

Minutes of meeting with Thames Water on 23 October 2015 at 7 Anson Close, Wheatley

Present

Roger Bettess	Wheatley F and D Committee	Cyril Hale	Wheatley F and D Committee
Howard Brett	Thames Water	Denise Kinsella	Thames Water
Tim Davies	Wheatley Parish Council	Gareth Morris	Wheatley Parish Clerk
Katina Dykes	Wheatley F and D Committee	Jim Reilly	Wheatley Parish Council
John Fox	Resident, London Road		

HB explained the background to recent events at the Wheatley Sewage Treatment Works (STW). During the investment period 2010-15 it had been decided to improve the quality of the treated effluent and an additional nitrifying sand filter had been installed. A revised discharge permit issued by the Environment Agency was effective from March 2015. Initially the treated effluent had been meeting the new target but more recently it had been found that the treatment works had not been meeting the new target and Thames Water had taken the decision to tanker away the treated effluent from the works rather than discharge it into Wheatley Ditch. Storm discharges continued to be made to Wheatley Ditch during periods of extended rainfall. It was not clear how often storm discharges were made to the Wheatley Ditch. Thames Water were working on installing monitoring equipment to determine when and for how long discharges were made and HB hoped that the equipment would be in operation before the end of March 2016.

RB pointed out that by continuing to make storm discharges to Wheatley Ditch without the diluting effect of the treated effluent, the concentration of pollution in the flows in Wheatley Ditch were increased over normal conditions. HB acknowledged that this was the case. RB pointed out that this violated the Thames Water Environmental Policy. HB said that Thames Water had a dilemma of either breaching their Discharge Permit or satisfying the TW Environmental Policy. HB doubted that there was anything practical that could be done to mitigate the impact of the storm discharges. There was some discussion of possible options and RB expressed the view that Thames Water did not seem to have given serious thought to potential options.

KD reported that the water quality in the Wheatley Ditch had deteriorated over many years. Recently there had been scum floating on the surface and TW had cleared out the ditch in the past. DK noted that storm discharges at many Thames Water STWs passed close to houses.

RB pointed out that by tankering away the effluent, the discharge under normal conditions in the Wheatley Ditch had been reduced to virtually zero, significantly below any minimum acceptable flow or environmental flow. RB believed that this contravened Thames Water's Environmental Policy. RB acknowledged that Thames Water were not in breach of their Discharge Permit but Thames Water's own Environmental Policy imposed requirements on them over and above those specified in the Discharge Permit and Thames Water were failing to meet these requirements. HB said that Thames Water would investigate options for mitigating the environmental impacts of the tankering operation, including a potential option of pumping water from the River Thame into the Wheatley Ditch.

There was a discussion as to why the new sand filters were not meeting the required target. It was pointed out that while the physical nature of the sand filters could be easily managed, some of the treatment in the filters was biological and this was less amenable to control.

KD expressed concern about the risk of flooding when normal flows were re-established to the Wheatley Ditch. When it rained there had been raised water levels in the watercourse since the tankering operation had started. Thames Water agreed to investigate whether it would be possible to have somebody monitoring the downstream watercourse when the discharge of treated effluent was resumed to check that water levels were acceptable.

JF reported that tankers were still turning west onto the London Road rather than east. DK said that under dry weather conditions there were about 40 tankers a day rising to 70 tankers during rainy weather. She explained that there were no traffic restrictions on the movement of the tankers but Thames Water had decided, in an attempt to minimise disruption to Wheatley, to instruct the drivers to turn east. They were continuing to pursue the matter with the Thames Water contractor. She asked for reports of tankers taking the wrong route. There was a discussion of whether signs could be used to remind drivers of the route to take. DK said that putting up signs was difficult because of all the regulations associated with road signs but agreed to review possible options to remind drivers of the route.

JF said that when the tankering had started he had not received any information from Thames Water. DK said that Thames Water had leafleted a number of properties but not those on the London Road to the west of the site. KD complained that the leaflet had only been delivered some time after the tankering had started. The flow in the watercourse had stopped without any warning.

GM asked when the tankering operation would finish. HB said that he hoped that it would finish by the end of November.

TD raised the long-term issue of the capacity of Wheatley STW. HB pointed out that new houses in Wheatley would increase the dry weather flow to the STW but that the amount of rainfall entering the sewer system should not increase. DK pointed out that Thames Water were not statutory consultees on planning matters but they did put a lot of effort into monitoring potential developments to assess likely future needs. HB said that what is acceptable in terms of the frequency and volume of storm overflows is set by the government and Environment Agency policy. TD pointed out that in Wheatley there were a number of possible future developments, including the development of the Oxford Brookes University campus in Holton.

TD would like to see a public meeting in Wheatley for those potentially impacted by flood and drainage issues to explain what has been happening and discuss on-going issues.

TD gave his summary of the meeting so far:

- a) the problem at the Wheatley STW was being addressed by Thames Water
- b) Thames Water would investigate what could be done about the route taken by tankers
- c) Thames Water would investigate whether the Wheatley Ditch could be monitored during the process of restoring the discharge of effluent to ensure there was no local flooding as a result
- d) Thames Water would investigate the options for mitigating the environmental impact on Wheatley Ditch of the continuing tankering operation
- e) Thames Water would install monitoring equipment to monitor the frequency and duration of storm discharges. TD believed that it was essential that this was achieved by end of March 2016.

DK raised the issue of blocked sewers. Thames Water had a leaflet 'Bin it don't block it'. GM said that the Parish Council had a policy of not including leaflets with the Wheatley Newsletter but the Flood and Drainage Committee would prepare an item for the Newsletter. DK would provide GM with a number of copies of the leaflet.

Roger Bettess
25 October 2015