

Roundmoor & Boveney Ditch Storm Discharge Events

Eton Wick Public Meeting Minutes

Tuesday 8th April 2014 – 7.30pm

Eton Wick First School
Sheepcote Road
Eton Wick
SL4 6JB

Attendees:

Cllr Peter Lawless (Chair)	Royal Borough & Eton Town Councillor
Richard Aylard	External Affairs Director, Thames
Jim Jenkins	Process Area Operations Manager, Thames Water
Steve Crabb	Wastewater Operations Manager, Thames Water
Craig Miller	Interim Head of Public Protection, RBWM
Dr Samuel Ejide	Consultant in Communicable Disease Control Public Health England
Rutuja Kulkarni	Head of Public Health, RBWM
Glen Browne	Acting Team Leader, Environment Agency
John Sutton	Fisheries Team Leader, Environment Agency
Stuart Keable	Fisheries Officer, Environment Agency

1) Welcome & Introductions

Cllr Peter Lawless opened the meeting by introducing himself and welcoming everyone to the meeting. He said that we were here to discuss the damage to ditches surrounding Eton Wick, caused by the recent flooding and that there would be an opportunity for residents to ask questions. We have representatives from Thames Water, the Environment Agency, the Royal Borough and South Bucks District Council. Cllr Lawless asked each of the representatives to stand up and introduce themselves.

2) Meeting Format

Cllr Lawless stated that we would first hear presentations from the representatives of Thames Water, the Environment Agency and the Royal Borough. This would be followed by the reading aloud of nine previously submitted questions from residents and their corresponding answers. Cllr Lawless would then open to questions from the residents. He stated that the meeting would start with a presentation from Thames Water.

3) Thames Water Presentation and Update

Jim Jenkins of Thames Water introduced himself and stated that he would give an overview of Slough Sewage Works. He stated that we have experienced the wettest weather since records began in 1910. He said that of the 350 sewage works, 150 had suffered adversely due to the excess rainfall. He added that even once the river level drops the ground water levels are still high and this can flow into the network and cause problems. The Slough catchment area cover Taplow, Slough, Stoke Poges, Eton Wick, Dorney and Datchet and receives residential and trade effluent. The sewage flows into the works from pumping station sites. The storm permit states that excess flow can be stored in the storm tanks. If they reach capacity then they can flow into the ditches. The level of the flood was so high that it restricted access to the site.

However, they managed to keep the pumps working; this meant that they remained compliant. The remediation plans following the storm discharges are that they will carry out spot hoovering of sediment collected in the ditches and gardens. They will replace gravel and have offered to restock with fish. The Environment Agency will do this during the appropriate season, which is in Autumn. They are also pumping stagnant water back into the sewage works. A future consideration would be that they could divert the storm water into the Jubilee River but they would need to consult with the Environment Agency before they can implement it.

4) Environment Agency Presentation

Glen Browne of the Environment Agency introduced himself and said that he would give an overview of their point of view. He said that they were notified on the 19th January 2014, that there was an issue with the site and that 2km of watercourse was affected. A survey on the 13th March 2014 confirmed an impact on the fish and invertebrate stocks. The rainfall data they collected shows that the rainfall was excessive. December 2013 was 152% of average rainfall. January was 234% of the average rainfall. February was the wettest on record with 248% of average rainfall and the three month average was 205% of what would normally be expected for that area. He stated that the actions taken by the Agency included taking water quality/probe readings, visits to the sites by Officers and water aeration in conjunction with Thames Water. They also notified Public Health England and notified the residents in March 2014. They also carried out fish and invertebrate surveys, which would be explained in more detail by his colleague, Stuart Keable.

Stuart Keable introduced himself and stated that he had been tasked with investigating the ecological impact of the event. He said that he had conducted two surveys (for fish and macro-invertebrates) at two sites in March 2014 and then compared the results with the historical data for each site. The fish survey results showed that there was only 5% of fish compared to the last survey in 2009. He said that a number of large fish species had been found dead along the water course and that the rest had moved further down stream during the storm. The results of the macro-invertebrate survey showed that the diversity and abundance of species was very low. The scores at both sites were 12 and 21, where the expected score should be 80. He said that the results had been discussed with Thames Water and Thames Water had agreed to help with the recharging of the gravel downstream of the properties. This would be a real help to accelerate the natural recovery of the area. The gravel would make the water shallower and faster flowing, which would help the stream with self cleansing. A resident mentioned that some men had been seen working on the common and asked what they had been doing. Stuart Keable said that they were not working for the Environment Agency and referred the question to the representatives from Thames Water. The Thames Water representatives said that the men were trimming vegetation which still had residual pollution and were removing polluted silt from the watercourse.

5) Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead and Public Health

Craig Miller introduced himself and stated that he was here with the Royal Borough's Public Health team and colleagues from South Bucks District Council. He explained that the local authority is one of a number of agencies that deal with major events. The recent flooding had been designated a major event by the Police. The primary concerns of the local authority in such an event were to preserve life, communicable disease and outbreak control, to provide advice to those affected and to be an ambassador to support the local community with other agencies. Craig then explained what the council had done in respect of this event. He stated that the Royal Borough had co-ordinated an emergency response with other agencies to the major flooding

event. RBWM had carried relevant flood and public health advice and information on a dedicated area on the front page of its website during the course of the flooding and this specific event. Craig mentioned that water sampling pots had appeared on the door steps of several residents with no indication of who they were from and this had caused some concern. RBWM's Environmental Protection officers investigated further and found that they were from a company that sold water softening products and it was not related to the flood but was coincidental and unfortunate timing on the company's part. The Royal Borough also helped to get the community voice heard with the other agencies and ensured that communication improved between those agencies and the affected community. The Royal Borough also investigated the alleged outbreak at the Eton Wick First School, which the representatives from Public Health would discuss in more detail. The Royal Borough also investigated the noise nuisance complaint received about the water aeration pumps and helped mitigate the impact on the affected household. Finally, the Royal Borough co-ordinated a multi agency meeting to review this event and also organised this public meeting. Craig went on to discuss what in his view could have been done better in respect of this event by all organisations involved. He highlighted that there could be better communications between the agencies involved in the major event. There could also be better signposting of information for the local community. Craig mentioned that the local authorities, Thames Water and the Environment Agency had agreed to develop a memorandum of understanding for major events linked to Slough Sewage Works that would seek to improve communication and provide more definition of the roles and responsibilities of the agencies involved.

Dr Samuel Ejide introduced himself and stated that Public Health England's role in the flooding is to provide advice on health issues and emphasise good hygiene principles as all flood water is likely to be contaminated in some way. Public Health worked closely with the Environment Agency and Thames Water. They were able to collate data from national surveillance of gastric infections due to contact with flood water. The most likely places to be affected by infections in this way were care homes and schools. PHE were also able to collate data from NHS Direct and the Royal College of GP's, where people were reporting symptoms and illnesses on a national scale. The results of the data were used to assess the impact of the incident. Public Health had meetings with the Environment Agency, the Police and other agencies and supported the local authority with its advice leaflets. They also gave advice to local GP's to pass on to patients. A review of the data showed that gastric infections remained low as people took on board the advice provided by Public Health and that good standards of hygiene prevented a disease outbreak. The outbreak at Eton Wick First School was initially reported by the Head of Public Health at RBWM, Rutuja Kulkarni. The School managers were aware of the guidance and felt confident that they had handled the incident correctly. An investigation concluded that there was no obvious cause for the outbreak. Public Health gave written advice to the school management and there have been no new reports of infections.

6) Response to questions previously submitted

(Post script:- responses have been provided after each question in bold italic font)

Cllr Lawless stated that he would read out the questions submitted by residents and that the responses would be read by Craig Miller. He asked that any comments or further questions from the residents be kept until the end.

Q1 At the Dorney Parish Annual General Meeting on 19/03/14, Thames Water admitted to premeditated continuous discharge into Roundmoor and Boveney Ditches from early December. The excessive flooding and effluent content left Eton Wick surrounded by

an open sewer, decimating wildlife and leaving residents/landowners/dog walkers without notification of a public health hazard, for three months. At the above meeting the Environment Agency were also surprised to hear the discharge commenced in early December.

a) Have EA now established the legality of discharge in line with TW's Licence including notification criteria and water content?

