

## **FAQ's – Wastewater maintenance and effluent disposal**

### **How do I know if I currently pay towards wastewater disposal?**

This information should be contained in your latest service charge statement. In the absence of this you will be able to check this with our service charge team – [servicecharges@aster.co.uk](mailto:servicecharges@aster.co.uk). The cost on your service charge statement will be under the heading "Sewerage".

You can also view your service charges online through [MyAster](#).

MyAster is an online portal where you can monitor your account with Aster, complete tasks yourself and contact us at any time to suit you.

### **Why are you changing the current contract?**

Our current contract with Willow Pumps is coming to an end in autumn 2024. We understand that some customers have not been happy with the current contract, and this presents us with a good opportunity for a fresh look at the market.

### **Where can I access more information about the services you are looking to provide?**

A description of the services to be provided under the agreement can be found on our website search for [aster.co.uk/existing-customers/get-involved/consultations](http://aster.co.uk/existing-customers/get-involved/consultations).

### **What will the new contract cover?**

The agreement we intend to enter into is for the maintenance of wastewater infrastructure and effluent disposal this includes sewage treatment plants, septic tanks, surface water pumps and other installations serving homes not connected to mains drainage.

The services to be performed consist of the following:

- (ii) Servicing and Maintenance of wastewater treatment plants, septic tank systems and associated pumping stations including emptying and disposal of wastewater liquor and sludge. Also including routine maintenance and upkeep of mechanical / electrical plant.
- (iii) Reactive and emergency work as required to maintain the continuous function of the above wastewater works and systems.
- (iv) Reactive and emergency work as required to maintain the function of the main drainage pipe network connected to the wastewater systems.

The tender price will not include the cost of the utilities or the Environment Agency Licence.

### **Will the new contract be cheaper?**

Unfortunately, we cannot guarantee the new contract will be cheaper. Since entering the contract with Willow Pumps the economic environment has changed with inflation rates having increased.

**The plant my property is currently connected to is stoppered off and being emptied by a tanker. Will this continue with the new contractor?**

If the plant your property is connected to has not been repaired/replacement by the time the new contract comes into force then yes, your plant will remain stoppered off.

**I want to disconnect my property from Aster's plant is this possible?**

Yes, it may be possible to disconnect your property from Aster's plant. To do so we would advise you to seek advice from a drainage expert.

**Are you reviewing the current specification?**

Yes, we are. As part of our procurement exercise, Aster have reviewed our current specification with input from both internal stakeholders and an external consultant to ensure that the future specification is best suited for the individual plant requirements and to ensure its operating correctly, and where applicable, is compliant with the Environment Agencies requirements.

**Will you be approaching local or national companies?**

Aster anticipates procuring a contract with a series of regional lots which reflect the location of the equipment. The tender will go to an open market of both regional and national providers and the evaluation will allow for the most suitable contractor for each individual region to be appointed accordingly.

**How long will the new agreement be for?**

The intention is for the new agreement to be for 3 years with a possibility of 2 further 1-year extensions. (Total up to 5 years).

**Why can't I nominate a contractor?**

Due to the size and value of the proposed lots, we are not inviting you to nominate a possible contractor, as Aster are required to comply with the Public Contract Regulations and advertise the contract opportunity by way of a public notice through the Governments 'Find a Tender Service'. This allows for interested companies the opportunity to bid.

However, if you are aware of a contractor who may be interested in the contract, please encourage them to log in to the "find a tender service" website, where they will be able to view our contract notice.

**What happens if the contractor doesn't perform well, do they keep getting the work?**

The contract will say that if works or services are not delivered in accordance with the contract requirements, we may end the contract.

**You say this is a legal consultation, are you now going to add legal costs to my service charges?**

No. Although this consultation process is required by law there are no legal costs involved.

**When do you hope to have the new agreement in place?**

Following completion of a successful consultation and tendering process.

### **What if I am not happy with the current services provided?**

Under this consultation process we are unable to deal with complaints about quality of current provisions. Please call the contact centre on 0333 400 822 to log any issues you are experiencing.

## **FAQ's Section 20 Consultations**

### **What is a section 20 consultation and why does it affect me?**

The Section 20 consultation process was put in place to protect service charge payers and to make sure that landlords only carry out work or enter into service contracts that are necessary and at a reasonable cost.

Anyone who pays a service charge whether they are a leaseholder, shared owner or tenant maybe be affected by a section 20 consultation.

The process allows service charge payers the chance to comment on the works and sometimes to suggest contractors for the works depending on the value of the contract.

### **When is the S20 consultation process used?**

For any one-off works that will cost an individual service charge payer over £250 or for any new service (for example ground maintenance) that lasts longer than 12 months and will cost any service charge payer over £100, we need to let you know and give you the chance to comment on what we are planning.

Your comments (known as observations) form part of a formal consultation between us and you and it's our legal requirement under section 20 of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 to involve you.

### **How does the Section 20 consultation process work?**

This may vary according to the type of work and the cost but it's usually along these lines:

1. We send you a legal Notice telling you what work or type of contract we are planning to enter into. This will include letting you know where you can find out more details and how you can provide your comments.
2. We get some quotes from contractors, taking in to account any comments we've received.
3. We send you a 'notice of estimates' which gives you the details of the estimated costs. You are able to provide feedback to us on the estimates.

4. Taking into account any feedback we received we award the contract to a preferred supplier to carry out the work.
5. If the contractor is not the cheapest we will write to explain why they have been awarded the contract.

### **Can I nominate a contractor?**

While the opinions and views of Tenants, Leaseholders & Shared Owners are invited and considered, you are not invited to nominate a contractor or company for us to approach. This is in line with the regulations set out in the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 as amended by the Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Act 2002, as the invitation to tender is made by way of public notice.

### **What is an observation?**

You have a right to reply with your comments to a Section 20 notice up to 30 calendar days from the date of the notice. Your reply is known as an 'observation'. We will give due regard to any observations received during the consultation period.

A summary of all the observations received and our responses to them will be sent out with the next stage of the consultation documents.

All the comments and feedback we receive are taken in to account when planning the work and awarding the contract.

### **How do I make an observation?**

Your observation must be in writing either by letter or email. Any email should be sent to the email address at the top of this letter. Letters should be sent to the following address, Section 20 Officer, Aster Group, Sarsen Court, Horton Avenue, Cannings Hill, Devizes, Wiltshire, SN10 2AZ. You can't make observations verbally over the telephone or in person.

### **Is this Section 20 Notice a bill?**

No, this is not a bill. You don't need to make any payment in response to receiving this letter or any enclosed notices.

### **How much will this cost me?**

We will contact you again at Stage 2 of this consultation to let you know of any changes to your service charges as a result of this contract.

### **What if I cannot afford to pay?**

If you are worried about how you will meet the cost please speak to your housing officer. For more information visit <https://www.aster.co.uk/existing-customers/leaseholder/what-to-do-if-you-are-struggling-to-pay>

**I have received a S20 notice but I don't think it's for me.**

If you receive a notice to your address but not in your name, please let us know, it may be that our records need updating or that the leaseholder is subletting the property to you.

If you are a leaseholder sub-letting your property, please let us have a correspondence address so we can send S20 Notices to you there.

**I am planning to sell my property before the service described in the S20 notice is completed.**

You should keep the documents safe and pass them to your solicitor when you have accepted an offer. Any potential purchaser needs to be aware of any Section 20 consultation.

**Where can I go for advice?**

You can contact your local Citizens Advice Bureau for independent advice. The following websites also have useful information about the S20 process:

<http://www.lease-advice.org>

<http://www.leaseholderadvicecentre.co.uk>