Date: 13th April 2026

Bentham Town Council

Dear Mayor, Deputy Mayor and Town Councillors,

Angus Fire is proud of the work it does in manufacturing products that save lives and of the role it has played for over a century in the Bentham community. As the town's largest employer, we take our responsibility to the community very seriously. We recognise the concerns about potentially damaging environmental impacts from historical operations at our Bentham site and regret the inconvenience and worry that this has caused the community. We also appreciate the role that the town's elected representatives play in keeping the people of Bentham informed about a matter that is understandably of public interest.

Angus Fire has been working diligently for several years alongside independent and industry-leading environmental consultants and the Environment Agency to establish the extent of PFAS contamination at its Bentham site to neighbouring land and/or the River Wenning.

This is a complex, long-term process, and work is ongoing to evaluate the site (known as 'characterisation'), which includes detailed investigations into soil, groundwater and surface water. These investigations will lead to the development of an updated 'Conceptual Site Model' (a representation of environmental, geological, and hydrological conditions detailing how contamination could have moved from its source to receptors). Once complete, we will work with the Environment Agency and North Yorkshire Council to determine what corrective actions and/or remediation will be required to reduce PFAS contamination in soil and groundwater and to protect the wider environment from PFAS in the long-term.

Angus Fire's site in Bentham has been characterised as having 'PFAS contamination', but not 'pollution'. An area may be subject to 'contamination' without that contamination causing 'pollution', i.e. without it presenting a risk to the environment or human health.

At this stage, there is no known pathway between the contamination identified on the Bentham site and the Bentham community and/or wider environment. Official international guidance recognises that people may be exposed to PFAS through numerous background routes, including diet, consumer product use and general environmental presence, making it scientifically inappropriate to attribute blood PFAS levels to any single source without a proven exposure pathway. Until the site has been fully characterised, and a pathway identified, then it will remain a site subject to contamination, like hundreds of thousands of other industrial sites around the UK.

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Angus Fire stopped manufacturing firefighting foam in March 2024. We also stopped producing firefighting foam that used fluorosurfactants that we now know may have contained traces of PFOA in 2016. Since 2022, all fire testing at Bentham has been conducted using products that do not contain fluorosurfactants, known as Fluorine Free Foams.

We recognise the importance of the PFAS issue in Bentham and believe any public communications on the matter must be grounded in established facts and objective science. We are all aware that idle speculation can result in unnecessary worry, and that is why we've been clear in taking a science-led approach to our communications with stakeholders, including the media, providing detailed evidence and the most up-to-date testing results of our characterisation activities. We expect the media to reflect the science accurately and not knowingly use materially out-of-date information. It is disappointing that anecdotal accounts and speculation were broadcast as fact by ITV and that material known by producers to be out of date and incorrect, was presented.

Our commitment to the community has always been to present the situation using facts, in context and accurately. Reporting on legacy material without acknowledging the substantial testing that has since occurred, and which has disproven many previously held assumptions, is not only incorrect but misleading and does not provide the people of Bentham with a fair, balanced or up-to-date understanding of the situation.

We have a good relationship with the local community and want to maintain that. We will continue to provide regular updates to the Town Council and other elected representatives, in addition to our employees and the community via our public website www.derbs.co.uk.

We are aware that members of the Bentham community may have further questions following the ITV documentary. We have sought to provide answers to these potential questions and other themes explored in the documentary based on our latest understanding of the science.

**How did PFAS end up in Angus Fire's foam products?**

Angus Fire manufactured and tested life-saving firefighting foams, some of which (but not all) contained fluorosurfactants. Fluorosurfactants were purchased from three US suppliers, and they contained chemicals that are now known as PFAS. These chemicals were previously used in firefighting foam products because they can withstand very high temperatures and are extremely effective at rapidly and evenly covering flammable liquids and putting out fires.

Angus Fire has never manufactured fluorosurfactants or any PFAS chemical.

Angus Fire has always followed guidelines set out by the UK regulatory bodies. Industry and scientific knowledge about the potential impacts of PFAS chemicals has only emerged over time. Our own understanding of these chemicals evolved at the same time as the regulators.