We have experienced extreme weather conditions and the indications are that the discharge was legal. There is an ongoing investigation and we will be fully open with all interested parties once this investigation is complete. (EA)

b) Prior to the recent flooding situation, residents/landowners were questioning the general standard of water quality in Roundmoor and Boveney Ditches. TW's licence requires details of daily discharges into the watercourse to be notified to the Regional Water Quality Manager. Can EA/TW please provide accurate discharge statistics for the last five years?

c) Please advise what can be done to strictly monitor/record water quality with records accessible in the public domain?

Water companies are responsible for monitoring their own discharges by collecting and analysing their own chemical samples and submitting the data to us. This gives them a greater awareness of their performance and the environmental impact of their operations. We have an auditing role. We check that they are doing what they are supposed to by carrying out audits using the operation monitoring assessment (OMA) procedures. This data is publicly available. People interested in WQ data can email our External Relations Team on wtenquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk. (EA)

We recognise that the storm discharges from Slough sewage treatment works during this Winter's exceptional weather have been exceedingly unpleasant for local residents. However, throughout this period the sewage works has worked as designed and in accordance with its discharge consent from the Environment Agency. (TW)

Q2 The failure of all agencies to communicate and advise the community of the incident resulted in residents, children, visitors and their pets becoming ill and the death of abundant wildlife. Thames Water has issued a variety of apologies and poor excuses since the residents raised objections. On 24/03 a TW representative confirmed TW would be unable to advise every time Slough Treatment Works discharged due to the frequency and on 28/03 TW formally stated they are not obliged to inform residents of discharges or potential hazards. Following the confusion and poor communication of this incident to, and between, all parties, please advise protocol to be put in place to:

- a) Ascertain criteria TW are expected to meet prior to any discharge.
- b) Ensure agencies/authorities are advised immediately prior to all discharges.
- c) Ensure timely and informative announcements are made to residents, landowners etc. when intention to discharge is notified.
- d) Mitigate pollution and damage should discharge be agreed.

Our discharge consent requires us to treat fully incoming flows of up to 1,150 litres per second. Once that flow is exceeded any additional flow is passed to the storm tanks for storage until spare treatment capacity becomes available, at

which point it is pumped back for treatment. However, when the works is at full capacity and the storm tanks are full, any additional flow passes through the storm tanks and into Roundmoor Ditch. This is an automatic process, designed to prevent overflows of the system from either the sewage works or the sewers leading to it. These are known as storm discharges and the works was designed and intended to operate in this manner. In a normal year, storm discharges are infrequent and typically of short duration. When they occur, the flows are screened in passing through the storm tanks and comprise a high proportion of ground and rain water, so are relatively dilute. Once mixed with the fully treated final effluent from the main works discharge point there is a further level of dilution.

This winter's sustained exceptionally wet weather resulted in significantly higher flows coming into the works (in region of 2,000 litres per second for an extended period). Neither the sewer system or sewage works was designed to cope with this sort of flow and the storm discharges were required over an extended period.

There is no requirement for us to notify discharges made in accordance with our EA consent. However, in the particular and highly unusual circumstances experienced this year, with continuous storm discharges being required for a sustained period, we accept that we should have explained the situation to local residents and the Council much sooner. We will work with the Council to develop contingency plans and appropriate trigger levels for future use.

Work is already underway to restore the ditches now the wet weather has subsided. We are supporting the EA in this work, which is likely to include some restocking with fish when conditions are suitable.

Q3 During construction of the Jubilee River, the fresh water element of Roundmoor Ditch and Common Ditch was cut off. Roundmoor Ditch/Boveney Ditches became supplied with 100% treated effluent water via a dedicated sewage pipe from STW. Our streams are now no more than a dedicated sewage disposal conduit, and, to our knowledge, unique in TW's 350 treatment works. The ultimate destination for the outfall (treated and untreated contents) is, as stated, the River Thames.

a) What are the alternative options to avoid discharging into a minor open water course which travels three kilometres through a community, directly adjacent to homes and common land, before reaching the River Thames?

