



# Little Marlow Sewage Treatment Works Liaison Committee minutes

Minutes of the meeting of the Little Marlow Sewage Treatment Works Liaison Committee held on Monday 2 August 2021 in Ms Teams, commencing at 10am and concluding at 11:15am

## Members present

P Emmett (Little Marlow Parish Council), S Kershaw (Coldmoorholme Residents Association), M Overall (Little Marlow Country Park) and D Watson (Buckinghamshire Council) Chairman

## Others in attendance

L Bee (EA), D Collyer (TW), T Fowler, A-M Kenward (Buckinghamshire Council Officer), J Outhwaite (EA) and A Scott (TW)

## Agenda Item

### 1 Apologies

None were received.

### 2 Apologies

Since the last meeting the Chairman had completed the following tasks:

- Written to Thames Water (TW) and circulated their response.
- The committee should consider when it would be the appropriate moment to write to OFWAT.
- Taken part in discussions about how many Buckinghamshire Council (BC) councillors should be involved in this committee.
- Brought Little Marlow parish councillors up to date on progress following the May 2021 election.
- The chairman had recently updated the local Member of Parliament, Joy Morrissey.
- It is planned to set up a Directory on the BC website to include all relevant correspondence between BC and TW, the EA and OFWAT.

### 3 Minutes from the previous meeting

**RESOLVED**

Minutes from the meeting held 25 March 2021 were **AGREED** as an accurate record.

#### 4 Questions from the public

Several questions had been circulated to Thames Water (TW) ahead of the meeting. Full copies of the questions would be appended to these minutes. Mr A Scott answered from his prospective as the TW Regional Operations Manager. He was unable to comment fully on future strategy which was managed by a separate team.

In response to the written questions from Cllr Wilson and questions from the Chairman, Mr Overall and Mr Emmett the following responses were made by Mr Scott:-

##### 1.Prevention - Investment in Capacity, Capability & Processes

- Mr Scott had been working with the engineering and asset management teams at Thames Water to understand the full scope of work needed to future proof the site.
- Initial drafts were for 2 additional asset tanks, 25 meter in diameter with the new equivalents of the necessary inlet, distribution and return activated sludge (RAS) systems.
- Costs would be in the region of £10m which was not included in the latest Assets Management Plan (AMP) cycle (2019-2024). Therefore, there would be an internal TW funding review process to satisfy before works could begin. TW were keen to invest time upfront in getting the right solution before starting works to avoid abortive costs.
- Project timescales had not been defined, responsibility for timescales sat with the TW asset and project definition teams, but the installation of equipment was likely to take 2 years from when work on site began. This was due to the scale and complexity of the engineering work involved.
- In response to challenge Mr Scott stated that with all existing tanks now fully operational there was no reason to believe the site would be regularly pumping raw sewage into local rivers due to lack of capacity while planning and installation was carried out. He noted that the recent mechanical failure was a once in 14-year event.
- Mr Scott did not have figures to hand for the total additional capacity that would be provided by 2 additional tanks but stated they would give capacity for 1 of the 6 tanks to be taken offline entirely at any given time while still coping with maximum flow. **ACTION Mr Scott**
- At the last meeting it had been stated that during lower flow in summer months the other tanks could be taken offline and drained to allow for a full inspection. Mr Scott explained that instead there had been an inspection of the equipment by the engineering team on site to install the replacement equipment. This had included oil analysis, looking at heat generation, photographic work and vibration monitoring. There were delays bringing the broken tank back online so none of the other tanks were taken offline to carry out these checks.

##### 2. Future proofing - 1000+ Houses and Climate Change

- The site had two strategies relevant to flow in place namely the Ground

Water Impacted Management Plan (GISMP) and the Drainage and Wastewater Management Programme. Copies of these would be sought and added to the committee directory. **ACTION Mr Scott/Ms Kenward**

- Currently more water was being treated than was necessary due to surface and ground water entering the sewer network. The first step would be to limit this water entering the system. This could involve sealing manhole covers and lining sewers to prevent ground water coming through.
- There was a Developer Services team within Thames Water who liaised with developers. A database called Solar was used for predicting future flow including that raised by new developments.

### 3. Transparency - Alerts and Notifications

The chairman asked Mr Collyer to include in his distribution list the three councillors who were elected to represent Wooburn & Bourne End in May 2021, in future updates on the site. Ms Kenward would share the relevant contact details. **ACTION Mr Collyer and Ms Kenward**

### 4. Five Year AMP

The current Asset Management Plan (AMP) came into effect in 2019 and would be reviewed in 2024.

#### *Containment barrier*

*Dating back to 2017 Mr Overall had asked if it were possible to have a containment barrier to prevent overspill from the site escaping into the neighbouring country park in the event that the tanks overflowed. Previously there had been flooding to the anglers' car park, access road and public right of way. At the time TW had stated this would be too difficult to implement. Mr Overall asked whether something as simple as a ramp could be used to prevent sewage leaving the site.*

- Mr Scott would take this suggestion to colleagues for comment. **ACTION Mr Scott**
- Mr Scott referred to an incident approximately 2 weeks before this meeting where a flock of geese had flown into overhead power lines. The sites backup generator had failed to start automatically due to there being a reduction in power rather than a total outage. It had not been possible to manual start the generator as the high voltage panel had still been receiving some electricity but not enough to power the sites larger equipment. As a result, settled sewage from sediment tanks had overflowed on to local footpaths and private gardens - the clean-up took place within 12 hours. There would now be a full investigation including a review of how the backup generators operate in the event of a power dip rather than a full outage. It was confirmed that the electrical systems on site were considered to be sufficient having been inspected the week before the incident by the TW High Voltage team and independently by SSE.

