

Notes of Public Meeting on Friday 28<sup>th</sup> January 2022

between Langham Parish Council (LPC) and Anglian Water (AW) Authority

and held at Langham Community Centre 12:30pm

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Attendees

Paul Armstrong LPC

Chris Graves LPC Planning Committee member

Carol Harbach LPC Clerk – notes

Sir Bernard Jenkin MP – guest

Colchester Borough Councillor Nigel Chapman (left meeting at 1pm)

4 Members of Anglian Water Team – Mark Hinson (Colchester Treatment Manager), Dougie Barnard-Harris (Water Recycling Network Manager), Hannah Wilson (Pre-Development Planning Manager), Grant Tuffs (Regional Engagement Manager).

40 Langham Residents

Purpose of meeting

This had been arranged to enable **Anglian Water** (AW) to address local residents' concerns regarding the Langham **Water Recycling Centre** (WRC) that is sited in Greyhound Hill.

**Paul Armstrong (PA)** introduced the panel and gave apologies from Cllr Martin Bottwood Chair of **Langham Parish Council** (LPC) who was unable to attend due to illness. Apologies were also given for the cancellation of a 17<sup>th</sup> December meeting due to Covid.

PA thanked everyone present for attending and coming and making the meeting possible.

Background information was read out by PA which covered concerns regarding the capacity of the WRC, serious overflow issues experienced by residents, and the quality of the treated water fed back into the river system. There were concerns about what impact the new Vistry Homes development of 46 houses would have on the WRC as it was already over capacity.

The 2017 joint positioning statement signed by AW, **Colchester Borough Council** (CBC) and the **Environment Agency** (EA) was mentioned. This document stated that no major housing developments should be approved until the WRC had been upgraded. There is no upgrade planned until 2025.

Some technical questions had been sent by LPC to AW via email in December 2021 and the answers received were published on the LPC Website ahead of this meeting.

PA reminded the audience that this was not a planning meeting and planning issues would not be discussed (other than the specifics of condition 21 pertaining to the Vistry Homes development).

AW outlined the remedial work that has recently been completed in Boxted to reduce inappropriate inputs into the local sewerage network. New monitoring points have recently been added to the network and flow data is now being collected from these every 15 minutes. AW have commenced a quarterly review meeting process with EA to monitor progress. Their first joint meeting was yesterday.

AW stated that they are currently looking at removing any additional surface water they can (i.e. rainwater going into foul water systems) and suggested householders could help with the situation by using more water butts which would help relieve the pressure at the WRC.

**Sir Bernard Jenkin** (BJ) asked AW about the water that was entering the river system from the WRC and its quality. AW replied that nothing was going into the river that was not permitted. BJ asked what happened during a storm event. AW replied that Langham WRC (unlike some larger WRCs) has no storm consent to bypass the treatment process and discharge directly into the river during very wet weather. Nonetheless, overspill would eventually occur during sufficiently heavy rain. AW were unable to quantify how often this might happen though.

AW also stated that with any development the builders have a right to connect to the sewerage system and it is not something they can deny.

AW have no jurisdiction over planning. They can advise the **Local Planning Authority** (LPA) if they foresee a threat of sewerage capacity overload due to new connections, but they don't believe this applies in the case of the proposed Vistry Homes development.

Grant Tuffs explained that AW had submitted a pre-application to the EA to upgrade Langham WRC to operate with an increased **Dry Weather Flow** (DWF) processing permit. They expect to receive a response from the EA within the next 3 weeks and will then commence the design & planning work for the upgrade to be completed by 2025 latest. AW now have committed budget funding for this upgrade work.

An extensive Q&A session then took place:

Two residents commented on the problems that 7 households in Moor Road had back in 2016 when their houses were flooded with raw sewage. These residents now have non-return valves installed to help alleviate any future problems.

Comments were also made about pump failures being a frequent cause of floods and overflows. Greyhound Hill, Perry Lane and Chapel Road were specifically mentioned. The latest incident occurred just two weeks ago in Chapel Road.

AW stated that the flooding was mainly confined to surface rainwater ingress and is not related to any capacity problems at the WRC. Several residents disputed this assertion.

AW stated that the capacity of the WRC for “dry weather flow” is 460 cubic metres a day but that a heavy rainstorm can cause overspill at the WRC. BJ noted that the AW representatives were unable to quantify how often this occurred and commented that “not often” was not really a satisfactory answer.

BJ stated that he was amazed that Langham residents seemed to know more about the local sewerage network than AW. He suggested that “real time” information about overworked pumps and WRC spillages is now required.

Some residents questioned whether the current 6” diameter pipes that are in place are sufficient for the foul water flows and AW replied that they are. A resident asked about lining the pipes which would reduce possible leakage but perhaps restrict throughput capacity. AW confirmed the linings, where used, are only 3-4mm thick and should therefore cause minimal reduction in pipe throughput.

Sludge tankers were also questioned and AW stated that “sludge” needs to be taken away and recycled elsewhere into fertiliser products. AW explained that this is standard industry practice and is typically only required twice a week. Residents who live on Greyhound Hill contested this and stated that they were sometimes much more frequent than that.

