

RBWM PRE-CABINET MEETING
30TH OCTOBER, 2014
RESIDENT STATEMENT

Much of our local area is built on chalk and limestone rock with underground streams and chalk aquifers holding pure mineral rich water. The water appears above ground in a network of ponds, streams and ditches within our local villages; it enters Eton Wick through Roundmoor and Boveney Ditches before terminating in the Thames above Windsor. In 1963 Slough Council were granted consent to insert a 33" sewage pipe from Slough Sewage Treatment Works into Roundmoor Ditch. This resulted in increased water flow but provided an unwelcome legacy of pollution incidents that have occurred to this day.

During the construction of the Jubilee River the natural water element was cut off from Eton Wick. A pipe now runs under the Jubilee River into Roundmoor Ditch with the watercourse comprising 100% treated water (of variable quality) from Slough STW. The ditches are now classed as river.

This pipe is also the route for the discharge of storm effluent, coursing through our community, flooding farmland, gardens and public recreation areas, on it's way to the Thames.

Thames Water have confirmed Slough STW can treat incoming volumes of 1,150l/s; above this flows are directed to three storm storage tanks. As levels drop the stored storm effluent is introduced back into the plant for treatment. However, the treatment works can only store three days continuous 'steady' rainfall from empty; after this period (and during short term peak events) storm effluent is discharged into Roundmoor Ditch until rainfall subsides.

Although residents are located within Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead, the watercourses are affected at source in Slough Borough Council and by maintenance issues within South Bucks District Council.

Exceptional storm flooding from December 2013 resulted in Slough STW discharging storm water (in excess of 1,100l/s) containing untreated sewage into Roundmoor and Boveney Ditches from 3rd December to mid March. Due to the volumes discharged, the storm effluent broke the dividing shield separating Roundmoor Ditch from watercourses on the north side of our village. The discharge backed up into Colenorton and Common Brooks surrounding Eton Wick on three sides and creating a stinking open sewer directly outside homes. Adjacent farm/common land and gardens flooded from early December. Residents/visitors were not aware of the content until the water began to recede leaving sewage and sewage fungus covering land and watercourses. Wildlife charities were prevented in rescuing wildlife and wildfowl as the EA could not deem level of contamination acceptable for contact. Residents, however, could live directly next to the contamination.

Throughout this period neither TW or the EA highlighted the practice, pollution issues or public safety concerns to the village. Residents and their pets became ill, wildlife and wildfowl were killed and 95% of the watercourse biodiversity was eradicated. Animal and bird carcasses were left rotting outside our homes whilst authorities argued responsibility for contaminated disposal.

Residents became aware of content towards the end January continuously contacting RBWM, TW and the EA. Each authority denied responsibility for action, attributing problem and response to the other. It rapidly became clear TW/EA did not understand geography of the area or the effect their actions had on our community. A Public Meeting was arranged by RBWM. Despite detailed interrogative questions it was apparent TW were not in compliance with EA discharge licence and the EA did not monitor or enforce the licence issued to Slough STW.

As a result of the Public Meeting all parties agreed a documented procedure should be implemented in the short term to alert relevant authorities each time storm effluent is discharged from Slough STW. Designated, documented actions would ensure correct practice followed, clear announcements made and future discharges investigated.

In the long term TW/EA undertook to consider alternative discharge routes for storm effluent, agreeing to investigate discharging of storm volumes directly into Jubilee River. A date of six months was set to fully brief community on actions taken and proposed plans to alleviate the discharge problem.

It was assumed the watercourses would recover and further problems would not be experienced until late 2014. However, as the spring/summer progressed a myriad of anomalies were experienced throughout the village:

