

## **Langham Sewerage Review Meeting, 18<sup>th</sup> November 2022**

**(10am, Langham Community Centre Main Hall)**

-

### Attendees

Martin Bottwood Chair Langham Parish Council (LPC)

Paul Armstrong Cllr LPC

Annette Thorpe Cllr LPC

Chris Graves LPC Planning Committee member

Carol Harbach LPC Clerk – notes

Sir Bernard Jenkin MP

Colchester Borough Councillor Nigel Chapman

4 members of Anglian Water Team (AW) –

Mark Hinson (Colchester Treatment Manager AW), Hannah Wilson (Pre-Development Planning Manager) AW, Grant Tuffs (Regional Engagement Manager AW), Paul Lancaster AW manager.

Hayley Parker-Haines (Colchester Borough Council Planning Officer)

Carol Harbach – Clerk Langham Parish Council taking notes

40 residents

Cllr Bottwood welcomed everyone to the second meeting between AW, LPC and MP Sir Bernard Jenkin. He thanked the residents for supporting the meeting and demonstrating the importance of the issues that we are trying to address.

Cllr Bottwood conveyed his thanks to AW for agreeing to meet with us and to Sir Bernard for his continued interest in this project and for being here again today.

The front tables then introduced themselves.

Cllr Bottwood noted that LPC had aimed to meet with AW every 3-6 months but it is almost 10 months since we last met. Although this is not what was intended, in some respects this could be regarded as beneficial as we should now have a full year of network monitoring information which should enable AW to draw more reliable and accurate conclusions.

This meeting had been set up as a power point presentation to share information more effectively.

Cllr Armstrong thanked AW for stopping the night-time movements of sludge removal lorries in the village. He then presented the [attached Agenda and Scene Setting slides](#).

Slides 3 & 4:

By way of background for those newer to the village, it was explained that when Colchester Borough Council (CBC) finalised their Local Plan for major housing developments from 2017 out to 2033, Langham was assigned the highest percentage housing increase (19%) of all the satellite villages around Colchester. However, CBC did recognise that Langham Sewage Treatment Works (these days more politely known as a Water Recycling Centre or WRC) was already operating above its sewage treatment permit limit, threatening pollution of the Black Brook and River Stour. So, after consultation with the Environment Agency and Anglian Water, in 2017 they put in place various planning commitments that these new housing developments should not commence until sewage treatment capacity was upgraded. Sadly, since then, these conditions have subsequently been watered down and diluted at every turn.

Cllr Armstrong suggested that the focus of today's meeting was not about revisiting the past, but about working together with AW to investigate the heightened pollution and flooding risks that Langham is now exposed to, and exploring what mitigations might be put in place to protect residents going forwards.

Slide 5:

This slide summarises historic local reports of flooding and sewage overflow. Fuller details could be supplied to AW after the meeting. This offer was accepted. **Action LPC: LPC to provide details of historic local flooding reports to AW.**

Slide 6:

Sewerage Network flows and overflows are not routinely monitored, but some dedicated monitoring points were installed by AW from Nov 21 onwards, to be reported on today.

Any overflows at Langham WRC are not monitored because there is no dedicated storm overflow capability at this smaller WRC. However, the larger downstream WRC at Dedham does have a storm overflow with real time monitoring.

Slide 7:

Shows the duration of overflow events at Dedham during 2020 and 2021. In 2021, 66 days of overflow put Dedham WRC in the worst 2% of WRCs in terms of overflow duration. Despite this, it did not trigger any remedial investigation by the Environment Agency, who attributed the overflows to "confirmed exceptional weather". According to the Met Office, annual rainfall in the Stour Valley in 2021 was closely equivalent to the mean figure of the last 30 years, as shown in slide 8.

Slide 9:

Dry weather performance of the sewage system is important because it gives a true indication of whether the system can cope with what it is designed to cope with, namely human household waste volumes, when undiluted by any infiltration of rainwater getting into the system on wet days. This is why the Environment Agency chooses to specify sewage treatment capacity by means of a Dry Weather Flow limit (shortened to DWF). It is measured in cubic metres/day of sewage being processed by the WRC. The limit for Langham WRC, from 2010 onwards, is 420 cubic metre/day. The purpose of the limit is to prevent excessive pollution of the downstream river water.

Langham WRC was first identified as exceeding its permit limit back in 2016, when Colchester Borough Council reviewed all of the Borough's 10 WRCs and found just one, Langham, which was in breach of its limit. Looking across Anglian Water's total estate of ~750 WRCs, only 0.5% of them were in breach at that time. One does have to ask, if it's taking 9 years (through to 2025) to upgrade one of the worst polluting 0.5% of Anglian Water's WRCs, whether this country puts a high enough priority on solving river pollution problems?

Slide 10:

Shows the official Environment Agency DWF figures at Langham WRC up to the end of 2021. (It also shows the higher one-off figures from the 2016 Colchester Borough Council Study – the discrepancy has never been explained to us). The official figures indicate permit breach in 2020 and 2021, on a rapidly rising trend.

