

Thames Water left human waste to fester

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Thames Water has been accused of backtracking on a goodwill gesture after subjecting Camberley residents to a “disgusting” summer of stench caused by raw, untreated, human waste left to fester in the heat.

Last summer Camberley experienced a “persistent and intolerable” rancid odour the seeped from sewage works operated by Thames Water, a full meeting of Surrey Heath Borough Council heard.

Following a series of meetings, with councillors and MP Michael Gove, Thames Water spoke of its desire to make a financial contribution to a local community project to acknowledge the impact on residents over a five month period, according to a motion that was backed unanimously by councillors.

Introducing the motion was Councillor Jonathan Quin, leader of the Labour group and ward member for St Michaels. He said: “Disgusting sewage odour... plagued Camberley for over a five month periods from May to September. The odour caused by the Camberley sewage works run by Thames Water can not be described as anything minor. It was so awfully disgusting and strong that many residents...could not open their windows or hang their washing outside during the summer.

“The distress and impact caused to mental health... has been shocking.” He added: “Thames Water agreed to meet with councillors and the MP to discuss possible compensation to make up for missing five months going outside.”

The meeting heard that a children’s playground in St Michaels was suggested as a goodwill gesture and that there had been a “meeting of minds” with the utility firm, with the only thing remaining being the exact amount of money Thames Water would put forward.

He said: “Rather than agreeing to meet us in person again, Thames Water has since backtracked on its decision to make a contribution. I’m absolutely disgusted and disappointed at the disregard shown.”

Cllr Lisa Finan-Cooke (LD, Watchetts) told of how the problem began after Thames Water started shipping in human waste into Camberley that led to more than 11,000 complaints to flood in.

She said: “Between February and April more and more sludge was imported on to the site, and let’s be honest what we are talking about was raw human sewage which was just stored in vast open tanks to just fester away, and as the weather warmed up, the sludge began to produce an unbearable odour.”

She added: “That’s five months of people feeling sick in their own homes, of not wanting to open their windows, of not letting their children out to play in their gardens, not being able to hang their washing out to dry, cancelled birthday parties and family events. The site wasn’t sufficiently resourced to process the sludge in the first place.”

The Wednesday, October 25 meeting noted the problems caused by Thames Water and called on the private utility firm “in the strongest possible terms” to honour its previous commitment to make a financial contribution to a community project.

It was also agreed to write Thames Water and the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to express dissatisfaction over the importation of sludge to Camberley.

Camberley Sewage Treatment Works (Image Google)