- Roundmoor and Boveney Ditches maintained water levels two feet above seasonal levels, continuously breaking banks until beginning of October, despite a prolonged hot/dry summer.
- Water backed up over Roundmoor defence into Colenorton and Common Brooks resulting in still stagnant water in the centre and to the north of the village.
- Lakes were apparent on Dorney Common and in the fields adjacent to Wood Lane from March until September.
- A resident in Tilstone Close reported water seeping up through her extension floor despite having two 4m wide x 3m deep drainage pits dug in her garden. The ingress containing high ammonia levels continues despite TW re-lining main and branch sewers.
- CCTV investigation of the drains under Tilstone Close located an aperture and noted high Roundmoor/ground water levels entering the sewage network.
- Residents in the centre of the village experienced damp in houses/puddles in gardens at height of summer
- Other residents experienced water/sewage ingress; hesitant to highlight due to insurance concerns.
- Reports village wide of water table being less than 12" below ground level throughout summer.
- Farmland and gardens remained lush despite high temperature for long duration.
- Internal cracking/subsidence to houses along Roundmoor and Boveney Ditches reported.
- TW discharged high concentration ammonia into stream on 9th July for 18 hours due to contractor error.
- Visible solids were noted in Roundmoor on 12th August and reported to RBWM/TW/EA following short duration summer storm.
- Independent test results by environmental contractor showed water course contained excessive Ecoli and coliforms.
- Roundmoor water quality poor since July (highlighted by EA) and continuing to deteriorate.

Summer has highlighted a more significant issue for our village; it is clear Eton Wick is being affected by the watercourses surrounding our village. The discharge issues are also highlighting problems for the future. Slough STW may be able to treat high sewage volumes as a result of increased planning/climate change but our village cannot cope with increased 100% treated or storm effluent discharges.

The re-routing of sewage discharge is now a mid term solution. Longterm we request all local authorities review future planning approvals, assess Slough STW process capacity and investigate operation and condition of all surrounding watercourses.

We are facing another predicted wet winter/spring. TW have reviewed their 100% treated outflow records and cannot understand why groundwater and watercourse levels are so high. TW have already confirmed they have no option but to discharge into Roundmoor after three days of steady rain. Residents all fear they will be living next to a flooded open sewer once again.

We ask all parties (RBWM, SBDC, SBC, TW, EA, ETC, DPC and landowners) to understand and appreciate the problems we are experiencing plus the effect their processes, decisions and actions have on our village.

Thank you.

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RESIDENT REQUESTED ACTIONS**

1. Flood/Storm Discharge Protocol:

Due to the confusion between authorities and failure of TW/EA to act throughout flood, the need for a procedure was agreed in April. The procedure was partially put into practice on 10th July following short duration ammonia discharge.

Actions:

- a. *RBWM to publish fully documented protocol, including response targets, by end November.*
- b. *RBWM to confirm resident legal redress should procedure/targets not be achieved.*
- c. *RBWM to ensure procedure confirms designated authority responsible for collection/disposal of animal carcasses and clean up standards/response times following major event*
- d. *RBWM to become single point of contact, creating and publicising hotline and webpage for residents' questions and concerns in event of storm discharges.*

2. Storm discharge data/legality:

Specific data in relation to last five years storm outflow events/volumes from Slough STW was formally requested prior to and during April's Public Meeting. TW/EA presented and 'spun' other data to support legality of TW discharge. RBWM minutes detail EA as investigating legality, but their statement recorded at the meeting confirmed discharge was legal. EA ultimately agreed to provide data as a meeting action.

On 17th July TW confirmed the data was unavailable as they do not monitor storm discharge and volumetric meters recording flow into works and effluent discharge failed on 9th December and 28th January respectively.

Despite EA supporting discharge as legal, the EA advised they were made aware in February but only issued an enforcement notice on 18th July for meters to be in place by end August.

Actions:

- a. *EA to explain why they waited until 18th July to issue flow meter enforcement notice if TW reported failure in February.*
- b. *TW to confirm volumetric meters have now been installed on flow into Slough STW, effluent outflow and storm discharge route.*
- c. *TW to confirm data will be recorded, formally published with daily flow data issued to/accessible to residents.*
- d. *EA to explain why they did not check provision/condition of flow meters at Slough STW or collate data from TW as clearly defined and stipulated in the EA Licence issued to TW.*
- e. *RBWM to investigate how EA classified December-March discharges as legal in April without access to the required flow data*
- f. *RBWM to advise legal position and proposed action to prosecute the EA for failure to monitor and enforce Licence.*
- g. *EA to share results of investigation into TW storm event and elevated ammonia discharge including assessment of TW's permit compliance as detailed in email dated 24th July.*

3. Re-routing of storm discharge:

On the 17th July TW advised a meeting had been held with the EA on 29th May to discuss relocation of storm discharge point from Slough STW. TW commented:

“the options were discussed in some detail and the EA took an action to contact their Flood Defence team to see if the Jubilee River option was even a possibility. We also discussed the matter at our regular Permitting Liaison Meetings on the 3rd July where the same EA team were again present along with our normal contacts at the National Permitting Centre. It was not discussed in depth here but there was a commitment to chase the feedback from within the EA. Here are the notes from the relevant Thames Water team member:

We discussed two options – firstly, a permanent change to the storm discharge location, which would require a change to the discharge permit and then as an alternative, we discussed the possibility of having an agreement in place that would allow pumping of the Roundmoor Ditch to the Jubilee River in extreme circumstances (as we experienced this winter). We mentioned the latter as an option, in case a permanent relocation is deemed not appropriate due to lack of dilution in the Jubilee River in less extreme weather events.

