

Draft Notes - Langham Sewerage Review Meeting, 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2024

(11am, Langham Community Centre Main Hall)

### Attendees

Martin Bottwood (Chairman Langham Parish Council)

Paul Armstrong (Langham Parish Council)

Sir Bernard Jenkin MP

Caitlin Pugh (MP's office)

Grant Tuffs (Anglian Water)

Hannah Wilson (Anglian Water)

Paul Lancaster (Anglian Water)

Mark Taylor (Anglian Water)

Mark Hinson (Anglian Water)

Mike Edwards (Anglian Water)

60 Village Residents

Daniel Rees (Essex County Standard)

Cllr Bottwood welcomed everyone to the third meeting between AW, LPC and MP Sir Bernard Jenkin. He thanked the residents for the high turnout. The front table then introduced themselves. Cllr Bottwood thanked Sir Bernard for his continued support of these meetings, and then showed an introductory slide with photos of some of the recent sewage flooding incidents, prior to outlining the agenda structure for today.

Cllr Armstrong then introduced the key questions that we have asked Anglian Water to address today, in the three categories of recent flooding incidents, environmental permit non-compliance, and the upgrade timetable for the WRC. He also mentioned that there were some further more detailed questions that Anglian Water had agreed to reply to in writing as soon as possible after today's meeting. (Hard copies of those questions had been placed on chairs today for residents to take away and look at after the meeting should they wish to).

Grant Tuffs addressed recent flooding issues around Chapel Road/Moor Road, and confirmed that there have unfortunately been 6 incidents since early 2022. He attributed the most recent of these incidents to a burst rising main rather than any general overload of the sewer system. He explained that recent installation of some new variable speed drives on the pump starter panels should reduce the incidence of any start-up pressure shock waves in the system and thereby reduce the chance of future bursts.

Regarding compensation claims for flooding, Grant advised residents to ask their home insurance companies to approach Anglian Water's insurance company to progress this. In addition, he noted, there is a statutory right to a refund of your annual household sewage charge in any year that your

home is flooded with sewage. Two residents interjected at this point to decry the inadequacy and insult of this derisory approach, whatever the current statutory situation within the Water Industry.

Grant Tuffs then handed over to Mark Taylor to address environmental permit non-compliance issues. Mark confirmed that provisional data for 2023 showed permit non-compliance. He attributed this to periods of heavy rain in late Spring and in early Winter, both of which had resulted in high residual flows for some weeks after the heavy rain before tailing off towards more normal levels. He stated that sanitary limits were nonetheless complied with. He noted that downstream water quality in the River Stour (as reported on the Environment Agency's Catchment Data Explorer website) had remained "moderate" throughout the last 10 years.

Regarding plans for a WRC upgrade, Mark noted that cost estimates for this major project had recently been estimated at upwards of £6m. Based on current flow levels, even a 540m<sup>3</sup>/day capacity upgrade might not be enough to bring the WRC back into flow compliance. Anglian Water have therefore decided to defer the project pending a further several month investigation of the sewerage network, to include a detailed CCTV survey and additional flow monitor installations in the shallower parts of the network (which have not so far been addressed, unlike the deeper parts which were the subject of earlier investigations). The purpose of the work is to try and identify and then remove sources of unwanted infiltration, thereby helping to minimise the scope and cost of the WRC rebuild necessary to ensure future permit compliance. Mark explained that there was substantial likely scope for this, given the huge difference between the 2022 and 2023 DWF Q90 outturns of 328m<sup>3</sup>/day (confirmed) and 492m<sup>3</sup>/day (provisional), the former being in a very dry year, and the latter in a more normal year. Pending the results of the new monitoring program, Mark was unable to confirm when and even if a WRC upgrade would be required. The way forward might prove to be either additional sewer lining work, a WRC upgrade, or some combination of the two.

Cllr Armstrong then presented some information that we have recently received via Michael Neale of the Environment Agency (EA). In January this year, the EA helpline had been able to assist residents in securing a rapid response to the latest flooding after AW initially designated it as non-urgent. Back in December 2023, Langham WRC had by chance been the subject of a sample inspection by the EA compliance team. A full report is not yet available, but Michael observed that there were "obvious signs of difficulties managing the flows". The EA have recently provided LPC with full historic flow data at the Langham WRC for a 7 year period covering 2016 -2022. This has been graphed and it demonstrates that peak flows during the wettest weather periods are up to 10 times the dry weather flow rates. This extremely high peak-to-dry flow ratio has barely reduced at all over the full 7 year period, despite AW's reported activities to reduce infiltration over this time.