It is worth advising at this stage that this is not a unique situation as there are other sewage treatment works across the area where final effluent makes up the majority of the flow. Thames Water has an environmental permit to discharge into Roundmoor Ditch. We are happy to discuss a potential variation of the permit with Thames Water and any proposals they make. (EA)

b) At the Dorney Parish Council AGM, the Environment Agency verbally confirmed that they would open to proposals from TW to discharge directly into the Jubilee River where effluent would be significantly diluted. Please confirm investigative actions required to be taken/by whom, and the time span for investigation, report, consultation and instigation?

We have been discussing this with the EA and will be making a formal request for them to consider moving the storm discharge point to the Jubilee River. (TW)

- c) What other options could also be considered e.g. direct closed discharge pipe to the River Thames?

This is an issue for the EA. They are responsible for determining the appropriate discharge point for the works but we will cooperate fully in any investigation of alternatives. (TW)

- d) In the event treated and untreated discharges can be re-directed, please confirm how the natural water element will be returned to our village streams and the levels to be maintained?

If the storm discharge (partially treated) was to be relocated as part of a permit variation then we don't anticipate that this would cause an issue due to the continuous flow from the final effluent discharge. If the final effluent discharge (treated) is relocated it is likely to have a significant impact on the watercourse. We understand that Thames Water are looking at options to relocate the storm discharge and we are open to looking at this proposal. (EA)

- Q4** We understand the discharge has now ceased. Please confirm the proposed programme of works to:

- a) Clean up all affected streams surrounding the village including the adjacent land/properties?

We're committed to cleaning up areas affected by our storm discharges and will continue until it is sorted. Our contractors are currently busy removing affected vegetation and restricting flows in the ditches and clean up affected areas. This will help the watercourse recover faster. Later this week, the contractors will turn their attentions to removing the dried scum line from affected properties off the river frontage – we appreciate this is unsightly and we'll work with residents to ensure things are put back to normal. (TW)

- b) Re-stock the stream and encourage its bio-diversity?

Thames Water has agreed that there is scope for some habitat improvement works to be implemented with guidance from the Environment Agency in order to allow the fish population to recover and become self sustaining. The environment agency will proceed with a programme of re-stocking at the appropriate time. (EA)

Starting to happen. We will work with the Environment Agency to restock fish into the watercourse whenever they decide the time is right. Generally, this needs to happen in winter time as the dissolved oxygen levels are naturally higher, which is better for fish. There is also likely to be some natural recolonisation. (TW)

- Q5** Will TW make recompense for property damage due to content of emissions? Please confirm the process individuals should follow to make claims.

Any claim would need to be made through household insurance policies. (TW)

- Q6** Due to TW's negligence in advising residents, landowners, dog walkers etc. of the hazardous content of floodwater will compose be made for personal illness and veterinary costs? Please confirm recompense to be made to affected parties and the process individuals should follow to process claims.

Any concerns relating to public health should be directed to Public Health England or the local Environmental Health department. (TW)

- Q7** Will RBWM be responding to residents requests to review their council tax banding in light of the now known regular and future effluent discharges, with residents in the likely position of living next to an open sewer?

The Council is not responsible for setting Council Tax bands. The Council sets the level of Council Tax that is needed to provide local services, and makes a charge according to the individual band of the property and the area or parish that the property is in. The Valuation Office Agency (VOA) www.voa.gov.uk is responsible for determining which Council Tax Band a property is placed in. The Valuation Office Agency is an executive agency of HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC). There are a limited number of circumstances whereby a resident can appeal against the banding of their property – this is known as making a proposal to alter the Council Tax Valuation List.

Residents who feel that a “substantial physical change” has taken place in the area where they live since their property was first banded, and believe this has reduced the value of their property should contact the VOA to discuss the situation and likelihood of making a successful appeal. (RBWM)

- Q8** When selling homes, vendors are legally obliged to disclose all known neighbour/boundary disputes or matters affecting their property? Failure to disclose can result in prosecution. Could TW please advise formal legal text vendors should now include within their disclosure responses?

If there are specific legal questions you should consult with your solicitor assisting on the sale for the appropriate response. (TW)

- Q9** The recent incident has re-ignited concerns regarding STW and sewer systems being fit for purpose. Further concerns are highlighted due to proposed additional housing and climate change. Can TW confirm STW plant is fit for purpose based on current capacity of STW in direct comparison to current requirements (including statistics), plus plans for future investment in STW and sewer systems in light of the planned housing expansion/increased rainfall?

