

FAQ's – Wastewater maintenance and effluent disposal

What will this contract cover?

The agreement we intend to enter into is for the maintenance of wastewater infrastructure and effluent disposal.

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 up keep 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.

Why are you changing it?

The current contract is coming to an end and we are retendering to undertake a value for money exercise.

The letter mentions a payment of £100, does this mean I need to pay this or that this is going to be my contribution?

No. This letter is not a request for payment and at this stage we do not know what the cost to you will be for this service. We are required to consult with you about our intention to enter into a new agreement with a new contractor which will continue for longer than 12 months and where your contribution **may** exceed £100. We will write to you with details of the cost at stage two of this consultation once the tender exercise has been completed. You will have received this letter as you are a customer whose property drains into a wastewater treatment plant, septic tank or pumping station which we are responsible to maintain.

How long will be agreement be for?

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

If a contract is for a number of years 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 or are not value for money, 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.

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 www.aster.co.uk – search for ‘Have Your Say/wastewater maintenance’.

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

Following completion of a successful Section 20 consultation.

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. 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. If you have not yet registered to use our MyAster portal service, please [click here](#) to get started.

Why have I received a letter, I am the freehold owner of the property?

Section 20 of the Landlord and Tenant Act does not require us to consult with freeholders. However, as a freehold owner who pays a charge towards the cost of wastewater maintenance which we maintain we wanted to include you in the consultation to give you an opportunity to make any comments on our intention to enter into a new agreement for the provision of this service.

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 visit our website or contact your housing officer to log any issues you are experiencing as a formal complaint.

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>

