

ROUNDMOOR AND BOVENEY STREAMS

POLLUTION INCIDENTS - UPDATE

Although we initially started the Eton Wick Matters resident group in response to the 2014 floods, we have also highlighted many other issues including the local known fact that water quality had been visibly declining during the past three years with 'suspect' material noted within the streams on a regular basis. The consequent improvements required at STW had resulted in visible improvement in the watercourse which now allow residents to note and report any obvious differences.

In the Spring Village Newsletter we reported solids/paper debris were noted throughout the watercourse on 12/1 and 28/1. TW confirmed loss of partially treated sludge blanket from their final settlement tanks, admitting ongoing operational issues in their secondary treatment process. The EA were investigating further breaches of permit and TW procedures were under review with an action plan to be implemented.

Quality concerns were reported during February and March and were attributed to ongoing process problems. Within the last four weeks further incidents arose affecting the watercourse with the most serious occurring on Monday 20/4.

On the 24/3 the supply to our streams was stopped for at least five hours whilst TW directed flows to storm tanks. The stream bed was over 50% visible with only a three inch deep central channel. TW claimed the flows had been re-directed due to emergency engineering repairs. The EA were on hand to rescue fish stocks and monitor quality in case flows were directly diverted into the stream rather than re-processing through treatment plant.

During week commencing 27/3 the stream quality was poor on three mornings. Water quality is always at it's worse in the morning following overnight emissions but usually clears during the day.

On the 8/4 and 9/4 residents reported solids and paper products in the stream. We reported to the EA and TW as the condition of the stream matched previous loss of sludge blanket. TW checked in the afternoon but reported all satisfactory. The EA checked samples and confirmed ammonia levels were satisfactory, again, in the afternoon.

On Monday 20/4 poor quality with obvious solids was reported to EA and TW. TW investigated at treatment works and reported a fifteen minute spill from their treatment tanks.

On Tuesday 21/4 numerous resident reports were made to EA regarding extremely poor quality with high volume, large visible solids flowing through stream, pooling on the top and coating the banks. As residents started to talk to each other we also discovered the flow had stopped completely in the early hours of Monday morning with stream bed visible once again. TW confirmed they needed to divert outflows to storm tanks to protect our village from a pollution incident which had occurred at the inflow to the works. A specialist investigative team would be despatched out to commercial/industrial customers to locate pollution source.

The poor quality and solids continued for five days with TW advising the stream condition would not improve until wet weather returned and washed solids through. Following last weekends rain the stream visibility vastly improved, however, it was poor once again on Monday morning with visible solids floating by. During this incident EA contractors were working at the recreation ground and at the junction with Thames installing new gravel beds; they reported seeing dead and dying fish. TW confirmed investigations were in hand and finally released the following information on Friday 1st May:

We have found that due to an increase in Cess imports to site (this is sewage brought in by commercial tanker operators, which can be highly variable in both volume and content) we had an excess amount of septic sewage waste discharged into the process. We have temporarily suspended cess imports and will review implement additional monitoring of ammonia levels on our cess imports, to see if further controls need to be put in place to reduce the likelihood of a repeat incident. The biological treatment process used on site relies upon a culture of certain types of microbiology which takes 8-12 days to establish and stabilise before it reaches optimum performance. This biology was damaged by these cess imports and it has taken time to restore the site to normal operation.

Our action plan has been to clean all of the final tanks to remove residual scum and increase the oxygen levels in the process to re-establish the correct biology onsite. As a precaution, we have temporarily increased the level of supervision and monitoring on site until the process is fully stabilised. The stream should continue to improve in looks and we will continue to take monitor the biology of our treatment processes onsite and the quality of our discharges into the stream. In the medium term we will also carry out an enhanced maintenance programme to our secondary treatment process and also install additional monitoring devices to give us early warning so that if we do see such excessive discharges in the future the process will be more resilient.

This is the most serious incident since the 2014 floods and sadly illustrated the protocol we had requested via RBWM to ensure correct parties are informed/act speedily and public health hazards are communicated urgently to the village had not been actioned. TW and the EA did not invoke the procedure. RBWM became aware only via direct reports from the EWM team. Although TW advised solids had been fully treated RBWM Community Protection posted signs at the cattle grid and Thames end of stream recommending animals were kept away from water as a precaution. RBWM issued the following statement on Friday evening:

The Environment Agency has confirmed to the council that the recent event from the treatment works was a discharge of material that had been through the treatment process but it contained higher than normal levels of suspended solid. This is the material that residents would have seen in the water flow and settling on the stream bed and collecting on the vegetation. As with any non bathing water, residents should remember to wash their hands thoroughly (preferably with anti bacterial soap) if they should have any contact with the water. It is also recommended that dogs and animals are kept out of the water purely on a precautionary basis until the suspended solid has passed through the stream network and this matter is resolved.

RBWM are meeting with TW/EA to review the cess incident, ongoing process issues and incident communications on Tuesday 5th May. If you would like further information regarding their statement or would like to discuss concerns please contact RBWM Public Health 0844 967 0083. The next Flood Forum meeting is due to be held in June and residents, councillors and RBWM representatives will be raising recent issues for urgent action. We will continue to monitor and update via the website.

Forthcoming election: How it could impact our village streams short and long term:

Although RBWM have formally agreed to represent residents, a change of administration within the Council could affect the support our village receives in fighting the pollution and long term flooding.

Whilst the EWM group must remain non-political residents also need to be aware of the candidates standing for Eton Wick Ward next Thursday. The candidates are:

Mr. Peter Lawless (Independent) – Eton Wick resident, current RBWM Councillor and Flood Forum member
Mr. Peter Shearman (Labour) – Eton Wick resident.
Mrs. Samantha Rayner (Conservative) – Wraysbury resident

Last Tuesday we received a number of calls from residents advising receipt of letters and pamphlets from the Conservative candidate detailing a meeting with Mr. Adam Afriyie (our Conservative MP) and the Manager at Slough sewage treatment works. The letter claimed progress had been made. It is worth noting, despite numerous letters and emails during the floods, Mr. Afriyie refused to support the village claiming it was a local authority issue; attitudes obviously change during a public election campaign! We cannot draw the local authority candidate on details of the meeting but it appears the 'progress' relates to the recent incident only.

We also discovered TW were issuing daily updates playing down the severity of the pollution which were displayed on the candidates husbands Facebook page. The releases sent to the un-elected candidate completely disrupted the reporting process to the Flood Forum and residents; information did not get to the people who mattered the villagers.

Mrs. Rayner lives in Wraysbury and is married to the councillor for Horton and Wraysbury who is well known and admired for works within his Ward. The proposal for flood and pollution emissions to be directed into the Jubilee River, where the content can be heavily diluted, remains a long term aim for our village and representatives on the Flood Forum. Each time the proposal was raised in the local press during 2014, Eton Wick received condemnation from villagers in Datchet and Wraysbury. The Conservative candidates home location and connections obviously cause a great concern.

It is important all candidates understand local hydrology and engineering proposals for resolving our village issues, particularly as adjacent villages will happily accept us being held to ransom to protect their interests downstream. We contacted Mrs. Rayner on Tuesday following receipt of her letters and campaign leaflet, asking if she would make her position quite clear on support for the Jubilee River proposal before asking for villagers votes. Sadly, as of today (Sunday) we have not received a reply.

This is an extremely important question. Eton Wick needs a local councillor who will strongly support and protect our village.