

DOWN AMPNEY NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANNING STEERING GROUP – COMMITTEE MEETING 18 OCTOBER 2021 – MINUTES

In Attendance: Andrew Scarth (AS), Geoff Tappern (GT), Jackie Scuri (JS), David Fowles (DF), Darrel Warner (DW) and Mike Bruce (MB)

Item 1. Apologies: Lisa Spivey and Ray Jenkins.

Item 2. Programme Review. AS circulated an initial final version of the NDP documents for perusal. These had been discussed with the CDC and are final for this stage of the process.

Item 3. Further External Meetings. A productive meeting had been held with the Co-op and a meeting with the Welcome Trust was to be arranged.

Item 4. Regulation 14 Consultation.

- a. When. This was subject to the CDC decision on the need or otherwise for a Strategic Environment Assessment. Discussion on-going with CDC/AS/GT. It was hope to arrange a Village Meeting for 11 December.
- b. Statutory Consultees. AS held the standard list of statutory consultees, with some advised additions, all of whom would receive the NDP documentation with a 6 week response time.
- c. Hard Copies. It was agreed that 10 hard copies of the NDP documentation would be procured and robust quality paper. Up to 5 copies would be held by the DA Village Shop to be signed out by those who wished to read the documents, with a 48 hour turn round time. Other copies could be purchased.
- d. Website. Extensive work had been undertaken to generate a comprehensive, user friendly website, the details of which would be promulgated to all concerned by various means of communication including a DA News insert and hand delivery.

Item 5. Finance. The Neighbourhood Plan is working within budget at the moment; however, there are several hurdles to clear before completion. It is hoped that the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of the village is not required, and a decision will be known within the next two/three weeks. With a village consultation this will take us through Reg 14. Following Reg 14 there will be Reg 16 where we may well require costly professional advice to carry us through “inspection” and to a final referendum. Funding for the Neighbourhood Plan is in the Parish Council budget, and Locality funding will also help, although at this stage no application was being made for further Locality grants because any application must itemise what the money will be spent on: something which is not possible at this time.

Item 6. Sewage. Any new development connected to the existing sewerage system would result in further overload at the Ampney St Peter treatment plant. The amount of discharge of untreated sewage into Ampney Brook is well documented. Surface water entering the existing old pipe system certainly does not help and is a major contributor to the overload. Thames Water have been asked is it “Is it safe for our children to bathe in Ampney Brook?”. Their extensive response follows.

From: Richard Aylard <richard.aylard@thameswater.co.uk>

Subject: Re: Ampney Brook and housing development

Date: 13 October 2021 at 20:22:48 BST

To: Geoffrey Tappern <Geoffrey.Tappern@hotmail.co.uk>

Cc: Tim Beech <tim.beech@thameswater.co.uk>

Dear Geoff,

I must start by apologising again for the delay in replying to your questions, in doing so, I should start by making it clear that we are absolutely committed to protecting and enhancing our rivers and supporting the communities who love them. Putting untreated sewage into rivers is unacceptable to us, to our customers and to the environment. We're working hard to make discharges unnecessary, with the help of the government, Ofwat and the Environment Agency. Our current business plan, spanning 2020-2025, will deliver environmental improvements to 745km of rivers across the region. The use of digital technology to create a more intelligent sewer network and enabling more proactive maintenance and repairs will help us to drive a reduction in untreated sewer discharges.

Eliminating discharges is not going to be quick, easy, or inexpensive and we welcome the continued support of our customers and regulators, who are equally passionate about this topic, as well as extensive collaboration with local communities and other stakeholders, to achieve cleaner rivers.

I'd also like to address your specific questions in regards to Ampney St. Peter, responding to development and recreational use of the river. These can be complicated issues and hopefully my colleague Tim Beech explained some of the challenges when you spoke last week, he is also available (as am I) to be contacted should you have follow up questions.

Ampney St Peter

I'd like to reassure you we are significantly investing in Ampney St. Peter Sewage Treatment Works (STW). Ampney St. Peter STW has been upgraded numerous times over the years to comply with the new discharge permits and storm tank improvements. We are currently planning a 'flow to full treatment upgrade' which put simply means the treatment process will be increased to accept more flow for treatment and reduce the amount of untreated sewage going into our storm tanks or discharging to the environment. The project, alongside a number of other STW upgrades are being reviewed at the moment but we expect the upgrade to be completed no later than March 2025. In order to size the upgrade sufficiently we have also delivered some additional onsite flow monitoring this year which will allow us to better understand the volumes of flow coming in and out of the site.

In reference to the pumping arrangements you mentioned. In 2017/18 we installed a second wet well (underground storage tank) adjacent to the original Ampney St. Peter pumping station and separated the two incoming sewer networks serving the STW. The original pump station now only serves the network from Ampney Crucis, whilst a new pump station serves Ampney St. Peter and Ampney St. Mary. This scheme substantially reduced the risk of flooding in the catchment.