There were a couple of issues that the Agency had some concern over. Firstly they wanted to consult with their FRCM (flood risk & coastal management team) to ascertain whether in very high flow conditions, the Jubilee River can hydraulically accept additional flows without causing flooding further downstream. We haven't heard back on this yet (despite chasing them). Obviously this could be a complete show-stopper if they say there is no capacity in the Jubilee.

Secondly, to support any application the EA have said that they will expect a full network investigation and infiltration study due to the extreme spills that were seen from the site. This will be along the lines of looking at any options for removing any infiltration or inundation from the network, over pumping in the network in an emergency (to reduce the storm spill at Slough itself) etc.

Checked with our asset planning team, and what the EA are asking for in terms of an infiltration study is quite difficult to do – as you will appreciate, this is a bit like trying to find a needle in a haystack and if there are high flows due to groundwater infiltration, we can only find them when the groundwater levels are high – which is also the time when it is dangerous to enter sewers to try to put flow monitoring loggers in. We are continuing to work on the process and prioritisation for these studies across the whole of the Thames Water area, so this is not a quick fix I'm afraid.

On 29th July the EA issued a formal statement (which they would not distribute to residents) stating their Asset Performance Team deemed the Jubilee River option 'not appropriate'. On 1st October the EA commented if they were to allow storm discharges from the Slough STW to enter the Jubilee river they would need to reduce flows down the river from the Thames; this is not something they could or would do. There are no other discharges into the Jubilee River for the same reason.

A simple statement deeming solution of re-routing into Jubilee River 'not appropriate' is unacceptable.

Actions:

- a. *TW to publish Slough STW plant information including process volumes, capacity for future increases, capacity of storage tanks from empty, frequency storm effluent directed to tanks, volumes stored and duration, frequency of discharge, frequency single storm has resulted in peak capacity and storm discharge, anticipated future discharge volumes/frequency.*
- b. *TW to explain comment pertaining to the pumping of storm discharge from Roundmoor Ditch into the Jubilee River as an option, if permanent relocation is deemed not appropriate due to lack of dilution in less extreme weather events. If the Jubilee can achieve suitable dilution of high level storm effluent in extreme weather events, it can achieve acceptable dilution from reduced effluent levels in less extreme weather events. In either event the dilution far exceeds that of Roundmoor and Boveney Ditches.*
- c. *EA to report in detail on consultation with their Flood Risk and Coastal Management Team regarding the Jubilee Rivers ability to hydraulically accept additional flows.*

- d. *EA to explain how they expect TW to carry out a full network inspection and infiltration study when TW are only able to locate when ground water levels are high and sewers are dangerous to enter, without this being viewed as an EA delaying tactic.*
- e. *EA to explain why their Asset Performance Team were only mentioned after the Public Meeting in April concluded, including the overhead comment “it would doubtful pass their scrutiny”.*
- f. *EA/TW to publish detailed investigation data, flow assessments and risk assessments to support refusal.*
- g. *EA/TW to publish risk and flow assessments that deem discharge into Roundmoor, through a village, more appropriate.*
- h. *EA/TW to investigate and report on alternative options for discharge or handling volumes at Slough STW.*
- i. *EA to consider TW suggestion to discharge storm flows directly into the Jubilee, but balance capacity by engineering equal flows of Jubilee River water into Roundmoor. The village would still flood in extreme circumstances but not with storm effluent causing a public health risk.*
- j. *EA to advise whether they could give approval for discharge licence into Roundmoor, under current legislation, if TW applied now.*

4. Watercourse maintenance:

TW acknowledge that whilst storm effluent continues to be discharged into Roundmoor, the flow should not be impeded ensuring all pollution travels through village as speedy as possible.

