

7th February 2008



# Special Edition

I had intended in the most recent edition of *The Golant Pill* to be provocative, but I certainly did not intend to cause offence, and nor did Simon Funnell in the front page article which I asked him to write: we offer our sincere apologies for any offence caused. Rightly or wrongly, I was trying to reflect the deep sense of frustration many felt with the sewage situation.

I regret, in particular, not mentioning the unstinting work of Tom Ross who continues to act as adviser to the Parish Council about the sewage scheme. I was alongside Tom at meetings of the Liaison group with SWW so I know at first hand how fortunate the village is to have a chemical engineer of his calibre speaking for us. It is a pity that SWW has been unable to produce an engineer with equal ability. Had they been able or willing to do so, many of our present problems could have been avoided.

I have, of course, spoken in person to Tom and he has graciously accepted my apology for not recognizing all his efforts in my editorial. He offered to write an article in the next issue of *The Golant Pill*, an offer which I accepted without hesitation! I hope that Tom will continue to write updates in future editions so that we are all informed. Be reassured: he is fully confident that the scheme *will* work, given time.

As someone who has served on a variety of committees throughout my whole life, and I have enjoyed doing so, am only too happy to highlight all the voluntary work which is given in our community. It can be such a thankless task at times. Very often one puts in a great deal of effort and much time to achieve very little.

At their recent meeting in our village hall, the SE Consultative Committee of Cornwall County Council agreed to hear about our plight. The meeting was chaired by our own County Councillor, Sally Bain. The Chair of our Parish Council, Sue Reardon, gave an impassioned summary of the problems and handed over a dossier from the Council giving full details. Every committee member was very receptive to her speech and to other comments from the floor. Two county councillors used similar words about their personal experiences with SWW as I had in my editorial! The whole committee agreed to look into the situation as a matter of urgency.

Just as *The Golant Pill* was going to press, Simon wrote on behalf of the Parish Council to Colin Breed, our MP, and to the Chairman of South West Water, and others! Simon apologizes for stating at the end of the letter that he was writing 'on behalf of the people of Golant' without asking each one of you, but I hope that you will agree that Simon, with plenty of technical input from Tom Ross to keep him on the right track, has composed a letter which seems to be getting the stirrings of a response. Already Simon has heard from the Planning Department at Cornwall County Council, and they have promised to look into any breaches of planning consent by SWW.

At the end of my editorial last week, I asked for 'Action' and I think you'll agree that there have been very positive developments in recent days! Our MP, County Council and Parish Councillors *are* working on our behalf to solve the serious sewage problems which beset our village.

To emphasize the constructive efforts which are going on behind the scenes, I have reproduced the letters from our MP and from the Project Manager at SWW, as well as Simon's letter to them, as I feel that it is important you are kept in the picture.

I shall endeavour to ensure that my next editorial has wind and tide behind it.

**Mike Harris,** Editor

30<sup>th</sup> January, 2008

Dear Mr Breed

### South West Water Sewage Treatment at Golant

I write on behalf on the St Sampson Parish Council and the residents of Golant in the hope that you can help us. In mid 2007 South West Water commissioned their two million pound sewage treatment scheme at Golant, and the process has never worked properly for more than two weeks at a time, and has now stopped working altogether.

As a result, five tankers a day, including weekends, are collecting untreated sewage and much surface water which goes in to the sewage system, and taking some 10,000 gallons per day out of the village to the treatment works at Par. Needless to say, the road into Golant is steep and narrow, and the disruption, noise, and environmental risk are all considerable.

I believe you were involved in some of the initial discussions about the scheme, which caused considerable controversy within the village. Nevertheless, once permission was granted we all did our best to co-operate with SWW and their contractors, MacAlpine, who were excellent. A liaison committee was set up, which I sat on, and we also had the help of a retired Chemical Engineer experienced in this kind of work, who devoted hours to helping SWW. He pointed out many shortcomings in the technical specifications, and yet SWW was never able to produce a Chemical Engineer of their own who would understand the issues involved.

A brief summary of our warnings which went unheeded, and have thus resulted in the present collapse of the system, is as follows:

Spring tides, which occur every two weeks, mean that salt water (which kills the bacteria in the RBC units and therefore stops them 'digesting' the sewage) can easily get into the laterals, and from these laterals the salt water is pumped up into the RBC units. SWW assured us at a public meeting that salt water would never get into the system. Salt water has never been out of the system.

Much of the water from the roof drains, and some water from a pond further up the village, is fed into the sewage system. We recommended strongly that SWW change this, or they would end up pumping perfectly clean rainwater 300 feet up, only for it to feed back down again into the river. Recent events, with the pumps breaking, shows how foolish SWW were to ignore this advice. The tankers are taking 10,000 gallons out of the village each day; Golant has less than a hundred properties connected to the system (many properties, like mine, are on septic tank), and some of these are holiday properties. Of the 10,000 gallons, a tiny fraction is sewage. Is this utter madness?

The odour control units at the pumping station and at the RBC units are incorrectly designed and fitted. Our resident engineer kept explaining this to SWW, but at no point in the last two years have they been able to produce an engineer who understands just why these units cannot work as they are at present configured. The smell down at the pumping station is adequate proof that these odour control units do not work.