We recognise more work needs to be done, particularly when it comes to infiltration. This occurs predominantly during winter/spring months when groundwater levels are high, resulting in clean water infiltrating into the sewer network or through manholes from surcharging highway/land drainage. Ampney St. Peter catchment suffers from this seasonal infiltration, and this affects the

sewer network at the same time placing significant pressure on STWs. We are working to tackle some of the root causes and in the short term our operational teams have been working hard carrying out lift and look surveys & CCTV investigations to identify sources of water ingress. As a result, we have repaired sections of high risk sewers and sealed a number of manhole covers.

Looking further ahead we are developing a Groundwater Impacted System Management Plan (GISMP) for the Ampney St. Peter sewerage system. GISMPs are agreed with the Environment Agency and published on our website. They outline the short, medium and long term interventions to tackling infiltration in the sewerage system. <https://www.thameswater.co.uk/about-us/regulation/drainage-plans>. We are building evidence for a more strategic wholesale approach to sewer lining to line large portions of the network in the high-risk groundwater areas of the network for each system. We are not funded to deliver this level of lining in this period (2020-25), however, where interventions can be undertaken as part of routine sewer maintenance activities these will be communicated and progressed separately.

Ampney St. Peter STW is also being assessed under the Environment Agency SOAF (Storm Overflow Assessment Framework) programme. The framework ensures that we are proactively monitoring and managing the performance of our overflows considering the pressures of growth and changing rainfall patterns. Stage 1 and 2 assessments which investigate the root cause of the spills and quantify environmental impact is due to be complete for Summer 2022. Interventions identified as part of this process will be included in our next business plan (2025-2030).

Development

We have a duty to provide maintain and extend our sewer network to accommodate new development. For STW upgrades we are funded through our 5 year business plan and for sewer enhancements we are funded via infrastructure charges from developers. To help us understand what development is coming forward we monitor local plans which give a longer-term view of development, up to 20 years, as well as planning applications which give a 1 – 5 year view.

As you may be aware, Water and Sewerage companies are not statutory consultees in the planning process and have limited powers to prevent connection to our networks. We therefore work closely with developers and planning authorities to ensure any upgrades needed to serve a new development are delivered in line with the new development's needs/timescales. When commenting on planning applications we undertake desktop assessments to calculate any potential impact on the existing infrastructure and in some cases we may seek an appropriately worded planning condition to ensure occupation of the development doesn't outpace the delivery of the infrastructure.

When assessing new development it is important to understand whether surface water flows are proposed to discharge into our system. Foul flows from new development are often very small in comparison to the existing sewerage systems – we often refer to 100 houses of foul flow being equivalent to one house with their roof drainage connected into the foul. Therefore when we undertake desktop assessments for foul flow the impact is often assessed as negligible in comparison to the existing situation, assuming new surface water flows are managed on site and not connected to our system. So discharges from Ampney St. Peter are a result of infiltration into the

sewers, not from over development and our efforts in the catchment are to restore the headroom by reducing the infiltration flows.

All discharges from STWs are regulated by the Environment Agency. We monitor spills from STWs over a long period of time (multiple years as weather patterns are varied) to understand the impact surface water/infiltration is having and if triggers are met we will instigate a STW study and plan upgrades as appropriate to remain compliant within our consent. We recognise the lag effect this causes, and we are working with WaterUk and DEFRA to challenge a developers right to connect.

Recreational use of the river

We fully appreciate just how well loved these rivers and stream are and why people want to use them for recreation. However, we need to gently remind people that sewage discharges aren't the only sources of pollutants, nor are water companies responsible for river quality generally. Animal faeces from livestock and wildlife, along with run-off from farms and roads, also contribute to the hazards. It really is up to individuals to make informed decisions based on numerous factors and we support the government's advice on open water swimming: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/swim-healthy-leaflet/swim-healthy>

The wider health of the river concerns us, though formal assessments are part of the Environment Agency's role. We certainly recognise that real-time discharge notifications of sewage discharges play an important part in helping people make informed decisions about whether to use the river or not. We're currently trialling these notifications around Oxford to support an application for bathing water status. Details on this can be found here (www.thameswater.co.uk/riverhealth). We're looking to adopt a similar approach for our other wastewater catchments in the future. The Environment Agency are responsible for river health and undertake regular monitoring to better understand areas that require additional investment and interventions, either from water companies, councils or private landowners. Long term monitoring can be an expensive and resource intensive activity and as such is usually targeted to hotspot areas and for a finite period. Our Oxford trial will run for at least a year and will be the longest bacterial monitoring programme on a watercourse in England. The learnings from this will help us better understand the general health of the river and what proportion of the perceived poor water quality is linked to sewage spills/effluent, under a range of conditions.

I do hope this is helpful. I'm very happy to discuss further, or indeed to come and speak to the Parish Council.

Kind regards

Richard

Dialogue with Thames Water continues and we will take up there offer to come and see us to discuss the many problems. A solution is vital before any further development is added to the system, and the existing pipe work lined to stop ingress of surface water into the system.