

## Meeting with United Utilities

23<sup>rd</sup> August 2022

Held at: Hoscar Waste Water Treatment Works (WWTW)

### Attendees

Parbold Parish Council: Cllr Brian Arnold, Cllr May Blake, Cllr Ellis Gill, Beth Joule (Clerk)

United Utilities: Joanna Williams, Richard Fowler

Environment Agency (part of meeting): Claire Hayter, Pete Towne, Dave Hughes, Andy Thompson

Introductions were made and apologies given on behalf of Carol Pollitt (Environmental Health, WLBC) who had been invited but who is on leave.

Special thanks were recorded to the late Cllr Paul Quirk, who had championed the issue discussed today and had worked hard to help eradicate the odour problem.

### Background

This group last met on 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2019 (see notes below) but due to Covid 19 there has been very limited interaction since.

It was explained that United Utilities are divided into 2 areas – Network and Process. Network deal with pipeline issues, flooding etc and Process are responsible for the treatment works.

Up to January 2022, there had been an App in place through which any instances of odour could be reported. It was explained, however, that there were technical and cyber security issues that meant that it was impractical to continue. Also, the App did not capture enough data to link in with UU's complaints system which in turn did not reflect the true picture of the odour problem, nor give enough data to OFWAT.

Any complaints received by the UU Service desk need to be investigated and this often means a physical visit to the site of the odour by UU staff and/or Environmental Health (EH) officers. Odours cannot be efficiently measured or

identified which occasionally means that the source may be elsewhere, such as farmers spreading slurry or rotting crops in nearby fields, or turf being lifted.

### Current situation

It is generally recognised that due to investment of over £6 million in recent years the odour emanating from the Hoscar treatment works has significantly reduced but has not been eradicated. Improvements over the years include covering the filter beds, increasing the capacity of the storm tanks and a proactive approach to breakdowns.

The Environment Agency monitor processes at the Hoscar site and issue a permit to operate – this includes monitoring the levels of odour being discharged and complying with odour control requirements.

When planned or unplanned maintenance or an unforeseen breakdown results in an odour discharging into the area UU generate an automatic text to any mobile number registered on an account within a 0.95 mile radius of the Hoscar site, warning of the possibility of being affected by the odour.

Although the App no longer operates residents can report odours to the UU Service Desk or via the website. Each report will need to be investigated which may be time consuming for UU operational staff but it was agreed that it is important to record a clear picture of how often these odours occur and what areas are most affected. This will drive the requirement for further improvement to minimise these instances.

### The way forward

The previous reporting process was unsatisfactory and inefficient. It is now proposed that if residents of Parbold wish to complain about the odour this should be direct via the UU service desk on 0345 075 0713 or online through the UU website complaints portal. This means that all data is captured in the generic complaints process that UU are required by OFWAT to investigate.

It is recognised that more investment is required to improve facilities at Hoscar WWTW, as increased demand for treatment and ageing infrastructure would otherwise present a risk to the operational viability of this plant. Managers at Hoscar WWTW will articulate this risk when preparing for the next Asset

Management Plan (AMP) cycle which identifies essential capital projects for the coming years.

It was also agreed that involvement by local Environmental Health Officers in this working party is paramount and although not present at this meeting it is expected that the officers will participate fully in working alongside UU and the Parish Council to resolve the current issues.

It was agreed to meet as a group in early spring 2023 and again in Autumn, and dates set as Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> March and Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup> October 2023.

**Update following meeting at Hoscar Sewage Works (Wigan Waste Water Treatment Centre) scheduled for 3rd December 2019.**

Parbold Parish Council United Utilities meeting - 3rd December 2019

In attendance: Cllr Arnold, Cllr Quirk, Cllr Blake and the clerk.

Hosted by Claire Mallard - Asset Manager Wigan WWTC

Richard Fowler, United utilities, Jessica Betts - Production Manager, Kate Elliot - Environment Agency

Jill Antrobus - Senior Environmental Health Officer , WLBC, Gill Perkins - Environmental Health WLBC

The role of the Environment Agency is to issue permit and control of water quality leaving the site predominates, but it does cover a small section of land around the consolidation tanks too.

Environmental Health are involved in responding to complaints of odour by neighbours.

The presentation was given on power-point and will be distributed by Claire Mallard to the parish council following the meeting.

In 2019 there have been 33 complaints over 22 days, made by 11 individuals.

Between 20 - 26th May - 12 complaints. 4-13th July - 9 complaints (? that's only 21 of them)

WLBC reported 43 complaints in 2019 - discrepancy of 10.

The following statistics were then compiled:

YEAR	Number of complaints recorded by	
	United Utilities	WLBC
2018	154	156
2017	50	57
2016	120	85
2015	116	100
2014	40	199

The Environment Agency had no recorded complaints.

There are clearly discrepancies still over reporting.

We are encouraged to continue reporting on the gizmo system.

United Utilities will ensure that the gizmo complaints are passed to both Environment Agency and WLBC.

United Utilities will inform the parish council of any proactive or reactive maintenance that might give rise to an odour problem in the village. Maintenance is commonly done during January - March as the weather conditions usually mean odour problems reduced at this time. In warmer weather odour problems increase.

It is frustrating that every time new management are introduced they have no historical experience or briefing on the odour issues we've had with the plant. This particular new group claim not to have any information or minutes of previous meeting, in fact no idea what the shape of the meeting would be. It was encouraging that the Environment Agency (EA) sent a representative though disconcerting that they were not included in the notification process using the gizmo. On the whole this was a good meeting, forming a connection for future relations.