Before opening up the meeting to public Q&A, Grant Tuffs responded to Cllr Armstrong's presentation of the EA data. He explained that the massive infiltration levels demonstrated by the flow data merited a more thorough investigation before spending £6m of customers' money on a potentially over-engineered WRC upgrade. He noted that infrastructure investment funds over and above statutory WINEP-driven requirements are limited and must be prioritised. Upgrade of the Langham WRC is on the radar, but no firm timescale commitments can be made until completion of the new round of flow monitoring has been completed, which is likely to take another year. Cllr Armstrong wondered why the source of such major infiltration had not been tracked down and identified much earlier than now, given that the flow data shows that it has been known about since at least 2016 if not earlier. Cllr Bottwood noted that Langham WRC does not appear in AW's published list of 12 worst performing WRCs in their latest Annual Report, and he was therefore sceptical that upgrade investment would be prioritised any time soon. This was not refuted by AW.

## Q&A session summary

Q1 from Luciana Haywood: Why hasn't AW's documented Committed Investment Plan for the Langham WRC, published back in November 2021, been delivered as promised?

A1: Investment priorities can change as situations develop. More urgent issues can come along.

Q2 from Luciana Haywood: Why does there appear to be no contingency in the sewer network to cope with adverse weather without flooding occurring?

A2: the flooding at your property was due to a burst pipe and is distinct from the overall capacity of the sewer network.

Q3: Why hasn't past flow monitoring already identified the sources of infiltration?

A3: We can't monitor all of our 38,000km of sewer network. The previous round of flow monitoring was targeted at concerns around the new housing developments on School Road. The new commitment is to a full catchment area survey which hasn't been previously done.

Q4 from Alison Stacey: Why are your sewers so leaky and why haven't they been serviced to maintain them?

Not answered.

Q5 from Alison Stacey: How about installing a storage tank to provide overflow contingency?

Not immediately answered, but answered later in the meeting.

Q6 from Andrew Stacey: Why are there no effective emergency protocols to mitigate or minimise the risk of sewage overflows when exceptional weather events start to cause problems in the sewer network?

Not answered.

Q7: How wide is the survey area going to be? (The questioner lives on School Road and previously suffered a period of three weeks of sewage flooding in their garden which was never satisfactorily explained to them.)

A7: This time around, all parts of the sewage network that are shallower than 2.28m deep will be surveyed, rather than sewers deeper than that figure last time around.

Q8 from Paul Armstrong: Are the high peak-to-dry flow ratios in Langham typical of AW's network elsewhere?

A8: The high infiltration is very atypical, in the top three or four of AW's entire network, with the other most atypical catchments all being in the Norfolk Broads.

Q9: Will you be sharing a detailed map of the complete survey coverage?

A9: We can do that.

Q10: Is there a connection between the recent flooding at Chapel Road/Moor Road and the recent backing up of sewage in the toilets of several houses along Perry Lane? (AW engineers have come and cleared the drains several times, but each time the problem returns again after a few days).

A10: We'll look into that for you.

Q11 from Tony Emms: What are you going to do NOW to stop the flooding problems (a temporary contingency solution)?

A11: With respect to the burst mains, specific actions have been taken and these will hopefully prove effective. With respect to the WRC upgrade, we can't invest in a massive upgrade program when we don't know where the excess water is coming from.

Q12: How often do you maintain your pumping stations?

A12: We don't have that detailed information to hand, but it will be in accordance with a routine maintenance program.

Q13: Were the flow monitors used in the recent program properly calibrated to make sure the results were accurate?

A13: Yes, they would have been calibrated before use.

Q14 from Peter Dawson: Last 14<sup>th</sup> December, you told me you were going to check the Non Return Valves and install a Pressure Reduction Valve before Christmas. Was that actually completed in December?

A14: No, the Pressure Reduction Valve was fitted last week and commissioned this week.

Q15 from Peter Dawson: Can you provide the Parish Council with a detailed map of the sewer network layout and the location of all the Non Return Valves, so that during future potential emergencies the Parish Council can notify people not to use their water, to help reduce the risk of flooding?

A15: Yes, we should be able to do that.

