

**TO: ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE –
12 AUGUST 2003**

SUBJECT: SMELLS FROM A FOUL SEWER IN KENILWORTH

FROM: Environmental Health

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1. In response to the Notice of Motion presented to Council on 9 July by Cllr R I G Davies, to advise Members of the work which has been and which is currently being undertaken with regard to preventing smells emanating from the foul sewer serving the Rouncil Lane area of Kenilworth.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1. Sewage smells. However, there are some smells associated with sewage which are more unpleasant than others. If the smells remain in the sewer, they do not cause any problems. However, when they force their way out of the sewer, they can become very unpleasant for the surrounding residents. As far as we can tell, the smells complained of in this area of Kenilworth, are caused by sewage which has “gone septic”. They are not constant, and seem to affect different parts of the area at differing times. They are unpredictable.

2.2 History:

- 2.2.1 The sewer serving this area was constructed when the houses were built (Circa 1945) and is a 9 inch pipe enlarging to a 12 inch one running from Rouncil Lane near to Rounds Hill, turning at Mortimer Road and turning again to run behind the houses in Rouncil Lane and Leycester Road (taking some right-angled turns before eventually discharging into a larger sewer in Warwick Road. It has been added to over the years, with newer properties being connected, but it is of an adequate size to take the effluent from the area.
- 2.2.2 When the abattoir at Banner Hill Farm was constructed in the 1980s, it was connected to this existing sewer by way of a (very) long private pipe (rising main), along which waste and sewage was pumped at intervals. This is a perfectly normal practice and, indeed, was the preferred option at the time for the discharge of waste. (Other options which could have been considered might have included the construction of a new sewage treatment works on the site and the discharge of treated waste into a suitable watercourse, as happens with other large commercial enterprises in the area. As far as I can ascertain, there is no suitable watercourse in the vicinity). The sewer in Rouncil Lane is of such a size that it can readily take the volumes of sewage produced by the abattoir.

- 2.2.3 I can find no records of complaints of smells associated with the abattoir whilst it was being operated by Snelsons (this is not conclusive as Environmental Health often destroys files over seven years old), and the abattoir closed for a time (2 years?) in the 1990s, only to reopen in early 2000 in the face of fierce opposition from residents.
- 2.2.4 Since the abattoir reopened as Farmers Fresh in 2000(?), there have been repeated and strong complaints about smells (unpleasant, bad egg smell, sewage smells) which residents have attributed to the working of the abattoir. These complaints have, in the main, originated from a small number of residents. However, when we have investigated the situation, the smells have affected many others.
- 2.2.5 The smells emanate from road gullies and inspection chambers on the public sewer, and from inspection chambers in gardens on private drains and sewers which connect to the public sewer, and seem to pervade the general area for long periods of time – sometimes many hours.
- 2.2.6 The smells do not seem to occur at set times of the day, or at set times of the week, and even occur at weekends (sometimes) when the abattoir is not working. The effluent from the abattoir, whilst including blood from the operations and so being stained red, is stored on site, passed through a 3mm screen, and treated with chemicals (hypochlorite) before being pumped to be discharged into the public sewer in Rouncil Lane on the corner of Rounds Hill. The treatment with hypochlorite is carried out by hand and, at times has failed to be sufficient to remove smells from the effluent. This has been a source of concern and there have been numerous contacts with the company running the abattoir to ensure that a proper system of management is in place to eliminate all smells from the effluent. I am confident that the management of the abattoir has now got the treatment of their waste under control sufficiently so that at the point of discharge into the public sewer, it is not giving off any unpleasant odour.

