

Revamp Your Tank: Frequently asked questions

As the scheme has developed and taken shape, there have been some additions and amendments to the FAQs as more detail has come to light. Please note, this scheme is run by Wiltshire Council in collaboration with Wessex Rivers Trust.

1. What does the scheme cover?

Revamp Your Tank is not to be used to retrospectively fund projects already agreed or completed. It is funded using central government money aimed at improving water quality in our rare chalk streams. The scheme will cover the full provision and installation of a new package treatment plant (the **New Plant**) to replace your old system. This will include:

- an initial survey carried out by a contractor and an assessment of your current system's performance;
- the contractor will design and procure the most appropriate New Plant for your property subject to the terms of the scheme;
- all groundworks associated with the installation of the New Plant;
- removal and/or decommissioning of the old system;
- installation of the New Plant and any required services, including electrical supply;
- making good of the ground and leaving the area as found, as much as is possible (this may involve spreading grass seed over the newly disturbed soil);
- the first annual 'check-up' service to ensure proper function and maintenance. This will include a tank empty, but not include any operational costs i.e. running costs

2. How will the funds be dealt with and when will they be paid?

- a. The contractor will be paid directly by the Council and will not ask for any money or bank details from you, as the customer, **unless any variations to the design and installation plans have been made by you and privately quoted to you.**

3. Do I have to organise anything?

- a. If your sewage system only serves your property, you will only need to coordinate with our third party contractors once the project starts and arrange site visits, dates and access for works etc. All other project management and payment will be cared for.

If there are multiple properties involved, neighbours will need to coordinate acceptance of the scheme and, if in agreement, appoint a 'lead applicant' for ease of communication. This is done through signing extra documents.

4. *Why are septic tanks thought to pollute rivers?*

- a. They are designed so that the liquid and solid waste is separated, with the liquid being released into the surrounding soil (a drainage field) where it can be assimilated ('eaten') by the bacteria naturally occurring in the soil. However, sometimes septic tanks have been placed too close to surface water bodies, or they become affected by groundwater or, increasingly, surface water flooding. In this way, the effluent they release can reach rivers and streams as pollution. Moreover, if a septic tank malfunctions, it may also release untreated effluent.

5. *What is better about the new system?*

- a. Package treatment plants (PTPs) not only separate the waste, they also biologically treat them to produce bacteriologically safer and clearer water. This is why they are legally allowed to discharge straight into a water course, whereas septic tanks are not. The PTPs being used in this scheme are also designed to remove some excess nutrients from the wastewater, which cause pollution if released. In addition, if tertiary treatment is used in series with a PTP, this results in the highest water quality standards being reached.

6. *What's in it for me?*

- a. This is a scheme designed to benefit both the environment and the homeowner. As well as having the substantial cost of replacing your system covered entirely, and having the project managed on your behalf, the funding will also cover a 1 year service plan and one tank empty. These benefits are, of course, additional to helping to reduce pollution inputs into our waterways.

7. *How long will the new system last?*

- a. Roughly 30-40 years if it is well maintained. Maintenance schedules and model specific information will all be given to you by the contractor on completion of the project.

8. *Is the new package treatment plant likely to smell?*

- a. If your system is well maintained and service according to the manufacturer's guidelines, it should not smell. Foul odours will be a symptom of an issue.

9. *Is the new package treatment plant likely to make a sound?*

- a. Yes. A sewage plant requires the addition of oxygen into the water which is added through an air blower or air compressor. This can produce a humming sound. Our specification of the systems to be considered for use dictate they must run below 50dB.

10. Are the proposed PTPs compliant with the current legislation?

- a. Yes, they will be compliant with all environmental permitting regulations such as the Environment Agency's General Binding Rules

11. What are the timeframes for delivery?

- a. Mid – late summer is when the first rounds can expect site visits. From there, projects will agree works start dates within a matter of weeks. Projects will run through the rest of 2024 into 2025, and will be prioritised according to a) the simplicity of the works and permissions to be sought b) the geographical location and neighbouring project sites (to be clustered together to minimise local disturbance).

More complex projects such as having multiple properties connected to a tank, or having the possibility of connecting to Wessex Water's mains network will take more time.

12. Will the scheme fund upgrades to recently installed housing association owned sewage treatment units? Including newer ones?

- a. We are targeting the older septic tanks first, so would not be looking to replace recently installed PTPs.

13. Is the scheme run on a 'first come first serve basis' and where are you prioritising?

- a. We are firstly targeting the headwaters of the tributaries to the Avon. Examples of these areas, but not limited to them, are the Upper Wylye (Deverills), Upper Nadder (Donheads), Upper Bourne (Collingbournes) and Upper Avon (upstream of Upavon). The scheme is likely to continue to run foreseeably due to funds generated by the scheme being recycled into more projects, thus creating the greatest benefit for the rivers. Therefore, the risk of missing out due to capacity is low.