Q16: Do you ever maintain your Non Return Valves?

A16: They should be inspected at least once a year (...but several residents then firmly stated that this hadn't been happening in practice...).

Q17 from Tony Emms: I ask again, what are you going to do NOW to stop flooding happening again tomorrow or next month (rather than in the future once you've completed your new surveys)?

A17: In the short term, we have just completed the installation of a Pressure Reduction Valve at the Pumping Station. Beyond that, there isn't much we can do other than issue warnings, and checking NRVs which we've now committed to do. Installation of a storm tank isn't a realistic or cost effective solution here: we'd rather sort the infiltration issue at source. And even after we've identified the sources of infiltration that shouldn't be entering our foul-only sewer, we will rely on collaboration from others (Landowners, Highways etc) to fix these issues.

Q18 from Luciana Haywood: Are AW not worried that if they continue to kick this issue down the road with surveys rather than taking action and spending money to solve the issues, the anger in this room will turn into legal action for criminal discharge of sewage?

A18: AW have spent money, on sewer lining, NRVs, surveys, and Pumping station upgrades. We can't realistically do any more until we've identified the source of the infiltration. It's a big problem because of the ageing legacy infrastructure that we inherited when we were privatised 30 odd years ago.

Q19: How often is the Pumping Station serviced?

A19: not answered.

Cllr Bottwood drew the Q&A to a close with a plea for all residents who had suffered issues to provide details to the Parish Council so that we can compile a comprehensive list and then follow up holistically with Anglian Water on all residents' behalf.

### **Thoughts from our MP**

Sir Bernard could fully understand why residents' patience is running out. More than two years on from our first meeting, there is still no emergency plan and Anglian Water are unable to confirm a date for upgrading the WRC. It's very striking that the high peak/dry flow data has been known for years and years and it therefore seems odd that AW are only now trying to discover where the excess water is getting into the system. There would appear to be a lack of the necessary urgency.

Sir Bernard then sought to clarify some technical points. AW definitively confirmed that flows actually *entering* the WRC cannot be rejected or backed-up within the premises: all such flows will pass through all the processing stages before then discharging into the Black Brook. But AW were unable to confirm that the sewer pipes *feeding* the WRC were adequately dimensioned to cope with peak flows during wet weather (since the system was designed as a foul-only sewer and cannot be expected to cope with the massive infiltration levels that Langham is experiencing).

Sir Bernard noted that the flow graphs shown today suggested that the steps taken so far to tackle the infiltration problem had clearly only just begun to scratch the surface of a huge problem. AW responded that about a £1m was spent re-lining sewers and sealing manholes back in 2015, and the flows seen since 2016 are despite that work. The recent survey work had focussed on deep lying sewer areas on the assumption that these were the most likely source of major infiltration, but with hindsight this assumption has proven incorrect and the focus must now shift to shallow sewer sections.

Sir Bernard hoped that AW would now immediately expedite some sort of emergency contingency protocol to assist Langham in coping with prospective flooding emergencies during heavy rain. Without this he felt that AW would indeed appear vulnerable to a legal challenge by local residents.

Sir Bernard would be writing to the AW CEO to emphasise that the Langham situation is now desperate and requires acceleration of both the long term plan and some more immediate contingency measures, to address AW's breach of license and breach of the law. He will not rest easy until he sees much faster progress in addressing Langham's longstanding sewage issues.

### **Wrap Up and Action Points**

Cllr Bottwood asked AW whether resolution of the infiltration problem would cause fresh problems of flooding elsewhere by simply re-directing that rainwater into already overloaded surface water drainage systems.

AW responded that this was indeed a likely outcome, and that a multi-agency approach would therefore be needed to tackle this. Similar initiatives in Norfolk (the Norfolk Strategic Flood Alliance) have involved up to 36 different agencies, showing the complexity of these issues, but the County Council will be the ultimate Lead Local Flood Authority.

In response to a late question from Barry Hobbs, Sir Bernard noted that elsewhere in his constituency, the threat of legal action in response to a lack of adequate contingency planning led to installation of a new pumping station in Frating.

Cllr Bottwood proposed that once LPC have received written answers to the more detailed questions previously submitted to Anglian Water, we would then decide on a suitable schedule for a follow up session to agree a detailed action plan.

Cllr Armstrong suggested that we should try to collate a full list of recent flooding issues from affected residents, to aid in developing that action plan with AW.