The EA attributed high stream levels to vegetation in Roundmoor and Boveney Ditches. Dorney/Eton Wick have been subjected to ongoing delays and difficulties in relation to EA clarity surrounding riparian ownership/maintenance. Historically the EA maintained but are now unable to agree requirements with major landowners or appreciate they are expecting villagers to enter watercourses when the water could contain high level coliforms and human waste at any point during the year.

The EA state “they are unable to provide reassurance regarding impact on human health. The designated use of the water (e.g. abstraction for drinking, sensitive habitat) determines the standards we set for our quality monitoring. The only waters the EA monitor for bacteria and ‘other things’ that can be detrimental to people, are designated bathing waters. The Roundmoor Ditch is not designated bathing water, so the EA do not hold this information. During storming events the water quality deteriorates and they can understand why residents would not wish to enter the river during these events. The EA advice to those considering entering the river is that they need to carry out their own risk assessment and always take precautions because they can never be 100% sure about the quality of the river at any given time”.

This may be acceptable for standard watercourses but unacceptable for a watercourse the EA licence for sewage discharge. Residents should not be expected to risk assess; the EA are missing the point completely – residents are not aware when storming has occurred or human waste is in the stream.

Actions:

- a. *EA to provide clarity on riparian ownership, responsibilities and work with landowners/residents to understand and achieve requirements.*
- b. *EA to resolve issues with Dorney Commoners/land agents regarding vegetation and cattle poaching once and for all, ensuring village does not experience issues every year.*
- c. *EA to work with landowners/agents to monitor and enforce regular maintenance.*
- d. *RBWM/TW/EA (responsible authority to be decided) procedure required to ensure watercourse bacteria levels are monitored and safe to enter for maintenance. Results to be published for public access.*

5. Watercourse monitoring:

Whilst the watercourses were originally designated 'ditches', Roundmoor and Boveney are 12-14ft wide and flows increase annually eroding farmland and gardens

Action:

- a. *RBWM/TW/EA (responsible authority to be decided) to survey and monitor watercourse width, depth and condition to understand effect of increased flows.*

6. Watercourse engineering and control:

Eton Wick was originally only subject to changes in the River Thames and surrounding minor ditches. The village is now an island between two major rivers and surrounded by ditches which are now classified as rivers.

The increasing problems illustrate our village is being affected by surrounding watercourses.

Actions:

- a. *RBWM/EA and TW to examine overall effects including high groundwater levels, control of River Thames/Jubilee River/village watercourses and emissions from Slough STW.*
- b. *EA to examine Jubilee River and River Thames riverbeds and banks to assess current condition.*
- c. *EA to re-assess Jubilee River including design, operation and flow modelling using latest software and in conjunction with current climate assessments.*
- d. *EA to publish results of inspections.*

7. Future planning:

Planning approvals for commercial and residential properties have affected (and will continue to exacerbate) volumes passing through Slough STW.

Actions:

- a. *RBWM/SBC and SBDC to review existing planning proposals for building in Slough STW catchment areas and anticipated effect on Slough STW treatment volumes and outflows.*
- b. *TW to report on effect of proposed volumes on Roundmoor and publish plans to mitigate increases.*

8. Flood Forum

The EA have floated the idea of a Flood Forum for Eton Wick. However, the consensus is we need a task/results oriented team, with engaged, high level representation from all parties.

Actions:

- a. *RBWM create and lead a formal flood team.*
- b. *RBWM to publish meetings, reports and results for public information.*

9. Resident Information

Our resident group are currently responsible for reporting issues, collating information and updating residents.

Actions:

- a. *RBWM to take responsibility for informing and updating residents.*
- b. *RBWM to act as formal channel for all resident questions and concerns, managing queries to other local authorities, TW and EA.*

10. Public Meeting

The forthcoming meeting should have been a positive update on actions underway to improve discharge route. Instead Eton Wick has suffered a dry summer and watercourse related issues with mixed success. TW have been positive and pro-active, whilst the EA have continually failed to appreciate village issues as a whole, issues which will return year after year until they communicate truthfully and effectively.

Residents request the meeting is an open, honest, technically informative, supported meeting if we are to make progress.

Actions:

- a. *RBWM to arrange Public Meeting for November in Eton Wick Village Hall, attended by all parties.*
- b. *RBWM to collate formal questions/requests for technical data submitted prior to meeting.*
- c. *RBWM to manage attendees ensuring they provide technical data/reports and answer questions in full.*