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Press release

19 November 2024

Mishcon de Reya instructed by community group to bring legal action over "forever chemical" pollution in the UK's most PFAS polluted town

- Groundwater in Bentham in North Yorkshire has over 55,000 times Government's quality standard for a 'forever chemical'
- Legal action over PFAS would be first of its kind in the UK

[Cleaner Bentham](#), a group of concerned residents and business owners in the small town of Bentham in North Yorkshire, has instructed leading law firm Mishcon de Reya to work with them in relation to claims arising from PFAS contamination detected in shockingly high concentrations in the town of Bentham.

Known as "forever chemicals" PFAS (per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances) don't easily break down in the environment or in our bodies, and are found in everyday items, from frying pans to waterproof coats. PFAS find their way into our water sources, food and even the air that we breathe, and can cause a myriad of human and environmental issues, including, in humans, autoimmune disorders, certain cancers, thyroid dysfunction, fertility issues in women, issues in pregnancy, hyperlipidaemia, liver function problems, and can cause developmental problems in children. PFAS chemicals are especially commonplace in firefighting foams.

Angus International Safety Group (Angus Fire) has a large factory in Bentham. It is a manufacturer of firefighting products, including firefighting foams, some of which have historically been known to include PFAS.

ENDS report published an [investigation](#) into PFAS pollution levels in Bentham in May this year, revealing Bentham to be the most PFAS polluted place in the UK. This pollution is thought to be directly linked to the chemicals used by Angus Fire over the past decades. Angus Fire has also [reportedly](#) repeatedly breached its environmental permits in the last 10 years. When tested in 2008, groundwater at Angus Fire's site was shown to have total PFAS levels of 1,199,000 ng/l, including 36,100 ng/l of PFOS, which is 55,538 times higher than the [government's environmental quality standard for PFOS](#) of 0.65ng/l. [Testing carried](#) out this year also shows PFAS contamination in both water and soil surrounding the site.

Mat Young, a local resident and Chair of Cleaner Bentham, has been investigating this matter tirelessly and has already undertaken a huge amount of work with relevant scientists, academics and universities. Supported by Mishcon de Reya, he has secured commitment from one university to carry out initial blood testing for potentially impacted residents of Bentham, and two other universities to undertake additional tests of the environment in and around Bentham. Mat has cultivated a steering committee which has also liaised widely with various press publications to raise awareness of this issue to help encourage action by local authorities to protect residents.

Mat Young, chair of Cleaner Bentham, says:

"Residents of High Bentham are devastated at how this has affected the town, its residents and other affected communities down the River Wenning. We are all worried about the effect this might have on not only our families' health but, the health of anyone else affected by the pollution down the River Wenning, into the Lune and beyond.

"Cleaner Bentham is a non-profit committed to getting to the bottom of how much PFAS contamination there is and where it ends up. We are an incredibly engaged group, we have undertaken many hours of research into this issue and liaised with some of the top experts in the world, many of whom have willingly and freely given their time to look into or speak to the group about this issue.

"Mishcon de Reya have been amazing from the very first time we spoke to them, they came into the interview with knowledge of the incident and a battle plan and have supported us during the development process of research and recruiting our committee members."

Emily Nicholson, partner at Mishcon de Reya says:

"PFAS cases have made huge waves in the US, but this would be the first time such a case has been brought here in the UK. PFAS contamination is widely known about and is understood to have devastating consequences for both the health of those impacted and for the environment and is extremely difficult to remediate. The people of Bentham deserve to have the full facts about the extent of the contamination, the effects of this pervasive chemical and to obtain damages where they have suffered with their health or otherwise."

If you are a Bentham resident and are concerned that you might be impacted by PFAS pollution whether specifically or more generally, or you simply live in the area and want to support the investigations, please contact PFASBentham@Mishcon.com.

Notes for Editors

1. You can find more information about Cleaner Bentham and their campaign [here](#)
2. Cleaner Bentham is currently operating two fundraising pages:
 - (i) for its startup and operational costs; and
 - (ii) to fund health screening processes, such as blood testing to quantify the potential harm to residents caused by PFAS pollution.

Visit this [link](#) to make a donation.

About Mishcon de Reya LLP

Mishcon de Reya is an independent law firm, which now employs over 1400 people with more than 650 lawyers offering a wide range of legal services to companies and individuals. The firm has grown rapidly in recent years, showing more than 40% revenue growth in the past five years alone.

With presence in London, Oxford, Cambridge, Singapore and Hong Kong (through its association with [Karas So LLP](#)), the firm services an international community of clients and provides advice in situations where the constraints of geography often do not apply.

The work the firm undertakes is cross-border, multi-jurisdictional and complex, spanning seven core practice areas: [Corporate](#); [Dispute Resolution](#); [Employment](#); [Impact](#); [Innovation](#); [Private](#); and [Real Estate](#).

Mishcon de Reya's [Purpose Litigation team](#) are acting on this matter. Purpose Litigation is an innovative approach to identifying, building and funding claims that drive constructive societal

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change and deliver measurable positive impact with a focus on three core themes: Climate, Environment and Human Rights and Governance.

