

**Professor Jim Bridges and the missed opportunity in 2005  
to stop the Belvedere incinerator from being built**  
By Michael Ryan BSc, C Eng, MICE

### **Relevant Background**

The Chester Chronicle article “Incinerator health fears dismissed: A COCKTAIL of chemicals released from a proposed incinerator will pose no danger to its neighbours, a planning inquiry heard” (23 July 2013) started as follows:

*“A COCKTAIL of chemicals released from a proposed incinerator will pose no danger to its neighbours, a planning inquiry heard.*

*The claim was made by international health expert Professor Jim Bridges at the inquiry into Peel Holdings’ proposed incinerator, waste plant and technology complex on Ince Marshes.*

*He went on to suggest that at low levels of potency, some of the dioxins released through industrial processes could even provide health benefits.*

*Giving evidence for Peel, Prof Bridges said: “It can be concluded that the operation of the proposed incinerator plant, according to the statutory emission limits, will not result in adverse health effects in the local population.”*

<https://www.cheshire-live.co.uk/news/local-news/incinerator-health-fears-dismissed-5241389>

### **Belvedere incinerator public inquiry**

My evidence of 18 August 2005 to the above Public Inquiry was deemed unacceptable and ignored, following a complaint by Professor Jim Bridges, who was acting as expert witness for the incinerator proposer.

[https://www.ukhr.eu/birthdefects/Belvedere\\_incinerator.pdf](https://www.ukhr.eu/birthdefects/Belvedere_incinerator.pdf)

I had cited unpublished ONS birth defect data, which had been released to me in October 2004 on the instruction of Treasury Minister Ruth Kelly MP. The ONS data showed the numbers of babies (live and stillborn) recorded with birth defects in each of the 303 Primary Care Trusts in England for each of the eight years 1995 to 2002. To read fax: <https://ukhr.eu/Fax-to-Ruth-Kelly-MP-req-birth-defects-in-PCTs-1995-2002-sent16-08-2004.pdf>

The rate of babies born with birth defects in the London Borough of Bexley had increased since treated sewage sludge was incinerated at the Crossness and Beckton sewage works. Sludge having been formerly dumped in the North Sea until that practice was banned by the European

Union. A graph showing that increase in the rate of Bexley's birth defects was included in my submission. This graph shows the same Bexley birth defect data:

<https://ukhr.eu/birthdefects/greaterlondonreport.pdf>

The Mercury article: "**I'M INCENSED: Researcher claims inquiry evidence 'not taken seriously'**" (23 November 2005, pages 1 & 2) contains the following extract (link to article here: <https://ukhr.eu/Mercury-23-November-2008-pages1&2.pdf>):

*"In his evidence submitted to the public inquiry into Riverside Resource Recovery Ltd's (RRRL) proposal to build a waste-to-energy incinerator in Belvedere, Mr Ryan included figures he obtained from the Treasury, which showed Bexley is the London Borough with the highest number of babies with defects.*

*"He was amazed when his submission was refuted in a report by toxicologist Professor Jim Bridges, of Surrey University, acting on behalf of RRRL.*

*Mr Ryan claims the professor's information was based on current figures, which group Greenwich, Bexley and Bromley together.*

*The Treasury figures, says Mr Ryan, reflect the true situation as they are for Bexley alone.*

*A spokesman for RRRL said its solicitors had notified the DTI (Department of Trade and Industry) that it rejected Mr Ryan's submissions and the company would not withdraw Professor Bridges' paper.*

*A spokesman for Bexley (Primary) Care Trust said it regularly received the Government figures but considered the overall numbers to be low and any variations likely to be random or due to reporting procedures.*

*In 2002, the Trust received two alerts, but after investigating, found there was no cause for concern.*

*She added: "The Health Protection Agency advice is that although incinerators clearly do emit pollutants into the environment, provided they comply with modern regulatory requirements, they should contribute little to the concentrations of monitored pollutants in ambient air."*

Collection of birth defect data started in 1964 following the Thalidomide scandal, as reported by The Times article: "Scheme to notify malformations" (6 January 1964), which ended:

*"The scheme will be widely welcomed as a valuable means of helping to cope with a problem which involves a high infant mortality rate and is responsible for much ill health, disability, and parental distress."*

The Times article can be accessed here: <https://ukhr.eu/The-Times-6-January1964-page-12.pdf>

It would have been a matter of minutes for Bexley Primary Care Trust, the Health Protection Agency, the London Borough of Bexley, the Greater London Authority, the London Health Observatory, or the Environment Agency to check if ONS data showed a sudden rise in Bexley's

infant death rate after sewage sludge began to be incinerated at the Thameside treatment works at Crossness and Beckton. The first graph on page 3 shows that such a rise could have readily been seen by the above organisations who each owed Bexley residents a duty of care.