Slide 11:

The DWF has increased by 27% in just two years. 9% simply reflects the increased number of houses added to the WRC catchment area during that time. Post-COVID increases in time spent at home may well account for about 12%. This would leave only about 6% to be explained by other unknown or statistical factors. Imminent housebuilding projects in Langham are clearly going to cause a significant further uplift in DWF.

Slide 12:

Shows the three major housebuilding projects included in the Local Plan. Half of the 46 Vistry homes are being built right now. The 30 Williamsons homes were granted outline planning approval in July 2022. 13 houses at the corner of Wick Road/Park Lane are currently being applied for. If these three developments all get built over the next couple of years, along with some further smaller "windfall" sites, then the catchment area housing stock will increase by about another 20%.

Slide 13:

This slide shows a reasonable projection of the planned housebuilding on the DWF at Langham WRC. It calls into serious question whether AW's outline application for a new 500 cubic metres/day processing permit is remotely fit for purpose.

Q&A on Cllr Armstrong's slides:

Grant Tuffs explained more about the Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO) capabilities at AW's larger WRCs. These provide a pressure release valve to discharge sewage and rain water directly, without treatment, when this is required in order to protect houses from potential flooding with backed up sewage. There are 1500 such facilities at the moment and AW are aiming to get measurement systems operational at all of them very soon. CSOs can discharge for various reasons, including adverse weather, blockages due to 'fatbergs', and equipment breakdowns etc.

Hannah Wilson presented the [attached slides](#) from Anglian Water. She agreed to take questions as they came up, rather than waiting until the end of her presentation.

Slide 2:

Shows the topics to be addressed.

Slide 3:

Summarises the actions taken since our last meeting in January 2022.

Slide 4:

Shows the locations of the 6 established flow monitors, together with two new additional monitors (shown unnumbered) which were installed in August 2022.

Q&A on slide 4:

Q. The network flow directions are unclear? A. A map was provided to LPC previously, which did include some flow arrows. **Action AW: AW to provide LPC with a more detailed map of the network area feeding Grove Hill, with directional arrows and locations of all pumping stations shown.**

Slide 5:

Summarises the findings from the flow monitoring so far. The Grove Hill monitor (86207) is of most concern due to high flow measurements. Two nearby supplementary flow monitors were installed from August 2022 to provide improved understanding, but more time is required to assess results from these additional monitors. Three "asset surveys" have been "registered" for completion in the new year. Two of these assets are close to Grove Hill; the third is an online storage facility in Chapel Road, which is suspected of contributing to some high flow readings in that part of the network.

Q&A on slide 5:

1. When was the potential Chapel Road issue identified? A. A couple of months ago, at which point it was registered with the Environment Agency.
2. How old is the online storage plant? A. Unknown, we don't have detailed records of that.

3. Isn't it rather late to still be investigating the problems, which have been known about and reported since 2016? A. Network flow monitors are a new initiative which has only recently been funded to allow it to happen.

Slide 6:

Summarises the next flow diagnosis steps moving into 2023. The next scheduled AW/EA review meeting is in January 2023. EA will look holistically at both the catchment network and the WRC performance.

1. Do pumping stations have back up power supplies (in the event of potential winter power cuts)? A. Yes. Some have permanent back-up generators, some will require mobile generators to be brought in. Pumping stations do also have some local storage to prevent immediate overflows in the event of failure.
2. Can you understand the frustration caused in the village by your slow ongoing diagnosis of network problems, while housebuilding continues apace and will make the existing problems even worse? A. Yes, but it must be recognised that current legislation does not give AW any powers to block or delay new housebuilding.
3. Weren't there meant to be quarterly EA/AW review meetings? – LPC has only been forwarded an AW report from a single meeting since January so far. A. A planned October meeting was cancelled due to lack of any material update since the first summer meeting. The next meeting is now scheduled for January 2023.
4. The single AW summary report sent to LPC in the summer was fairly cryptic and difficult to interpret, can further details be provided in future? A. **Action AW: Yes, AW can provide the full technical report as well as the summary report next time, and then meet with LPC to explain and interpret the reports.**
5. Might it be helpful if EA could be invited to join a three way meeting? A. AW would have no objections to this, but cannot answer on behalf of the EA. **Action LPC: LPC to approach EA and request their participation in a tripartite meeting.**
6. Is it correct that the new Vistry Homes development connects to the most problematic area of the local sewerage network at Grove Hill? A. Yes (but see earlier answer explaining that we have no powers to delay this).
7. What is the criteria/threshold for the triggering of a high flow alert on the network monitors? A. The threshold will be set relative to the expected design flow but we don't have those technical details to hand. **Action AW: AW will ask for and forward a more detailed technical explanation to LPC. (This explanation should also clarify the distinction between high flow and flooding, which are not the same).**

Slide 7:

Summarises AW's commitments to future information sharing with LPC.

