

BROOMFIELD AND KINGSWOOD PARISH COUNCIL

www.broomfieldandkingswood.org.uk

Chairman:
Cllr. Bob Bowker

Please reply to:

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Your ref: LD/JE/CCMS 61154

7 November 2007

Mr L Dawson
Chief Executive Officer
Southern Water Services Limited
Southern House
Yeoman Road
Worthing
Sussex BN13 3NX

Dear Mr Dawson,

RE: SEWAGE AND DRAINAGE ISSUES – KINGSWOOD, KENT

I refer to my letter of 29 October 2007 in which I stated I would write further to you following the meeting of the Parish Council held 5 November.

Thank you for your apologies for the delay in reporting back to the Parish Council – the continued lack of response or communication by Southern Water over a long period (nine months) has caused a good deal of frustration and anger locally.

Having supplied Councillors with a copy of your letter dated 24 October, and made members of the public present at the 5 November meeting aware of its contents, I would now like to take the opportunity to make the following observations:

Paragraph 3 – *“our records show that we have no history of reported incidents in the Ashford Drive area regarding the public sewer network”* and, *“we have had 2 incidents report to us this year but both were found to be problems with private drainage systems and not within the public sewer”*. These two statements were very hotly disputed by members of the public present at the meeting, many of whom have lived in Ashford Drive or surrounding area for many years.

For example, on Sunday 15 July, numbers 24, 26 and 28 Ashford Drive experienced blockages, No. 28 being the home of Councillor Fitzpatrick. It would appear that your system recorded only one affected one property and also that it was a problem with a private drainage system? Councillor Fitzpatrick, himself a retired senior engineer, is adamant that the blockages to the three properties were caused by back flowing from problems in the main sewer.

A second illustration of this was provided by a very long-standing resident present at the 5 November meeting, who described her experience in October / November 2006 when, due to serious sewage

flooding in the vicinity of Charlesford Avenue / Whitehall Drive, she was required to walk along raised boards whilst a workman carried her dog through the affected area. This particular, and serious flooding incident must surely be recorded?

Whilst noting your recommendation in Paragraph 10 of your letter, that residents ask for a reference number which begins 'CSMS' (to be highlighted on the Parish Website and in the December issue of the village magazine), you will be aware that on a number of previous occasions, I have asked for a dedicated name and telephone number for residents to report incidents and ensure accurate recording to enable you to build up a full picture of the severity and frequency of the blockages, etc., and in particular their location. I believe Southern Water's continued failure to provide residents with a specific contact has resulted in the non-recording of incidents and/or their accurate collating, and therefore you are not aware of the full extent of the problems, or the frequency.

Residents report that for many years they have suffered serious problems to private drainage systems caused by blockages in the public sewer system. Some of these problems have been so severe, that toilets have overflowed inside houses and residents have elected to take out private insurance policies to cover associated costs.

Question: If blockages such as these are private and not connected with or affected by the public sewer system, why at the site meeting on 26 April, did your Engineers state that residents would not be charged for call outs to any such incidents? Also, can you please confirm whether this is still the case?

Paragraph 4 of your letter 24 October states, "*A CCTV survey of the sewers has confirmed that there are no major faults within the system. A small area of flat lying sewer was detected but this is not thought to be significant enough to cause any restrictions or delays in the flow of sewage through the sewer*".

At the site meeting on 26 April, those present, including Parish Councillors and representatives from other bodies, saw for themselves that the flow in the sewer from Ashford Drive > Robinseat (Broomfield Road) was almost non-existent. A discussion took place during which it was suggested (I believe by Paul Savage), that a pumping station might be needed to rectify this fault.

Question: Are you able to explain the apparent discrepancies in your County Engineer's report and the statement made by Paul Savage and/or your Engineers on 26 April please? It is also alleged by Councillor Fitzpatrick that the MTS Engineers who conducted the surveys and investigations in July, likewise formed very different opinions as to the state of the sewers and the general lack of flow.

Paragraph 6 informs us that your County Engineer "*spoke to two local residents who have lived in the area for 30 years they could not recall any problems with the sewers*". The only assumption is that the two residents to whom your County Engineers spoke must live in the area of the village served by the Gravelly Bottom Road sewer run, which to my knowledge, does not suffer the same problems – the east > west run along Gravelly Bottom Road has a significant fall in ground level, whereas the Ashford Drive / Broomfield Road run does not as the lie of the land at this location is generally much flatter. I am able to supply you with the names and addresses of a number of residents who have been seriously affected by the sewerage issues over many years, should you wish to pursue the matter further.

Residents have confirmed that they are aware of your increased, regular jetting regime to prevent the build up of any silt or fats that pass into the sewers, which does for the time being, appear to be having the desired effect in preventing further blockages. However, there is concern locally that this jetting programme is not an answer in the long term and I have to ask why such regular jetting is necessary if, as you state in your letter, the CCTV survey confirmed that there are no major faults?

Thank you for clarifying your position regarding the proposed Affordable Housing development at Ashford Drive. I can now confirm that a decision has been made to go ahead with a proposal to build 18 Affordable Homes on land at the north (cul-de-sac) end of Ashford Drive. With this decision comes additional worries for nearby residents, who are extremely concerned that any extra load on the existing sewers at this location can only serve to exacerbate the problems. It is, therefore, reassuring to learn that Southern Water would "*try to ensure that the problem is not made worse and connection is made at a point where there is sufficient capacity to cope with the increased flow*" and ideally, if 18 houses were considered to be a 'larger development' a self-contained sewerage system which does not connect to the systems of existing properties so that the impact on them is minimal, would appear to be one way forward, but does not, of course, resolve the current problems some residents are having to endure.

Your penultimate paragraph refers to your extensive investigations confirming that *“there are no visible problems with the sewer system and the current report of events confirms this to us”*. This does not, however, concur with the observations made by your Engineers, including Paul Savage, at the meeting in Ashford Drive on 26 April and I would therefore suggest that further consultation with them might be advisable to ensure all aspects of the alleged blockages, flows, pipe diameters, etc. are fully examined. Neither does it tell us the geographical extent of your survey, i.e. were tests conducted just in the area of Ashford Drive and Broomfield Road, or around Kingswood as a whole – sewerage problems have been experienced by residents living in a large area of the village and I have correspondence to this effect from residents living in Charlesford Avenue and Ivy Close.

At the meeting on 26 April your Engineers stated that initial tests would be carried out in the areas of Kingswood most affected, i.e. Ashford Drive, Broomfield Road and Charlesford Avenue, and thereafter further investigations would be carried out around the village generally. Please would you clarify the position in this regard.

These sewerage and drainage blockages simply cannot be allowed to continue, and should there be any recurrence of raw sewage leaks in the area, this must raise serious concerns regarding the health and safety of our Parish residents and visitors alike, and other environmental issues.

In the meantime I would be most grateful if you were able to send me a copy of your Chief Engineer’s report? This would not only serve to satisfy the concerns of Councillors, but would also hopefully set at rest, the minds of those residents most affected by this issue as a whole. It would also be extremely helpful if you were able to provide the Parish Council with a map showing the routing of the sewerage systems in Kingswood, particularly in respect of your comments made at Paragraph 5 of your letter.

I look forward to hearing from you at your early convenience, and in any case it would be extremely helpful to receive your reply prior to the next Parish Council meeting on 3rd December in order for me to further update Councillors and residents.

Yours sincerely,

Susan M Wotton
Parish Clerk

CC:

Hugh Robertson MP, Faversham & Mid Kent
Mr D Riley – Ashford Drive Action Group
Councillor Peter Parvin, Leeds Ward