As part of our five year planning process we have recently reviewed the capacity required at Slough STW against the Council's Local Plan, which runs to 2026. The level of population growth anticipated in the area served by the works is approx. 4% from 2011 to 2026 and the works has adequate capacity to with this.

However, in the light of this winter's events we have started looking at whether the works can be modified to take an increased flow to full treatment. This would reduce the likelihood and duration of storm discharges. It is clear that part of the problem of the greatly increased flows was caused by large volumes of water from river flooding (particularly in the Wraybury area)

entering the sewers which lead to Slough STW. High groundwater levels will also have had a significant effect. Both of these issues are notoriously difficult to pin down to specific locations but further modelling work will be undertaken, in conjunction with the EA and local authorities.

We work closely with the planners at Slough Borough Council and neighbouring boroughs to understand where development may take place and identify consequences for our sewer network and treatment works. Although not a statutory consultee we actively seek to respond to planning applications and will seek specific planning conditions where there is a potential infrastructure contract. (TW)

7) Questions from the floor

(Post script:- responses have been provided after each question in bold italic font)

Cllr Lawless said that he would now request questions from the residents.

Q: The answers are abhorrent. At every opportunity, Thames Water has failed to grasp the impact on residents. Thames Water has failed to understand the feelings of residents. Thames Water is not taking responsibility for health and vet fees.

TW are in no doubt of the depth of feeling. TW are not complacent. Lots of people have been affected from Sevenoaks to Cirencester. We have experienced unprecedented wet weather, which has not happened before. People are working 16 – 18 hour days, doing their best. TW has had correspondence from residents and can only give honest replies. TW can not give legal advice regarding housing or public health advice. The works is working the way it was intended. It might happen again. TW will work with EA to find a solution. In summer, effluent is highly treated, so no one notices.

Q: TW did not communicate properly.

TW agrees that they did not communicate properly. Lots of people had been flooded out of their homes. TW should have reacted more quickly. TW apologies for it but will work with RBWM on contingency plans for future events.

Q: Why was there bad smells issuing from the holding tanks?

The storm tanks were used intermittently throughout December and sediment will settle in the tanks. As this sediment is moved it will release a certain amount of odour.

Q: Why is the sediment stockpiled?

It is used as fuel/fertilizers but couldn't be moved to farmers due to the flooding. It is usually moved in July and August.

Q: Where did it go during the flooding?

To the inlet valves.

Craig Miller asked asked residents who are affected by sewage odours to make contact with RBWM regarding this, so Environmental Protection Officers could investigate.

Q: Resident wanted to go back over the answers to Q3. He understood that priority had to go to the flooded areas but he wanted to reiterate the unique position that Eton Wick residents are in.

TW stated that it was not common but there are other instances of this situation, mainly in small rural villages.

Q: Do these villages have effluent travelling beside them?

TW do not have the specific information for these locations at this meeting so would not be able to comment in this level of detail.

Q: We now live next to a 100% treated sewer. We live in a unique position.

TW stated that it was a fair point and suggests that they could move the storm discharge from the ditches. EA states that this could cause the watercourse to dry up.

Q: There was a natural spring across the common but this dried up when the Jubilee River was built. Why was this question not brought up? We need people to look into this and communicate what is happening to local watercourses.

Q: Resident requested water quality results from the last 5 years.

TW signposted residents to the information held by the Environment Agency on their website.

Q: Resident stated that this did not comply with the Licence.

TW stated that the Licence does allow them to discharge under storm conditions.

Q: Can we get statistics?

TW stated that residents can have all of the data they have.

Q: Resident request information on the quality of water downstream.

This is not possible as storm discharge is not monitored.

Q: The answer to Q3b states that TW will make a request to EA to discharge the water into the Jubilee River.

Yes, TW will ask for permission to move the discharge into the Jubilee River from the EA.

Q: The answer to Q2 states that the storm discharge is automatic and TW is not able to inform people of very discharge. They have a site in London (Mogden Works) which sends a text message to the local rowing club warning of a storm discharge. What is the difference?

Mogden is a bigger site compared to Slough. However, it may be possible to have a similar scheme for Eton Wick residents. This will require some work to determine if it is feasible.

