Little Marlow Sewage Treatment Works Liaison Committee minutes

Minutes of the meeting of the Little Marlow Sewage Treatment Works Liaison Committee held on Friday 28 April 2023 in Via Video Conference, commencing at 11.04 am and concluding at 11.56 am.

Members present

D Watson

Others in attendance

P Emmett, S Kershaw, J Morley, J Morrissey MP, A Scott, K Fisher, L Hornby and E Barlow

Apologies

M Overall, L Bee, J Outhwaite and A Valantine

Agenda Item

1 Welcome

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and explained it was hoped to hold these meetings twice a year.

2 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Councillor Stuart Wilson and Mike Overall.

3 Chairman's Update

The Chairman reported that since the Group last met, an exchange of correspondence between Councillor Martin Tett (Leader of Bucks Council) and Thérèse Coffey MP, had taken place particularly in respect of the Little Marlow site. A response from Rebecca Howell MP, had been received stating that the Environment Agency (EA) was carrying out an investigation into the Category 2 significant incident that occurred at the Little Marlow Sewage Treatment Works (LMSTW) in March 2021; this investigation was ongoing. The EA had been invited to this meeting but were unable to attend so had submitted an update report for the Committee's information.

4 Minutes and Actions Arising from the last meeting

The minutes of the last meeting were agreed as a correct record.

5 Questions

The Chairman reported that two questions had been received from the Marlow Canoe Club which had been answered, prior to the meeting, by Thames Water and were attached to the agenda.

The Chairman asked, on behalf of members of the public whether an alert system could be set up rather than having to look at the TW Electronic Discharge Map (EDM) to check.

Jake Morley, TW, responded and stated that having checked with the relevant team, he was informed that the EDM had replaced specific alert system via texts and appreciated that there was an extra step to look at the website to determine whether discharge was taking place. He agreed that he would feed back comments from the Canoe Club but a unified approach was the aim to let the public know so they could make their own decisions before using the waterways. It was believed that the EDM was the most appropriate approach.

A question could be fed back to the Canoe Club to ask how long they would want a text alert system to be place. Perhaps periodic updates, say every hour? If that were the case, then it was suggested that checking the website would be more efficient.

It was noted that the EDM was the first of its kind in the UK and it was the intention to make it more comprehensive to pick up issues such as water quality data although the timeline for this was known at this time.

Sam Kershaw commented that he had raised the question of whether recordings from the EA could be correlated with data from TW and whether any other authority was doing so particularly in terms of determining the impact of incidents on the quality of water for the wildlife and other water users. Andrew Scott, TW, responded that this question should really be directed to the EA. It was noted that water companies upstream and downstream do carry out monitoring on certain serious works.

Nick Rowcliffe asked whether consideration had been given to programming in an alert system from the EDM so that people could sign up for particular outfalls/alerts?

Jake Morley responded that TW was reviewing and understanding what could be done to increase date output. There was shortly to be an addition to the EDM, although that was, for the moment, confidential but that it would be publicised when they could.

In response to the statement about dogs becoming ill having been in the river, a request to co-ordinate an email chain with people who wanted to report these incidents to TW. Jake commented that TW and the EA would like to see these to record the incidents.

Philip Emmet asked what was the current capacity of the sewage works and what would the capacity be once the new housing came online within the next 18 months?

Andrew Scott responded that he did not have the complete answer. The population equivalent to the site was approximately 200,000 and there was no plan, as far as he was aware, for a growth scheme within 2025 to 2030. However, it was considered that the capacity was sufficient until at least 2030. Population equivalent was how TW determined the load and the flow into the sewage treatment works although there was a more complicated model that looked at industry in the catchment and the various types of housing within that. Infiltration was looked at a number reached from there. Once the figures had been reached and looked at decisions were then taken whether to expand or not. It was considered that the Little Marlow site was not on the list of sites due for significant growth upgrade. However, resilience work would, in the meantime, be carried out.

