

## **Advice on Dealing with Agricultural Smells**

### **General Information**

The Council frequently occasionally complaints about agricultural odours affecting areas of Aylesbury Vale. This is especially true during the spring and in summer after harvesting. Generally, the most common source of odour complaints relate to the spreading of bio-solids (sewage sludge), animal manures (such as chicken manure) and slurries (muck spreading). Prevailing winds can carry these odours some distance across fields and into residential areas.

Spreading of all these waste materials is recognised as standard agricultural practice, and as Aylesbury Vale consists of a large proportion of working farmland, such odour must be expected from time to time. It is not always possible to advise as to the expected duration or anticipated intensity of odours, as this can be dependent upon weather conditions but odours usually only last for a short period of time. Farmers are encouraged to use best practice whilst spreading on their fields.

### **Why do farmers spread when they do?**

Spreading can only be undertaken in fair weather. Ploughing in wet, cold or frozen ground is not feasible. The growing season dictates that most crops are harvested in summer and ploughing in of manures follows almost immediately. This is to replenish the soil ready for the following year. Unfortunately, this means that spreading is most likely to occur at times when people will want to have their windows open or be relaxing in their gardens.

### **Sewage sludge**

Most people recognise the smell of animal slurry and will generally accept it as a part of being in the countryside. What concerns many however is the use, and in particular the smell, of sewage sludge. Sewage sludge is the semi-solid material left over from the sewage treatment process. It is a readily available and sustainable resource, which contains valuable nutrients and trace elements essential to plants and animals. The spreading of sewage sludge onto agricultural land is a legitimate practice and is considered the best option for disposal. It is a perfectly lawful activity. It is recognised as a sustainable agricultural practice as it reduces the use of chemical fertilisers. Without recycling in this way, these wastewater by-products would need to be disposed of in much less sustainable ways, for example by being sent to landfill.

### **What can be done?**

The process of spreading is a key factor in successful farming; unfortunately, the weather and positions of their fields/crops dictate when farmers can spread. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) has published a [Code of Good Agricultural Practice for Farmers, Growers and Land managers](#). The code is a practical guide to help farmers protect the environment in which they operate. Whilst the code in itself is not law, compliance with it can help farmers meet their legal obligations. The code provides advice to farmers on how to carry out their activities, such as spreading, whilst causing minimum nuisance to neighbouring properties.

In instances of significant odour over a prolonged period, an Officer will visit the area to assess the extent and severity of the odour. They will also try and establish if the odour is the result of any bad agricultural practice. Where farmers are spreading without regard to the code then they will be contacted and advised as to what best practice is and encouraged to use it.

It is unlikely that legal action will be taken against agricultural odours in a countryside location, unless the odour is unreasonably excessive and is identified as being the result of bad agricultural practices. If the Council is satisfied that, despite having received appropriate advice, agricultural material is continuing to be spread in a manner which does not fully follow the Code, and this in turn is resulting in unacceptable levels of odour, then it may be possible to take legal action.

#### **Further advice**

To obtain further advice on agricultural odour issues please email:

[envhealth@aylesburyvaledc.gov.uk](mailto:envhealth@aylesburyvaledc.gov.uk)