Q: Could you not co-ordinate with Floodline?

The EA runs Floodline. It would be hard to know much in advance but it could be possible. Craig Miller stated that this could be picked up with the work that the organisation will do to develop a memorandum of understanding.

Q: The answer is to get rid of the stuff rather than receiving a warning.

Q: Resident wanted a commitment on the proposals as he was concerned that this would be forgotten. He also asked what the normal flow was. If TW had followed the legality of the Licence, why has the Licence allowed so much pollution?

TW stated that their commitment was because they did not want to go through this again and that they genuinely care about the environment. They can see that diverting the flows into the Jubilee River may benefit the community. TW will follow due process. The normal flow figures are 608 litres per second so the storm trigger is double this. It is around 40 Olympic swimming pools of effluent per day. The polluting load remains the same. The Licence allows this level of pollution as the storm discharges are normally short-lived but due to the problems experienced from the extreme weather other options will be considered.

Q: Can you give timescales for when the diversion into the Jubilee River will take place? Who else will you be consulting with?

TW will discuss this with the Flood Department.

Q: Have discussions started?

TW will need to look at what land is required. TW can reconvene the meeting in six months to give residents an update.

Q: Regarding the missing fish, one reason could be that some fishermen were using the river during the storm surge. Is this allowed?

No, this is not allowed. There is a number to ring to report fishermen doing this. There are a lot of problems with poaching of fish. Their eyes and ears are local anglers and the number to ring is on the EA website and on fishing licences. Enforcement officers will answer those calls.

Q: On the right hand side of the common there is a clump of reeds, which hinders flow. Can anything be done to improve the flow?

The reeds are not entirely responsible, there is an issue with cattle poaching (cow displaces soil with its foot and that soil is washed away) in that area. This widens the river and the silt is more likely to settle.

Q: Who was in charge of the decision to place the aeration pumps in their original positions? They were placed beside the resident's house and caused a lot of problems. Why were they not placed in their current position to begin with?

TW apologised for the stress caused by this. TW had engaged with third party contractors to place the pumps. They were probably placed there so that the contractors could gain safe and easy access to the watercourse.

Q: The resident said that he would like to speak to the Manager in charge of that decision.

Specialist contractors were used and it was a mistake made by the contractors.

Q: A resident who lives in Tilstone Close stated that there was sewage in her garden. She called TW, who contacted the contractors. The contractors called her to say that they would be arriving at 9.30pm to clear the sewage. She pointed out that it would be dark and that she lived in a rural area. The contractor stated that there would be plenty of light. This statement did not fill her with confidence.

Cllr Lawless stated that he would take a few more questions before closing the meeting.

Q: With new housing being built how will the current infrastructure cope?

By looking at the local plan to see if it can cope. The works can cope with a 40% increase. Water companies cannot influence planning applications but they do check applications. Slough STW has been expanded in the past and can be expanded in the future.

Q: A farmer was prevented from putting his cows into four fields but cows are on Dorney Common where the land had been contaminated. This is spreading the pollution and affecting dogs walking in the area. Who will pay for vet fees?

It is difficult to comment on the farmer's use of the land. If people can prove that their pets illness is linked to the pollution then it will be done. They will need to write in. TW will provide you with the Customer Services address after the meeting.

Q: If we get data from local vets regarding the illnesses will you look at it.

Although they are not an expert they will look at this data with their legal team.

Q: Who can we contact if we have any further questions?

Refer to Craig Miller and he will provide a contact.

8) Confirmation of next steps

Craig Miller said that it was important to remind people of the development of the memorandum of understanding with other agencies. Craig added that he would take the lead to co-ordinate this and that this was a positive step.

Q: The picture shown of where the effluent skirts the village ignores the fact that it circles the village and is not in straight line. The resident wanted action not just more talking. TW have failed to understand the geography of the village and have surrounded it.

TW are only aware of the outfall down the ditch. They will get a rep down tomorrow so the resident can show them what they mean and it will be sorted.

9) Close

Cllr Lawless stated that a lot of issues had been raised tonight and thanked people for attending. He added that RBWM was doing its best to support local residents. If there are any further questions, please direct them to Craig Miller.