zero, Well-being &amp; Environment</b>
<b>Strategic Director/Head of Service</b>	<b>Nick Steevens</b>
<b>Report Authors:</b>	<b>Nick Steevens</b>
<b>Wards Affected:</b>	<b>St Michaels, Watchetts</b>
<b>Key Decision:</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>Date Portfolio Holder signed off the report</b>	

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**Summary and purpose**

This report outlines the chronology of the odour issues emanating from Camberley Sewage Treatment Plant during the summer of 2023.

**Recommendation**

The External Partnerships Select Committee is asked to note the contents of the report.

**1. Background and Supporting Information**

- 1.1 Camberley Sewage Treatment Plant (CSTP) is located in St Michael's ward bordered by industrial units, the A331 and the Watchmoor Park office development. The nearest residential properties are located in Surrey Avenue, less than 100m from the boundary of CSTP.
- 1.2 Thames Water currently hold a permit to process sewage sludge at Camberley and this is subject to an Environmental Permit issued by the Environment Agency. Processing of the imported material was allowed under an exemption meaning that the controls set by the current permit were not applicable.
- 1.3 On the 21<sup>st</sup> June 2023 the Council's Environmental Health service started to receive complaints regarding a foul odour which complainants believed was coming from CSTP.

- 1.4 Officers first contacted CSTP on the 22<sup>nd</sup> June by email and officers have recounted that it took some time for Thames Water to acknowledge that they had an issue on site. Initially it was maintained by Thames Water that the odour was of the result of various other external issues including locally blocked drains and not linked to activities at CSTP.
- 1.5 After further investigations officers spoke to the Customer & Stakeholder Manager for Thames Water who then confirmed that the odour issues were due to processes at Camberley Wastewater Treatment Works who were holding a backlog of raw sewage that needed processing. Assurances were also provided that an odour suppression system was in place to mitigate any odours caused by the presence of the sewage.
- 1.6 On the 18<sup>th</sup> of July officers made an unannounced visit to CSTP where they were advised that untreated sludge had been imported into Camberley and was being stored in a large open tank. The Sewage was imported to Camberley from other facilities that had operational issues. Material started being imported in February and by March the 'strategic tank' used to store the sewage sludge was full to capacity. The sewage sludge remained held untreated in the open strategic tank until July 2023. It is believed that as the weather became warmer this increased the levels of odour arising from the sludge, ultimately triggering complaints to the Council and to Councillors.
- 1.7 The sewage sludge introduced to CSTP by tankers was stored in open tanks with the intention of processing this at CSTP. During the same period Thames Water confirmed that there were issues with the odour control system resulting in the odour suppression not working continuously as intended. As a consequence complaints to the Council continued throughout July with officers witnessing issues with odour emanating from the site.
- 1.8 It was confirmed by Thames Water in July that the sewage sludge was found to be too high in ammonia content to allow timely processing at CSTP. Alternative arrangements had to be identified for its disposal. Complaints regarding the odour continued to be received by the Council and shared on social media throughout July. Officers raised with Thames Water the need for a letter drop to all affected residents in St Michaels and Watchetts wards.
- 1.9 Officers of the Council were provided with a mechanism to contact Thames Water out of normal working hours should an escalation in odour occur. This was utilised on the evening of Friday the 28<sup>th</sup> of July and the following Saturday due to an increase in odour. Contacting Thames Water to speak to an on-call officer proved impossible through the agreed electronic bulletin board with repeated contact with Thames Water over the weekend resulting in no response to officers.
- 1.10 During a site visit on the 2<sup>nd</sup> August it was finally confirmed that action had been taken and the odour suppression system was now operational

24 hours a day whereas suppression had previously only been in place during normal working hours with intermittent failures also causing odour during normal working hours. Sludge processing had restarted and it was confirmed that it would be complete by the end of the August. Letters were eventually sent to residents on or around the 18<sup>th</sup> August 2023.

- 1.11 Thames Water completed the sludge processing operation as agreed at the end of August. The cleaning of the tanks then started with the process completed by the 25<sup>th</sup> of September.
- 1.12 The Environment Agency have confirmed their intention to revise the Environmental Permit which will remove the ability to process sewage in open tanks. Additionally, sewage processing at CSTP is now subject to the evolving Industrial Emission Directive (IED). The directive will require Camberley to comply with the latest Best Available Technology (BAT) document to control its emissions to Air land and Water. As odour is an emission to air, the permit will now add new controls to mitigate any impacts.
- 1.13 On the 27<sup>th</sup> September 2023 Councillors attended a meeting with Thames Water and Michael Gove MP to discuss the impact that the odour had on the 11,600 residents of St Michaels and Watchetts wards. During the meeting a commitment was given by representatives of Thames Water that a financial contribution would be offered towards a community project in the affected wards. In October 2023 a letter was received from the Operations Director from Thames Water reneging from the offer and stating that in the current circumstances *Thames Water is unable to contribute funding to such a project.*

**Annexes:**

None

**Background Papers:**

Letter from Thames Water, October 2023