Chemical companies' product formulations are typically considered to be commercially confidential. This means that the manufacturers of the fluorosurfactants did not share their formulations with Angus Fire or any of their other customers. We now know that fluorosurfactants sold to us and used in some of our firefighting foams may have contained traces of PFOA as an 'unintentional byproduct' of the manufacturers' production process and that they also contained other PFAS chemicals.

The fluorosurfactant manufacturers proactively provided us with assurances that the raw materials they sold to us were neither hazardous to the environment nor to human health. Angus Fire received these reassurances multiple times and had no reason to doubt them.

Evidence has since emerged that suggests some suppliers were aware of potential risks but did not disclose them to their customers. A copy of one such assurance from DuPont (a leading chemicals supplier), that was also provided to ITV but not included in their documentary, is available on the Angus Fire's microsite (www.derbs.co.uk). It states that studies of relevant DuPont products "*are safe for workers, consumers and the environment when used as intended*" and that, when they degrade, the products "*are not expected to be harmful to human health or the environment at relevant environmental concentrations, have rapid bioelimination and are not bioaccumulative*".

**Where is the contamination on the Angus Fire site?**
Our independent environmental consultants have conducted investigative work of the soil and groundwater at the Bentham site. This work is ongoing but already shows that PFAS has contaminated soil in six localised areas on the site, with the majority contained within the top two metres of soil.

**Is the River Wenning or drinking water supply polluted?**
Angus Fire has not polluted the River Wenning or drinking water.

A study carried out by Dr. Patrick Byrne (a Professor of Water Science at Liverpool John Moores University), in addition to testing undertaken on behalf of the Environment Agency, shows that PFAS in shallow groundwater at Angus Fire has not affected the river. This same study shows that the river contains PFAS even before it reaches the Angus Fire site, including tributaries upstream of Angus Fire. This must, therefore, be associated with other sources of PFAS.

Testing carried out by Angus Fire shows that the mains drinking water supply to its Bentham site, which should be no different to the town, is compliant with the Drinking Water Inspectorate's (DWI) thresholds. Yorkshire Water has also confirmed that supplies to the town meet the same DWI thresholds. Routine water quality testing in a groundwater abstraction well close to the Angus Fire site equally shows that this drinking water supply is not impacted by PFAS.

**Has the Angus Fire site now been fully characterised?**
There is still insufficient data to fully characterise the Bentham site and its surrounding areas for PFAS. Angus Fire's environmental consultants have a scope of work agreed that will investigate these data gaps further. Once they have an updated 'Conceptual Site Model', we will continue to work transparently with regulators to understand what corrective actions and/or remediation need to be carried out to reduce PFAS contamination in soil and groundwater and to protect the wider environment from PFAS in the long-term.

**What is the link between blood PFAS levels and health?**
The link between PFAS in blood and health outcomes is understandably concerning to residents, and so it is important that these are represented accurately and in a way that reflects the scientific evidence. We have always been led by the science available to us at the time and we are constantly monitoring scientific data and updating our actions accordingly.

There is currently limited scientific agreement on the relationship between PFAS exposure, blood PFAS levels and health effects, and so there is no conclusive way of interpreting blood tests for PFAS. The science remains complex and evolving and individual blood test results cannot reliably be used to infer health risks or the source of any exposure.

While we appreciate that the findings of the blood tests conducted by ITV will have caused concern to the residents of Bentham, having raised PFAS levels in blood is neither an indicator of health, nor that its source emanated from Angus Fire. This is because PFAS are everywhere: PFAS have been used across thousands of industrial and consumer products since the 1940s and are therefore present in water, soil, food, household products, and the wider environment.

The sample size used in ITV's blood test group is too small and cannot be extrapolated in a way that is representative of Bentham's population. The results were also not tested further to verify that they were accurate and that any outliers had not arisen from testing errors or cross-contamination. Further, the UK does not have a national 'safe' level. It is therefore not possible to classify the blood test results of that sample group as 'unusually high' in a UK context.

