

Permitting decisions - Surrender

We have decided to accept the surrender of the permit for Home Farm Pig Unit operated by P Ames, T J Ames & H Ames.

The permit number is EPR/YP3831MN.

We are satisfied that the necessary measures have been taken to avoid any pollution risk and to return the site to a satisfactory state. We consider in reaching this decision that we have taken into account all relevant considerations and legal requirements.

Purpose of this document

This decision document provides a record of the decision-making process. It:

- highlights key issues in the determination.
- summarises the decision-making process in the decisions considerations section to show how all relevant factors have been taken into account.

Read the permitting decisions in conjunction with the environmental permit and the surrender notice.

Key issues of the decision

The Operator has an anaerobic digester on site which is not regulated by the Environment Agency, nor is it within this permit boundary. On 13 February 2021, this anaerobic digester (AD) tank failed resulting in releasing approximately 2,000m³ digestate into four surface water ditches, which entered via an adjacent surface water ditch to the north of the tank flowing in a northerly direction along connected field drainage ditches. Previous laboratory analysis of the digestate from the plant showed that it contained a high concentration of ammonia compounds which could be highly toxic to aquatic life. Although the AD tank did not require permitting under EPR, the Environment Agency attended the incident due to the environmental impact to ensure effective remediation was completed.

The operator contacted a specialist agricultural contractor to advise on the loss and supply plant for the remediation of the areas contaminated by the spill. The findings, sampling, analysis and description of remediation works is contained in document 'Seed Environmental Limited Final Report' reference '1684 Ames – Brunstead,' dated 15/02/2021 (this decision document will refer to this report as the 'Seed Report').

According to the Seed Report, the drainage ditches contaminated by the digestate ultimately flow into the North Walshal and Dilham Canal approximately 1.7km to the west of the spill. The affected ditches remove surface waters and groundwater from the adjacent land and are spring-fed.

During the clean-up operation, dams were placed in the four affected ditches to limit the spread of digestate. A vacuum tanker was used to remove digestate from the water up-stream of the emergency dams which was sent for off-site disposal. This prevented further overspill into the watercourse.

Additional emergency soils bunds were constructed to provide further containment (along with on-site slurry tanks) and the opportunity to pump it out. Due to the large volume of digestate requiring removal, arrangements were made to also send this for land spreading in agreement with the Environment Agency.

A series of filtration barriers were placed in affected ditches to remove residual ammonia and ammonium. Mechanical dredging also took place to remove visible digestate material. An additional surface water treatment system was installed in a particular stretch of affected waters to abstract digestate-impacted waters. This system worked by sending abstracted waters through an air stripping tower to encourage aeration and the nitrification of ammonia and ammonium concentrations.

The abstracted contaminated waters were treated using vessels containing aqueous phase zeolite clinoptilolite as additional measures to remove ammonia and ammonium.

Some of the treated waters were discharged into the main receiving ditch flowing east to west offsite. Other impacted and treated waters were used to irrigate a pre-agreed grass field. An aeration and recirculation system was installed in three ditch locations to enhance the removal of harmful compounds resulting from the contamination event. Mechanical dewatering and dredging also took place within the affected watercourses.

The Seed Report describes the sampling and monitoring regime used from the start of the incident to 27/09/21 which is when results consistently showed levels of contaminants in the affected waters were satisfactory. The Environment Agency agreed that the remedial ammonium target of 1.0 mg/l in the impacted drainage ditches needed to be achieved before the dammed waters were released. These releases happened in stages between 02/08/21 and 27/09/21. Seed continued to monitor the water quality following the release to confirm no impact. The incident site remediation equipment was therefore fully decommissioned on 07/10/21. On 21/12/21, the Environment Agency confirmed with the author of the Seed Report that they were satisfied that the remedial works had been successfully completed.

This application to fully surrender the permit has included the Seed Report as part of the Site Condition Report. Correspondence by email received on 22/03/23 from the author of the Seed Report provided justification for not requiring sampling of the local groundwater. The decision not to conduct this sampling was made because it was considered that the upward head of pressure provided protection of groundwater receptors. The consultant calculated that the amount of water they pumped out over the course of a weekend exceeded the volume of the affected ditches. We have accepted this justification.

The site is remaining active, albeit with lower pig places which is why the operator has decided to surrender. Therefore, it has not been decommissioned.

Given the previous good compliance record of the site, and the nature of the comprehensive remediation following the digestate leak incident, we are satisfied that this permit can be safely surrendered.

Decision considerations

Confidential information

A claim for commercial or industrial confidentiality has not been made.

The decision was taken in accordance with our guidance on confidentiality.

Identifying confidential information

We have not identified information provided as part of the application that we consider to be confidential.

The decision was taken in accordance with our guidance on confidentiality.

Pollution risk

We are satisfied that the necessary measures have been taken to avoid a pollution risk resulting from the operation of the regulated facility.

Satisfactory state

We are satisfied that the necessary measures have been taken to return the site of the regulated facility to a satisfactory state, having regard to the state of the site before the facility was put into operation.

Growth duty

We have considered our duty to have regard to the desirability of promoting economic growth set out in section 108(1) of the Deregulation Act 2015 and the guidance issued under section 110 of that Act in deciding whether to accept this permit surrender.