14. How long will the average planning application process be for septic tank instalment?

- a. We are progressing a more streamlined process for planning in the form of a Local Development Order (LDO). This provides a blanket planning permission for projects of this nature that meet the Order's criteria. Some projects will meet the criteria of the LDO, and therefore be prioritised. Others, such as multiple properties being attached to a tank, or where a listed building is involved, will still require planning permissions and take longer.

15. Are there any other schemes of this nature already delivered in the country?

- a. Yes, another privately led scheme has been successfully delivered in Somerset and is now expanding into Wiltshire. Multiple Local Planning Authorities are also looking to deliver their own upgrade schemes such as this.

16. *What's included in the 1 year funded service plan?*

- a. An annual check-up and service is included with one tank empty. Operational costs such as electrical charges are not included.

17. *We have multiple properties connected to a single septic tank. Are the Package Treatment Plants (PTPs) on offer large enough to account for such scenarios?*

- a. Yes, the contractor would size the PTP accordingly to demand from the properties. Please note, these 'multiple property' projects are not covered by the local development order mentioned in Q15. As such, they will take a bit longer to complete and require more coordination from residents.

18. *Will the permit to discharge to the river be sought on the homeowner's behalf?*

- a. Yes, the contractor and the council will be ensuring all planning, building regulations and environmental permitting requirements are met.

19. *If there is an option for my property to be connected to mains sewerage, can Wiltshire Council offer any financial contribution to the process?*

- a. We are currently talking to Wessex Water about connecting properties to the mains sewer, where properties are believed to be close to the network and connection is without undue complication. Connecting to the mains, if an option, will be covered by the scheme and will be taken forward on a case-by-case basis. If your property is found not to be possible to connect to the mains, you can still have a PTP installed under the scheme.

20. *We have an existing maintenance contract in place for the emptying of sludge from our septic tank. Is the emptying process for the PTPs the same as septic tanks? I.e. will our contract have to be amended?*

- a. Your contractor who empties your tank will, most likely, be familiar with the functioning of the PTP and, therefore, know how to empty it. Any contract amendments will entirely depend on your particular contract wording.

21. *Who are the third party contractors that the scheme will use?*

- a. Wiltshire Council have **just awarded** the first contract to Libra Utility Services Ltd ([Libra Utility Services | Professional Drainage and Cleaning Solutions](#)), meaning that we will shortly be able to progress with the first batch of projects in the catchment, according to our

prioritisation mentioned in question 14. We are hopeful that we will be able to open the tender opportunity to the wider market (subject to our specific requirements) in the future. However, this is not currently guaranteed, and timescales are unknown.

22. How will I know if my project is being progressed and I can expect to hear from a contractor?

- a. You will be kept up to date with the status of your project via emails from the Revamp Your Tank address. If you don't hear anything for a while, it means there is no update from the last position. When your project is forwarded to a contractor, Wiltshire Council will contact you to confirm this, and that you can expect to hear from the contractor.

Unfortunately, due to resource restrictions, we currently do not have an online system where you would easily be able to check the status of your project. Rest assured that if something changes, you will be notified.

23. Will some Package Treatment Plants discharge to ground? Or do all have to discharge to a watercourse? Will the proximity to a watercourse impact eligibility?

- a. The system can discharge either to ground or into the water course. The first eligibility criterion is being situated in the Hampshire Avon catchment. If you are in the headwaters of a tributary of the Avon (as mentioned in Q14) and a single house connected to your tank, then your project will be the highest priority. All other eligibility is determined through multiple screening processes using multiple GIS mapping layers, therefore it cannot be strictly defined before the application stage.

24. Can I, as the customer chose the package treatment plant and contractor?

- a. Due to the scale of the project, complexity involved in public sector procurement processes, and the need for us to prioritise and group projects for efficiency, the council will choose the contractor. The package treatment plant will also be decided by the contractor and the council.

However, you, as the customer, will have the ultimate sign off on all works once the contractor has explained the survey results and recommendations to you. You will then enter into a legal agreement with the contractor at that stage.

25. If my current septic tank operates to the required standard, do I still legally need to upgrade?

- a. You will need to establish if your plant drains to surface water (General binding rules: small sewage discharge to a surface water - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)) or to ground (General binding rules: small sewage discharge to the ground - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)) and work through the points on at the relevant page to establish your answer. However, pay close attention to point 6, copied in below, which dictates you MUST upgrade if your plant discharges to surface water:

“Rule 6: use the correct treatment system

You must use a small sewage treatment plant to treat the sewage if you’re discharging to a watercourse such as a river or stream. A sewage treatment plant, also known as a package treatment plant, treats sewage to a higher standard than a septic tank.