Concern was raised that, having been informed at a previous meeting, there was no capacity to switch one unit out to have maintenance carried out while the plant was running, therefore leading to concerns about the running of an efficient plant.

Andrew Scott stated that there would be no more capacity due to growth and that a resilience project was being put in place which meant that assets could be taken out which would be termed as not increasing capacity.

6 Thames Water Update

The Committee noted the written update provided by Thames Water. They noted that the update was from 1 October 2022, although data for the whole of 2022 could be provided if requested.

During his update, Andrew Scott reported the following:

- Since October 2022 there had been no spillage from the storm tanks meaning that everything that had gone into the river had been fully treated; to the River Rye and the Thames. This showed the size of the tanks involved particularly as the area had suffered significant rainfall since October with the wettest March on record. So everything had been fully treated and not blended as previously.
- Following the incident of 18 months ago, a temporary pumping set up was being installed and due to be commissioned within the next 2 months meaning that the blending operation would take place quicker and be treated without fear of significant pollution. This meant blending some of the partially treated effluent with the final effluent to keep TW within consent. TW realised this was not ideal but was the best of a worse case scenario rather than either spill raw from the storm tank.
- OHES were an independent laboratory and scientific company used by TW

to do water and river sampling. They produce data to TW which then gets reported to the EA.

- BOD was Biochemical Oxygen Demand. DAM was Discharge Alert Management. UWWR was Urban Waste Water which was a direct urban waste water directive which was a different set of sampling whereby TW had a 24-hour composite sample taken periodically on large sites. SAS was Surplus Activated Sludge.

- In response to a question about whether there were any other overflows nearby without EDM or if Little Marlow, through the treatment works, was the only one in the area and a question about whether pollution events and storm dust discharges could be distinguished in the EDM data, particularly picking up anything coming out to the river and whether it was as a result of a catastrophic failure or overflow; specifically whether the 27 spills in 2021 were as a result of overflows or catastrophic events. In response to the second question, Andrew Scott responded that not all the flow through could be put through to treatment and therefore it went into the storm tank. The EDM monitor was situated at the back end of the storm tank and so only records any spill from the storm tank and not through the final effluent. This action was taken with the permission of the EA which was the best solution under the circumstances at the time.

  In response to the first question, Andrew Scott stated there was a rolling programme and therefore all TW's sewage works should have EDM's fitted, the remainder would be some of the combined sewer overflows although the programme may not have been fully rolled out. All the currently installed ones were listed on the map. Andrew Scott agreed to obtain data from the network team or environment team to be able to give a more comprehensive response.

  ACTION: Andrew Scott

- In terms of pollution events, where an unpermitted storm discharge would be a three-times compliance failure, there had been no pollution events recorded on the EA website although one enquiry was received from a customer who was concerned about seeing an outfall. However, on investigation it proved to be the opposite meaning there was a lot of silt being carried by the river at the time and the effluent coming in was clearer and appeared a different colour (darker) from where they were standing; it was actually a trick of the light. It was confirmed that it was not pollution.

- It was noted that the Little Marlow site manager had been off work with a serious illness and therefore the site was being covered by staff from different areas around the Thames Valley. It was believed to be a good thing, because more colleagues were familiar with the site in case of emergencies.

- Investment and projects: A blending pump installation was underway and should be commissioned around June time although it was there as a back up and protocols would be put in place with the EA. This mean that it could not be used unless permission with the EA was sought. Therefore, it would only

be a catastrophic failure that would cause it to be used. A second piece of equipment related to sludge, particularly as the Little Marlow site did not treat sludge on site although did take out raw sludge from the process. The sludge consisted the raw sludge that settled as part of the treatment process and it was also waste bacteria that was generated as part of the process that killed the pathogens and reduced the organic load to then get to the final stage with clear water. Currently the liquor was returned to the start of the process and de-wartered raw sludge was stored on site, not for very long, and then taken to a thermal hydrolysis plant, near Oxford, where it was converted to advanced digestate. This created green energy as well as fertiliser. Funding of £5million had now been obtained to fix the dilapidated assets on site although it would be an 18-month lead time because of necessary pieces of kit that was needed, although it was hoped this work could be done with a 12-month lead time. The issue was that if the equipment stopped working, then solids would build up and it would be harder to prevent solids from carrying into the river. Therefore this was a necessary piece of work but would need to be managed well. The £5million had been put aside for this project.