*Mr Emmett had previously toured the site and asked if the storm tanks were still operational.*

- There had been no change to storm tank provision on site.

*Mr Kershaw asked what the process was for alerting local residents of incidents*

- Mr Collyer would check the formal process but stated that after recent incidents both political and environmental stakeholders had been contacted.

**ACTION Mr Collyer**

Mr Scott stated that there were trials in other areas to make on site monitoring available to the public in real time. The Smart Water Programme.

## **5 Thames Water report**

In addition to the questions above the following points were discussed:

- TW were working through the Compliance Assessment Reports (CAR) provided by the Environment Agency (EA) after recent incidents and had sent their official response to the EA. Copies of the TW responses would be sought and added to the committee directory. **ACTION Ms Kenward/Mr Scott**
- The TW Price Review Group and Ofwat were meeting as part of the 5-year price review cycle. The Chairman asked how this committee could support the review and Mr Scott would provide contact details to communication directly with the Price Review Group. **ACTION Mr Scott**

## **6 Environment Agency Report**

Ms L Bee, Environment Agency (EA), referred to the last 3 Compliance Assessment Reports (CAR) carried out by the EA. Copies of these forms would be shared and uploaded to the committee directory. **ACTION Ms Outhwaite/Ms Kenward**

1. March 2021 – arising from the equipment failure and subsequent sewage overflow. The investigation into the resilience was ongoing.
  2. May 2021 – arising from breaches that occurred after the equipment was repaired. The EA had introduced 24/7 water monitoring and there had been no further breaches. Monitors were to be shortly removed for redeployment due to a limited number being available. Data would be shared and added to the committee directory. **ACTION MS Bee/Ms Kenward**
  3. July 2021 – Still to be issued. Arising from geese damaging powerlines and the failure of generators to come online. Sewage overflow had not reached the Thames. The EA would be pushing for resilience to prevent issues reoccurring.
- There was a separate Enforcement Governance Group who would decide what action would be taken regarding these breaches once investigations were complete. The EA used a scale for consideration whether prosecution would take place.
  - Regarding timescales it was the investigation rather than the final decision that would take the most time and would be affected by EA resources. There was not a legislated timescale for a decision, but it was hoped a resolution could be made in the next few months.
  - Mr Overall asked if the July 2021 incident had caused sewage overflow into Spade Oak Lake. Ms Bee would seek feedback on this. **ACTION Ms Bee**

- Mr Scott stated the TW monitoring had found no evidence of the overflow making its way into the local watercourse.

## **7 Any other business**

Mr Overall referred to reports he had received from Bucks Bird Club regarding the unexplained death of 20+ wild fowls and Egyptian Geese. DEFRA had been informed of possible disease risk. There had also been anecdotal evidence of fish deaths which had not been supported by the local fishing club. However, there was no reason to believe there was issues with health of the lake.

The Chairman invited TW and the EA to comment on a news story from the [Bucks Free Press website](#) where a local man claimed to have contracted giardia disease from swimming in the Thames. Mr Scott stated that TW did not recommend swimming in the Thames and could not comment on where the parasite came from. Ms Outhwaite stated the parasite could also be transmitted from animals and humans and the EA would only monitor areas of bathing water.

## **8 Date of next meeting**

To be confirmed. Future meetings would be based on progress or if made necessary by further incidents.

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Please find below written questions raised by a Wooburn & Bourne End Member which I would be grateful if you could forward to Thames Water.

### **1) Prevention - Investment in Capacity, Capability & Processes**

What is being done in terms of investment to improve the existing operations of the facility over the next 1, 3 and 5 years that would give confidence to residents and businesses that risks and issues are being identified and addressed before an incident occurs?

### **2) Future proofing - 1000+ Houses and Climate Change**

If the Wycombe Local Plan is executed, Bourne End and Wooburn will have another 1000+ Houses in the next ten years. This is a massive increase and Thames Water have already stated they do not have the capacity presently in their Representations. What plans are being made to ensure that housing development cannot proceed ahead of the Thames Water requirements with regard to consultation and investment? As users and customers, we cannot tolerate a lag or "heel dragging". Thames Water must invest ahead of the curve.

Secondly, we have recently seen the impact of flash floods in London and we are only too aware of the impact heavy rainfall has on our own local roads and drainage systems. This eventually overloads the Sewage Treatments Works and discharges are made into the river with untold consequences on public health and the environment. What plans are in place to future proof this facility with regard to more dramatic weather patterns associated with climate change?

### **3) Transparency - Alerts and Notifications**

As a local Councillor, I find it very frustrating to only hear about issues at the Little Marlow Sewage Treatment Works through local social media groups and the Bucks Free Press. What is the purpose of this Liaison Group if it is not one of the first points of notification for incidents and, heaven forbid, emergencies? Our residents, downstream of the sewage works, want to know what has happened and be able to take the necessary precautions if required. We need transparency with immediate effect, either via this Liaison Group or directly if we are not included.

In addition to the Agenda I would ask the following:-

4) **5 Year AMP** Please advise when will the next 5 Year AMP financial planning process begin and what criteria would need to be included in a business case to support investment in increased capacity at the Little Marlow site? Is there anything this committee can do to assist in preparing such a business case? The previous major investment at the Little Marlow site was made outside of the AMP Process - what criteria would now apply in such an instance?

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### **Containment barrier**

At a previous Liaison Committee meeting, I did suggest to TW that they should consider constructing at least a low level containment barrier around the perimeter of the STW site

so that spillages, such as from the last three (?) short-period incidents, were contained within the site.

I don't think we ever received a fully substantive response to that suggestion although there was some feedback that it was not possible to do that at the main entrance to the site (which was understood to be the exit route for at least one, if not all those incidents).

I think it is worth raising that question again.