2.3 **Where are the smells coming from?**

- 2.3.1 Provided that sewers are properly constructed, to an adequate fall, at a proper size, with no obstructions in them, sewage is conveyed away from property (both domestic, industrial and commercial) without causing any problems – be that odour, spillage or backing-up. On the other hand however, should a sewer be constructed too flat (or even with a negative gradient), or if there are obstructions in them, waste can lie in the sewer for some time before being conveyed away by usage. In such instances, especially during summer/warm conditions, any sewage lying in the pipe can quickly turn “septic” and produce extremely unpleasant odours (bad egg smells). Where these are contained within the sewer, they are not a problem to surrounding residents. Where, however, the smell is allowed to “escape” into the atmosphere (or even in some instances travel back up pipes into buildings), consequences can be very unpleasant.
- 2.3.2 Given that the smells come from the sewer, there are a number of sources and, probably, one overriding cause:

- Certain of the road gullies in Rouncil Lane (and Mortimer Road) appear to smell of sewage at times. This does not appear to be connected with any pumping cycle of the waste from the abattoir, and does not seem to have any pattern. Road gullies are not normally connected to foul sewers, but these are. In order to prevent smells coming from such gullies, they are water-trapped and any overflow pipe has a “bung” inserted. Warwickshire County Council Highway Engineering Section has recently examined these gullies and discovered that a number of the “bungs” are missing. These will be replaced in due course.
- The houses served by this sewer connect to it through private sewers (serving a small number of houses – typically 8 -10) and are separated from it by inspection chambers which have “intercepting traps”. Over the years, these intercepting traps often become blocked (with grease, fat or other matter or objects) and, in order to clear them, the cap which is fitted to the rodding eye is removed and not replaced. Should this happen, there is a direct, untrapped, connection between the public and private sewer or drain. In the recent past, Environmental Health has advised a number of householders who we knew to affected in this manner, to replace the cap to the rodding eye. These particular householders have not had problems since.
- As mentioned above, the public sewer in question is a 9 inch and 12 inch pipe which has numerous connections to it along its length before it discharges into a larger sewer in Warwick Road. There are also a number of sharp bends in the sewer and “flat” lengths which have a tendency to slow down the flow. Where flow is slowed, there is often deposition of solids in the sewer, such that sewage flow is impeded. Where this happens, the impeded flow can turn septic and give off foul smells. There are a number of inspection chambers on this length of sewer which are not sealed (not in itself anything unusual) and which smell. These, as is the public sewer itself, are owned and maintained by Severn Trent Water.
- Although it is not possible at this stage to be certain, Environmental Health is of the opinion that the reason that smells emanate from the sewer causing such a nuisance, is that the pumped flow from the abattoir stirs-up sediment and retained sewage in the pipe.

2.4 **What has been / is being done.**

- 2.4.1 Environmental Health has responded to complaints from residents over the past few years and has sought to rectify deficiencies by negotiation. These deficiencies have included:
- Ensuring that bungs are in place in the road gullies. (It would seem that these get dislodged at times, as we have evidence that all were in place approximately 18 months ago, but that five are missing at present.
 - Advising residents how they can “help themselves” by replacing any missing rodding eye caps.

- Meeting with the abattoir management to ensure that they have systems in place which prevent their waste from causing offensive smells.

2.4.2 On 23 June 2003, Environmental Health wrote to the occupiers of 2 -48 Leycester Road and 34 – 88 and 31 – 123 Rouncil Lane explaining that we were attempting to obtain fuller information aabout the smells they were experiencing, and requesting them to fill out a “nuisance record sheet” over the subsequent three weeks detailing the date, duration and nature of any smells perceived, and asking them to make comments, including details of wind and weather conditions if possible. We enclosed a reply-paid envelope for their completed sheet. To date, we have received replies from 22 households out of a total of 93. the results of this consultation are being recorded on a spreadsheet and will be analysed over the next few weeks.

2.4.3 The Housing Business Unit has, during the past four months, carried out work to the property we own in Leycester Road to ensure that the drainage associated with these houses/bungalows is not causing a problem. Since carrying out this work, they have not received any further complaints.

2.4.4 Until very recently, Severn Trent Water has been reluctant to meet with officers from Environmental Health or to tell us what they are doing to stop their sewers smelling. Arrangements have now been made for senior officers of both organisations to meet and discuss what needs to be done, and to carry things through to a solution.

3. **OUTCOME(S) REQUIRED**

Members are requested to consider this (interim) report, and any verbal update available at the Committee meeting, and agree to receive a fuller report to a future meeting when more information is available..

Paul Leeman
Divisional Environmental Health Officer

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Nil

Areas in District Affected: Kenilworth St Johns.

Executive Portfolio Area and Holder: Environment Services - Mrs M Begg.

For further information about this report please contact:

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