A resident asked whether AW could limit tanker movements to daytime only to avoid night-time disturbances. AW agreed to look into this. (*See post-meeting update at the end of these notes*).

The residents believed that the tanker visits had increased after the 36 new homes that had been built at Boxted were connected to the system.

BJ asked how long would it be before the network data analysis and improvement works are complete so that flooding would no longer occur on a regular basis.

AW stated that they need 12 months of new monitoring data before they can fully assess and address any network issues. In the meantime, they will deal with remedial work to reduce surface water ingress. This monitoring started in November 21. They have installed monitoring points at 6 different locations around the village.

AW explained that they cannot just make ad hoc investments. BJ noted that this was regulated by Ofwat whose role it is to keep customers’ bills down as much as possible. The Regulator decides how much AW can invest on a five-year cycle that we are currently half way through.

AW confirmed this, and stated that it was difficult enough to get the present budget programme approved, as the Regulator thought they had over-estimated what they needed at the moment.

AW stated that the WRC can cope with the demand at the moment but the residents disagreed with this. AW’s position is that the sewerage network is adequately dimensioned to cope with all foul flows (including the planned new housing) *provided that* surface water is effectively

excluded from the system. AW's new monitoring program is focussed on identifying and reducing infiltration problems. A resident commented that several infiltration reduction schemes had been undertaken over the last few years, therefore it was unlikely that much further improvement could be made.

BJ noted that Langham appeared to have long experience of a failed system, and he was therefore not surprised by residents' scepticism about AW's assurances.

AW clarified that disposal of surface water into the foul sewer was made illegal for new properties from 2011. (This does not apply retrospectively to older properties, however). Households can apply for a small sewerage charge discount if they do not connect their surface water drainage to the public sewer.

Chris Graves spoke to the meeting stating that the Local Plan for Langham had 80 new houses approved for the period 2017 – 2033. There are 3 main areas of development on the plan, 2 in School Road and 1 at the Park Road /Wick Road junction. The first development has already been granted conditional permission in School Road (46 houses); the second and third developments have not yet been submitted for full planning approval. Meanwhile the 80 home allocation in the Local Plan for Langham has now been changed from a maximum to a minimum figure as a result of instructions from the government.

Chris Graves stated his understanding of the current position, which was that nothing can be done to upgrade the WRC over the next 12 months and, as AW had admitted at the outset, probably not until 2025.

Meanwhile, whilst condition 21 in the Vistry Homes planning consent for 46 homes prohibits build commencement prior to proof of satisfactory WRC capacity, the LPA are now proposing to relax the condition to allow work to start on half of the new homes. Chris Graves asked AW if this was the moment when they should be telling the LPA "Hold on, we can't cope with what we've got at the moment," in response to any proposed relaxation of that condition?

To this, Hannah Wilson responded that AW are not a statutory consultee on planning applications and that any necessary WRC upgrades are not funded by developer contributions but by customer bills. If a proposed new development threatens to overload the existing sewerage network, AW can request that the LPA impose a planning condition to mitigate the impact, but this is at the LPA's discretion only.

A resident asked about the current status of the 2017 Joint Positioning Statement between CBC, AW and EA. The reply, essentially, was that legislation changes now mean that AW cannot be a blocker to housing growth.

PA asked whether the proposed DWF permit increase from 420 cubic metres/day to 500 cubic metres per day was actually sufficient, given that the actual DWF in 2021 had already reached 480 cubic metres/day, even before the addition of the new housing developments included in the Local Development Plan. AW replied that they cannot invest ahead of proven demand due to the tight constraints of the Ofwat approved 5 year spending envelope.

AW summed up that there was a disparity between their data and the experience of Langham residents and that they would welcome further details from Langham residents about when and where problems occurred. Paul Armstrong suggested that historic events could be collated by the Parish Council and shared with AW. Any reports of new problems could and should also be reported directly to AW via their contact number (03457 145145).

BJ summed up that there had been a lot of information shared, but not enough to deal fully with residents' concerns. BJ therefore suggested another meeting for an update in 3 – 6 months' time, which he would also like to attend.

AW indicated that they would continue to liaise with LPC between now and the follow-up meeting, which they were happy to attend. One resident suggested that EA and CBC might also be useful attendees for this follow-up meeting.

BJ stated that if any residents were unable to get replies from AW or EA to their individual concerns and questions then to please contact him and he would follow up with AW or EA directly. He further noted that he had always found AW to be helpful and responsive to emails, and he thanked them for their attendance at today's meeting.

It was suggested that the next meeting would benefit from a more structured initial powerpoint style presentation from AW, to share information more efficiently with the sizeable audience.

Paul Armstrong thanked everyone for coming and a small party then left to visit the WRC.

Meeting closed at 2.10pm.

*Post-meeting update: Anglian Water confirmed on 1<sup>st</sup> Feb 2022 that sludge tanker movements to and from site have now been restricted to the hours of 7am to 8pm, seven days a week. During normal operations, only two or three tankers should be required each week. There may of course still be the odd occasion when additional emergency tankers are required during extreme weather events or as a result of mechanical breakdowns.*