The Yorkshire Post front page article: "Inquiry ordered into birth defects linked to pollution", by Chris Benfield (15 September 2025) included:

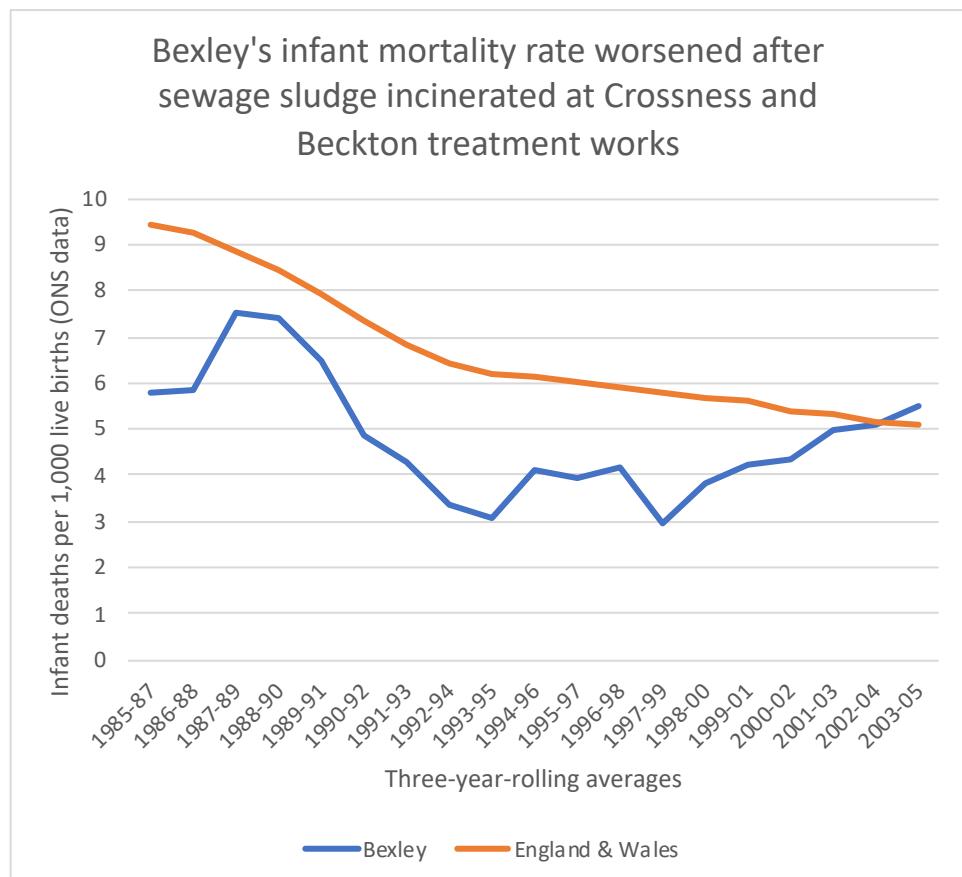
***"The Government pollution watchdog the Health Protection Agency confirmed yesterday there were anomalies that needed explaining and that birth defects would be included in national research."***

The Yorkshire Post front page article dated 15 September 2025 can be viewed here:

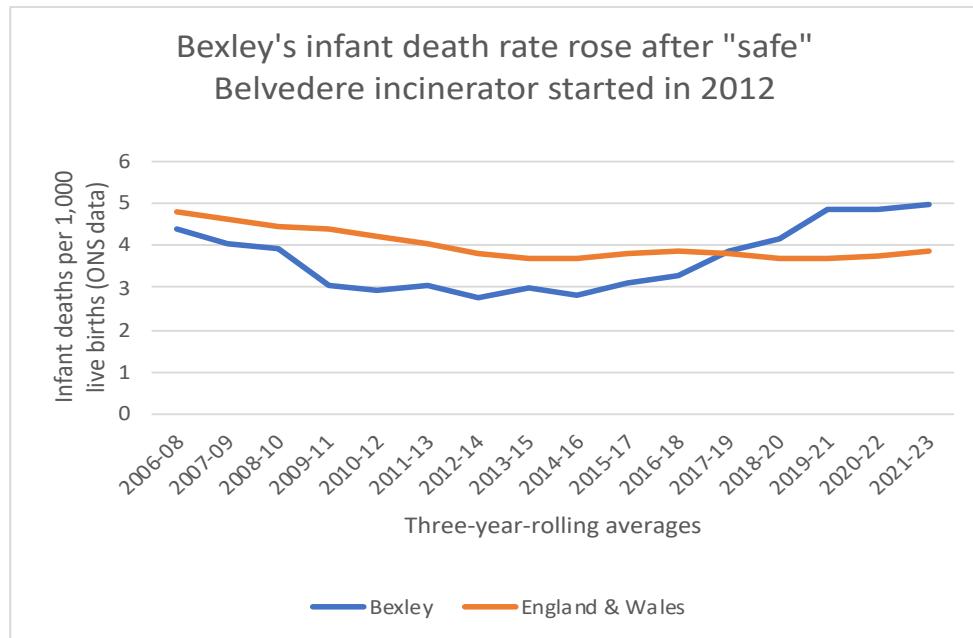
<https://ukhr.eu/Yorkshire-Post-15-September-2005.pdf>

The Yorkshire Post article dated 1 September 2025 can be viewed here:

<https://ukhr.eu/Yorkshire-Post-1-September-2005.pdf>



The significance of the above graph is that Bexley's infant mortality rate also suddenly rose after the Belvedere incinerator started operating in 2012:



If my 2005 submission to the Belvedere incinerator public inquiry had been properly examined and acted upon with due diligence by the former Health Protection Agency and the Environment Agency, the link between exposure to incinerator emissions and infant mortality could have been recognised and acted upon, enabling many lost lives to have been saved in England and Wales over the past two decades.

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200506/cmselect/cmenvfru/780/780we14.htm>

In December 2005, I sent the above report to the EFRA Committee headed: "THE FAILURE OF ENVIRONMENT AGENCY (EA) TO REGULATE HARMFUL INDUSTRIAL PM2.5 EMISSIONS". The report ended as follows:

*"A Greater London map showing point sources of industrial PM2.5s would explain variations of birth defect rates and other health parameters. Bexley is also affected by emissions from SELCHP (Lewisham) and Littlebrook D Power Station. I raised these issues in my statement to the recent public inquiry using unpublished ONS birth defect data—yet my evidence was wrongly criticised by pro-incinerator "expert" Professor Jim Bridges, whose seven page report on my statement was erroneous as detailed in the South London Mercury, 23 November 2005. Professor Bridges stupidly quoted from non-existent published birth defect data for Bexley and then, through Lovells (his solicitors), refused to retract his erroneous report after I reminded Professor Bridges that I had access to unpublished ONS data."*

**Corby steelworks "clean-up" and rise in birth defects plus spike in infant mortality**

The successful class action by Solicitor Des Collins to get justice after babies were born with defects, having been exposed to toxic air pollution during the Corby steelworks clean-up, is well documented.

Having a large set of ONS data showing infant mortality rates in all Councils in England & Wales, I was confident that there would be a spike in Corby's infant death rate that coincided with the clean-up.