Slide 8:

Summarises AW's response to the recent planning application for 13 houses to be built on Wick Road. The developer did not supply enough information about the proposed foul drainage solutions for the site. AW therefore recommended a planning condition to seek this further information prior to any potential approval of the development. AW have no statutory powers though, and the planning decision ultimately lies with the Local Planning Authority.

Slide 9:

Summarises the current status of AW's upgrade plans for Langham WRC. The red area indicates the existing catchment area for foul flows into the Langham WRC. A pre-application for an increased permit limit was submitted to the EA (nearly a year ago). The EA responded to it and engagement is continuing via an "optioneering" process. The initial application was for a 500 cubic metres/day permit limit, but higher figures are now being considered. The next formal update on the investment program is expected in April 2023 and this should confirm the preferred upgrade option.

1. Do you have provisional DWF figures for 2022 and can you share these with us? A. We have those figures, but they don't go the EA for review and sign-off until April next year.
2. You shared provisional figures for 2021 with us at our January meeting, can't you do the same again with the 2022 figures now? A. **Action AW: we can take that away and let you know what information we can share.**
3. Most rainwater ditches and drains around Langham seem to be blocked, but is that a separate issue? A. Yes, that's more of a County Council and Highways issue. However, problems there can cause knock-on infiltration to the foul sewerage network. Another issue is direct connection of household surface water drainage into the foul sewerage network. Prior local surveys in Beds and Herts have found approx. 25% of houses connect in this way, which is slightly more than the 20% allowance used in AW's sewerage capacity planning.
4. Who is the best source of information regarding rainwater drainage information? A. The Local Authority.

Some discussion followed about the complex web of stakeholders with responsibilities around the management of flooding risks. Reference was made to the recent Norfolk Flooding Taskforce chaired by Lord Dannat, which engaged more than 30 different agencies in their deliberations. AW took a full part in that process and acknowledged some of their own frustrations with securing engagement from some other agencies (no names supplied).

1. Surely AW must have an overarching set of capacity planning assumptions based on (for example) the number of bedrooms in new housing developments? A. Yes, of course. But when responding to specific planning applications, it's important to deal with the specifics rather than generic modelling assumptions.

Following on from the presentations, Sir Bernard Jenkin offered his thoughts on the proceedings. He thanked everyone for the invitation and said he was feeling frustrated and amazed at people's patience with these longstanding issues. He thanked Cllr Armstrong and Hannah Wilson for their informative and professional presentations.

Despite the positive engagement from AW's representatives today, the lack of visibility of a proper plan today constituted a failure and indeed a persistent failure. It should not be necessary for village residents to have to get this engaged in the technicalities of the sewerage system in order to be protected from sewage in their homes, and pollution in their local rivers.

Sir Bernard noted that there was a mood in Parliament to come after the profits of the Water Industry if the situation doesn't improve. The fines regime is being toughened up, the regulatory system needs toughening up, and the larger fines imposed should not go to the Treasury, but into a remedial pot to which the Water Industry can apply for to help them fix problems.

Sir Bernard stated that he would be writing to Peter Simpson, the CEO of Anglian Water, to request his support in lobbying government for a stronger regulatory regime, and also to seek his support in securing a proper emergency plan for Langham by April 2023, that explains how to address and fix Langham's longstanding sewerage problems, and how quickly it can be implemented.

A question was asked about whether there needed to be a stronger interaction between Anglian Water and the Planning Authority to stop these problems arising in future. Sir Bernard expressed his confidence that Anglian Water were interacting fully, but felt that the current methodology was not working and needed to be changed. Indeed, it was clear from the level of failure being experienced now (even before the current round of new housing is built) that the current methodology had already failed.

A question was asked about whether the Environment Agency was fulfilling its regulatory duties. Sir Bernard accepted that it appeared to be a Rottweiler with no teeth, which lumbers along rather slowly and allows the Water Industry to move at a similar slow pace.

Sir Bernard noted that in his recent discussions with John Hall of the Essex Wildlife Trust (who monitors pollution in the Stour), pollution is getting worse. There is a sense in Government that the Water Industry, bluntly, is "gaming" the system. He wanted to reassure Langham residents that there is now genuine pressure within Westminster to make changes to the system to prevent this continuing. Sir Bernard noted that he found meetings such as this one in Langham very informative and they helped to strengthen his resolve to fight for the necessary changes in Parliament. He therefore wanted to continue to attend them in future.

Cllr Bottwood noted that the housing numbers in the Emerging Local Plan started life as maximum numbers but are now viewed as minimum numbers subject to further potential uplift. Anglian Water need to be kept appraised of any such uplift affecting Langham.

Cllr Bottwood thanked Sir Bernard for coming along to the meetings and he left the meeting at 11:36am.

In response to a question from Cllr Bottwood, AW recommended that the next public meeting should be scheduled shortly after April, when further substantive data gathering and analysis should be available.

Meeting closed at 11:40am.