- A question was asked about risk factors for storm overflows being infiltration, misconnection or inundations and which of these three factors were of particular importance at the Little Marlow plant. It had been noted there had been a decrease in dry weather flow in 2022 compared with previous years; down from 30,000 cubic metres a year to 25,000 and which of the infiltration, misconnection or inundation was feeding through to lower this flow? Andrew Scott responded that normally infiltration was at groundwater level, and levels had been seen much lower than in the last two years. This then put a head of pressure in the pipes which then caused water to be forced into the pipes through small cracks. Inundations would be the impact of sudden downpours, which had been experienced in March of 2023.
- Andrew Scott suggested meeting with Nick Rowcliffe to talk about more sustainable behaviours and, in particular, misconnection in respect of rooftop runoff which was a significant contributor to flow and should advice to change to soakaways or water butts be given.

ACTION: Andrew Scott & Nick Rowcliffe

- In response to the dewatering project, if was noted that currently the assets were working so there was no change to the issue. However, they were at the end of their working life and having to work harder, therefore, the longer it took to replace the more of a risk to the assets failing. Contractors were still engaged to fix problems when they arose but taking them offline for any period of time was not an option. The site had two assets and it was unlikely they would both be taken offline at the same time. But if one was taken offline, then it was estimated that in the region of ten artic loads (per day) of activated sludge would need to be taken elsewhere for treatment.
- In terms of the time it would take for the whole project to be completed, it was noted that the finish time would be in the region of 18 months from

now.

- A question was asked about the adjoining country park in Little Marlow which was to be used as a Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) in relation to odour being emitted from the sewage works and whether monitoring was in place and if there were any records of that type. Andrew Scott responded that an external company was commissioned to record levels and data would be made available through an EIR request. There was an odour control unit in place at the composting plant at the rear of the site and was the reason the doors were kept closed, this was a large unit with a big fan and had some media attached to it which all extracted ventilation flowed through. All other tanks on site are uncovered, from inlet to primary and secondary tanks and then tertiary treatment which was not uncommon. TW understood that the tanks produced odours and TW stated they would look at the reports and pull together all affected areas to build up a picture of evidence to be looked at.
- A comment was made about the odour problem being from when the sludge was composted outside and that the biggest change to the odour in the village, came about when the composting plant was built as it had improved because the site was no longer fully composting. However, there was still an issue when lorries were entering and leaving the site causing odour issues around the whole area. Andrew Scott agreed to take this issue away and agreed that following the next odour survey, this issue would be looked at.

ACTION: Andrew Scott

The Chairman thanked Andrew Scott and Jake Morley for their report, update and response to questions.

7 Environment Agency Update

The Committee noted the Environment Agency's written update.

The Chairman notified the Committee that there was an online directory on the Buckinghamshire Council's website (link below) where correspondence could be seen along with progress on the Action Log.

https://buckinghamshire.moderngov.co.uk/ecCatDisplay.aspx?sch=doc&cat=13716

There was uncertainty around when a response from the EA would be received in relation to the March 2021 incident despite being chased for a response. Andrew Scott explained that that if TW had not been notified of formal prosecution procedures as yet and that investigations were still ongoing and therefore would not be able to discuss the incident at a meeting such as this one and neither would the EA.

8 Action Log Update

The Committee noted the Action Log update.

9 Date of Next Meeting

The Chairman indicated that a date in October would be arranged and members of the Committee would be notified.

Joy Morrissey requested that correspondence with DEFRA be forwarded to her in relation to the March 2021 incident. The Chairman agreed.

ACTION: David Watson

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