Sarah Ward of NN Journal wrote the following on 15 November 2025:

<https://www.nnjournal.co.uk/p/saturday-brief-baby-deaths-in-corby>

Emily Dugan of Sunday Times reported the Corby infant mortality spike on 16 November 2025:

[https://www.thetimes.com/uk/healthcare/article/is-corby-a-toxic-town-families-will-finally-find-out-the-truth-l92zpdjs?gaa\\_at=eafts&gaa\\_n=AWEtsqdnYoOTkkwkNgAfLxu-M6CEQ3mjAS\\_5TKvej1Ws8Gmqcy1rhUdycl&gaa\\_ts=6962286d&gaa\\_sig=ASM5oq3tJOWgLPP1z8ziak2YoPDhoakh4ullEqXxq36DxfYxzjjsrw\\_yPa63jljybMgVnEPX2X3yoOkcuZc39w%3D%3D](https://www.thetimes.com/uk/healthcare/article/is-corby-a-toxic-town-families-will-finally-find-out-the-truth-l92zpdjs?gaa_at=eafts&gaa_n=AWEtsqdnYoOTkkwkNgAfLxu-M6CEQ3mjAS_5TKvej1Ws8Gmqcy1rhUdycl&gaa_ts=6962286d&gaa_sig=ASM5oq3tJOWgLPP1z8ziak2YoPDhoakh4ullEqXxq36DxfYxzjjsrw_yPa63jljybMgVnEPX2X3yoOkcuZc39w%3D%3D)

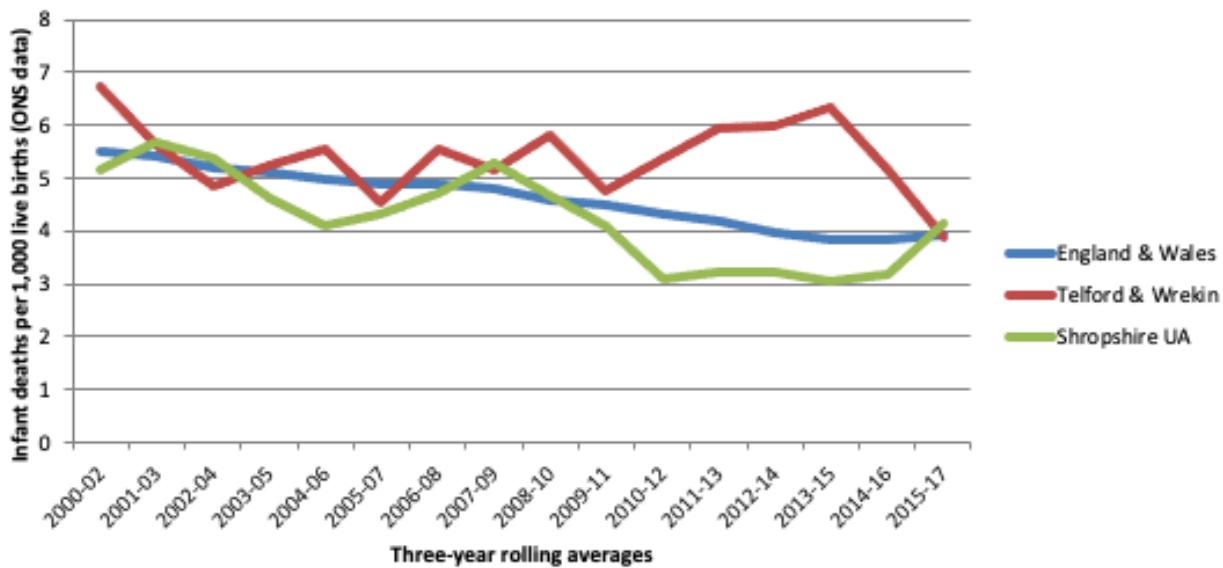
Professor Jim Bridges has had a very successful additional career as a "hired gun" for proposers of incinerators by acting as their expert witness.

He was expert witness for Veolia at the Shrewsbury incinerator public inquiry in 2011 where the late Dr Dick van Steenis MBBS (Times obituary, 16 April 2013) was my expert witness.

Before Veolia's incinerator was operational in 2015, Shropshire's dominant point-source of industrial PM2.5 emissions was the Ironbridge Power Station and the higher rate of infant mortality in Telford & Wrekin, which was heavily exposed to emissions, was blamed on deprivation

In November 2015 the Ironbridge Power Station closed-down and ONS data show that the infant mortality rate in Telford & Wrekin suddenly fell, whilst the rate in Shropshire Unitary Authority rose. It's been the same in other Councils exposed to incinerator emissions across England and Wales, starting with Edmonton incinerator in 1971.

**Telford's infant mortality rate falls after Ironbridge Power Station closed in November 2015. Shropshire's rate rose after Veolia's incinerator started in January 2015**



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