Independent medical advice provided to us, and government guidance in Australia, suggests that blood testing does not provide the conclusive evidence that people are seeking and could even be misleading. This is because almost everybody in the world has PFAS in their blood resulting from the use of household items and day-to-day consumer products.

Current scientific evidence does not establish a definitive causal relationship between PFAS measured in human blood and the development of specific cancers. Research in this area remains ongoing and evolving.

Senior epidemiologists have warned us of the challenge in interpreting cancer data for small, rural populations, such as Bentham. Studies used in the media to illustrate higher levels of cancer in Bentham must be interpreted cautiously. These studies compare the more populous Bentham with its very rural and sparsely populated surroundings and incorrectly argue that the relative difference between cancer rates in the town of Bentham and the wider Forest of Bowland area means that Bentham is a cancer hotspot.

The study referred to in ITV's documentary actually shows that cancer rates in Bentham are in the same category (not higher) as seven other populous areas, such as, Kirkby Lonsdale, Sedbergh, Broughton-in-Furness, Ambleside, Windermere, Kendal and Carnforth, where firefighting foam manufacturing and testing has not been documented, and are in fact lower than towns such as Morecambe and Barrow-in-Furness. This same study also shows that overall cancer risk in Bentham is low, with a relatively small number of cases.

Angus Fire has previously asked an independent statistician to analyse publicly available health data. He concluded that there is no statistical difference between the rates of cancer in Bentham and its surrounding areas. In fact, average life expectancy in the Bentham is comparable to the wider area (and for women specifically, it is slightly higher).

Angus Fire regards the health and safety of its employees as paramount, and we have always been careful to follow health and safety regulations on site for all chemicals in accordance with the material safety data sheets provided to us by the chemical manufacturers.

**Why are firefighting foams tested?**

As a manufacturer of firefighting foams, we responsibly carry out fire tests to ensure our products are fully compliant with international and industry standards. Since 2022, all fire testing at Bentham has been carried out using foam products that do not contain fluorosurfactants.

These tests typically last an average of six minutes, which includes the time to ignite the fuel and allow its temperature to rise before it is extinguished. As soon as the foam is released, it immediately covers the surface of the test pan, starves the fuel of oxygen and extinguishes the fire.

It is also worth explaining that not all of Angus Fire's legacy foam products contained fluorosurfactants, e, g, class A foams, high-expansion foams and training foams. Considering the density of foams that contained fluorosurfactants, in addition to the distance and topography between Duke Street and the fire test site, it is unlikely that these foams travelled as far as to Duke Street as claimed in the ITV documentary. Any foam that may have blown in the wind was likely to have been high-expansion foams that did not contain fluorosurfactants and therefore did not contain PFAS chemicals.

**Has Angus Fire breached its regulatory permits?**
Angus Fire has followed all relevant environmental guidelines and has kept the Environment Agency and North Yorkshire Council updated on our site 'containment' and 'characterisation' activities. Any historical breaches have been investigated and our procedures reviewed and improved to prevent these from happening again. We are not aware of any formal legal proceedings against us, and we do not accept the characterisation of widespread or systemic breaches.

**Why did Angus Fire purchase a number of local properties?**
Angus Fire's approach to purchasing these properties reflects our commitment to acting responsibly, transparently and in the best interests of the local community while detailed characterisation work continues under the oversight of the Environment Agency and the local authority.

The acquisition of these properties does not indicate that they were contaminated or that they posed a risk to human health, nor does it imply that any exposure pathway has been identified.

We do not intend to purchase any additional properties in Bentham and consider that our actions were appropriate and proportionate in light of the information currently available.

**Has any legal action been commenced against Angus Fire in relation to its Bentham site?**
No legal proceedings have been initiated against Angus Fire in relation to its Bentham site. Angus Fire continues to engage constructively with the Environment Agency, North Yorkshire Council and other relevant stakeholders as part of the ongoing environmental investigation process.

Yours faithfully.

*Paul Williams*
Managing Director