The resident engineer also pointed out, at a very early stage, that the whole scheme is designed for a community at least two or three times the size of Golant. Unfortunately, everything at SWW is contracted out, so once the juggernaut starts to roll, nothing, least of all common sense, can stop it.

### Sewage Scheme Commissioned

Since the system was commissioned about nine months ago, it has never worked. There is, of course, enormous dilution of the raw sewage by the hundreds of tons of rainwater and pond water that can flow into the system. We are informed by SWW that the facility is meeting its permit conditions, which are fixed by the impact of the discharge on the river and not the performance of the RBC units. Salt water is still infiltrating the system and we suspect there is no biological activity whatsoever in these units. As a result, the RBC units are nothing more than expensive settling tanks. It would not have taken two million pounds to arrange to dilute the sewage with tons of water!

Salt water is still infiltrating the system, so that whenever the RBC units are re-seeded, the next batch of high tides destroys their effectiveness. The pumps are noisy, the odour control units do not, and cannot, work, and thousands of pounds of electricity are being used to pump what is almost entirely rainwater 300 feet up, so that it can trickle back down again.

Our sewage is well travelled, but untreated.

### Present Situation

Now, however, the pumps have finally given up the unequal battle: we have a two million pound scheme which does not work, and we have five tankers a day coming in and out of our tiny and once-delightful village. I strongly suspect that regulations about the transportation of raw sewage are being broken each time, and we are attempting to clarify this with SWW, who so far have not answered our questions on this.

Cornwall County Council must ensure that the specifications of treatment and noise which were part of the planning permission are being achieved. SWW must be made to accept that the scheme has been an expensive failure, and the villagers deserve to be listened to. Please help us get back our village, and also

far have not answered our questions on this.

Cornwall County Council must ensure that the specifications of treatment and noise which were part of the planning permission are being achieved. SWW must be made to accept that the scheme has been an expensive failure, and the villagers deserve to be listened to. Please help us get back our village, and also get a sewage treatment scheme we can believe in, and which works.

This scheme was ill-conceived and wrongly found support with Cornwall County Council despite failing to meet several current government recommendations. SWW Consultant Engineers clearly failed to pay more than lip service to any other options, and the fact that SWW could not produce one qualified Chemical Engineer to attend any of our many liaison meetings is astounding. Despite absolute assurances to the contrary, sea-water has regularly infiltrated the system, thus rendering the RBC units totally ineffective, and now the pumping station does not work. Even when this is repaired, the RBC units and the odour control units will still not work, and we will be saddled with one of the most expensive energy-consuming schemes imaginable.

I am sure you are aware of similar problems with other SWW schemes, such as the one at Mevagissey, and the current disputes at Tintagel and Boscastle. This scheme was brought to your attention when in the planning stages, but no help was forthcoming; I do hope that the Liberal Democrat presence in Cornwall will at last show that it has some influence.

Yours sincerely

Simon Funnell

For and on behalf of St Sampson Parish Council and the people of Golant.

Cc:

The Chairman, South West Water  
The Programme Manager, SWW  
The Environmental Agency, Bodmin and Exeter  
The Chairman, Cornwall County Council  
The Chief Planning Officer, CCC

01 February 2008



South West Water Sewage Treatment Plant at Golant

Thank you for your letter of 30<sup>th</sup> January and I am absolutely amazed that following all the efforts made by so many people and the clear indication from South West Water about the chosen site for the Treatment Plant, there have been so many problems and difficulties.

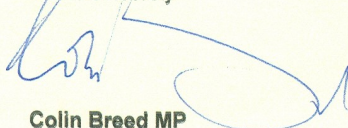
Whilst of course I am not aware of similar problems in other parts of Cornwall although I am engaged in considerable correspondence in respect of the Calstock Sewage Treatment Works, it is extremely disappointing that there has been such a complete failure.

Obviously I have written to the Chief Executive of South West Water requesting an explanation and it may well be that we should institute another local site meeting in due course.

However as soon as I receive a response from South West Water I will send you a copy and we can decide what further action might be necessary.

With kind regards

Yours sincerely



Colin Breed MP





**SOUTH WEST WATER**

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31 January 2008

Dear Mr Funnell

**Golant Sewage Treatment Project.**

I write to you following the receipt of a complaint letter from a member of the public and the issues discussed on the radio last week regarding the pumping station problems. Let me say initially that I apologise for the inconvenience caused by the tankers which are being used to empty the pumping station during the breakdown and the lack of communication with yourselves. Clearly it is essential to comply with the discharge consent to avoid the risk of allowing crude sewage to spill into the estuary.

A problem was identified with the pumps in late November 2007; whereby the pumps were not achieving the pass forward flow that they were designed for. The pumps were dismantled and the impellers were found to be badly worn. Replacement impellers have now been fitted and the pumps back in operation. The pump operating system has been reviewed and changes are proposed to be implemented week commencing 4 February. The worn impellers have been returned to the manufacturer to identify the reason for the failure, additional impellers have been ordered to ensure spares are available.

The scheme, as has been stated, has had various problems since commissioning, and it is proposed that on completion of the pump repairs, further investigations will be carried out with regards to the pump performance and odour / saline issues. I would like to give the Parish Council the assurance that South West Water fully intends to address the findings of the investigations in order to bring this unacceptable period to a close.

Yours sincerely



Mr P Brookes  
**Programme Manager**