If your septic tank discharges directly to a watercourse, as soon as possible you must do one of the following:

- *connect to a public foul sewer*
- *replace your septic tank with a small sewage treatment plant*
- *install a drainage field (also known as an infiltration system) – a series of pipes with holes placed in trenches and arranged so that the waste water can trickle through the ground for further treatment – and check if you meet the [general binding rules for discharges to ground](#)*

You must have plans in place to do this work within a reasonable timescale, usually 12 months.”

If you buy or sell a property with a septic tank that discharges directly into a watercourse

You should agree with the buyer or seller who will be responsible for replacing or upgrading the treatment system. You should agree this as a condition of sale.

26. Are the contractors carrying out the work going to be liable for any damage caused to the property/infrastructure?
 - a. *If you decide to go ahead after the site visit, you will enter into a contract with the contractor which will set out your rights and the duties the contractor owes you. This will explain to what extent the contractor will be liable for any damage caused. This will also set out how the contractor will repair or reinstate the ground after installing the new system. Please note that the contractor may not be able to repair or reinstate the ground*

exactly as it was before the new system was installed. You must read this contract carefully and decide if it is suitable for you.

27. If the site visit deems the property is in need of an upgrade, but turns out it's not eligible for some reason or another, will I be reported as being non-compliant?
- You will not be reported for non-compliance. However, we would strongly advise you to upgrade your plant via another method as soon as possible, if it is not eligible for the Revamp scheme.
28. What is typically required in terms of maintenance of the PTP, and what is the estimated annual cost?
- Depending on the make and model recommended for your property, the average maintenance includes an annual empty and a service. The costs of these will be explained to you after your site visit, as they are dependent on the model recommended by the contractor, and you will have ultimate sign off on the project.
29. Natural England state nutrient mitigation must be delivered in perpetuity for 80-100 years. What impact will the upgrade have on the deeds to my property?
- Once the plant is in place, and the 1st year of service and maintenance has been honoured as part of the scheme, the plant is entirely yours to run and look after. The plant will be covered by the Local Development Order (mentioned in Q14) or a separate planning permission. This requires that future replacements of the system (for example in 30 to 40 years) shall have an equivalent treatment efficiency of at least 5 mg/l for Total Phosphorus removal and must meet requirements of relevant planning and environmental legislation. This includes the requirement to look after and maintain the system in line with manufacturers recommendations.
30. Is there a contractual/legal obligation on the homeowner to maintain the new PTP?
- Yes. After the survey stage, you will be able to choose if you proceed with the project or not. If you do, you will sign a contractual agreement with the contractor directly which will require the homeowner to operate and maintain the new system as per manufacturer's guidelines.
31. Is the addition of tertiary treatment technology an option with this upgrade scheme?
- Tertiary systems and treatments are not funded by this scheme. However, if you would like to add this on, you would be able to have a conversation with the contractor directly and receive a quote which would be payable by you, the customer, as part of the overall works. This would be seen as a variation which, in the detailed information you

will be sent if accepted onto the scheme, is outlined as being chargeable to you as an additional cost.

32. If the PTP oxygenation pump stops work, how will I know?

- a. This will be dependent on the model recommended to you by the contractor after the survey stage and, therefore, a question for the contractor.

33. What happens if there are multiple properties linked to one sewage plant?

- a. Multiple property projects are more complex and time consuming than other projects due to the coordination needed, easements and rights of access etc. Therefore, these projects are currently lower on the priority list. However, if your property is linked with multiple others, it is only required that one property makes the initial application and replies 'multiple properties' to the question "how many properties does this tank serve?". From there, the project will be screened for acceptance or rejection by the council.

If accepted, the initial applicant will receive an email with detailed information to read, as well as a multiple property project form. All neighbours must read and agree to the detailed information and send a filled in form for their property in response to the acceptance email. This requires group coordination and complete buy in from all connected parties for these types of projects to progress. Please note, if you all share one tank and want to have your own individual tanks, this is not a given that this will be possible, and each project will be treated on a case-by-case basis.

34. Are the pumps associated with the package treatment works noisy?

- a. The noise generated by a sewage treatment plant is negligible, on par with a household fridge or pond pump, and a cluster of installations will not create more noise.
If you are stood very close to the compressor then you will hear a slight humming sound.

35. Are tertiary treatment options available via the Council scheme? E.g. 'bolt-on' treatment to existing septic tanks.

- a. We're not considering tertiary treatment as part of the scheme. We are not aware of any no-pump 'biofilter' options on the market that are approved for use by Natural England (environmental regulator for this nutrient neutrality scheme) that is certified to remove total phosphorus (the key parameter we're looking to address via this scheme. Hence, we can only use the package treatment plants that require an electrical supply.