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REPORT INTO MEETING WITH WESSEX WATER

You are aware that I met with two directors and the regional sewage manager from Wessex Water (WW) on the afternoon of 23rd March 2023. I was joined by our Ward Councillor and two Councillors from Winterborne Steepleton and Abbas.

Whilst I will report on my take-aways, I will first quote from an email received from WW's Ruth Barden on 30th March. For context, Ruth is Director of Environmental Solutions, Matt is Director of Infrastructure Development (or Strategy and Planning), and John is the Regional Sewage Manager.

Actions, I noted were:

- Matt to organise some hydraulic modelling of the sewer network from Winterborne Abbas down through Martinstown to check gradient & flow passage
- John to review CCTV and blockages recorded in network and check that there aren't any issues further down than recent callout – this stemmed from the concern that there was flow backing up between Winterborne Steepleton & Martinstown
- Ruth to provide gunk pots & sewer misuse flyers for PC meeting on 19th May
- Ruth to follow up with the Duchy of Cornwall about a wetland option within their land ownership

We are progressing these actions and have been looking at previous sewer models to understand if there are any hydraulic issues further up the sewerage system which may cause flooding or restrictions in the flow.

I'll keep you updated on the progress with these actions so that you can share this with the PC.

These actions stemmed from a wide-ranging discussion about the spillages of what they accepted, indeed insisted, was raw sewage from our manholes into our stream this winter. Of note, the only place they are licensed to spill is at the pumping station.

The overall WW position is that the sewage pipe has the capacity to cope with the black water loading from the villages, and that the capacity issue therefore relates to ground or surface water ingress to WW or private drains, exacerbated by rainfall drains (down pipes) connected to the system and possibly by partial blockages.

I don't think any of us doubts the high groundwater levels given the visible (and videoed) flows from wells and springs in the village, but they were interested to learn of the continued spillage days after rainfall ceased. I argued, successfully, that the continued spillage, particularly from the manhole opposite the proposed Morrish development, days or even weeks after rainfall had ceased, suggested that the problem is systemic rather than related to downpipes. They took the point, particularly as they agreed that although the pumps had operated almost continuously, and although there was frequent spillage into the Winterbourne, the system still backed up. This led to the agreement to carry out hydraulic modelling and reviews of the sewerage system.

The Regional Sewage Manager noted the sand deposits at the bottom of the road to Church Farm, and the extensive deposits in the Winterborne at and downstream of the confluence of the washpool stream, and this led to him agreeing to review blockages in the sewer, and particularly to see if sand ingress had any part in it. In addition to possible sand ingress they will be exploring the impact of disposal of fats and non-dissolvable tissues (such as wet-wipes) on the sewer and pumps and I agreed that we would publicise these issues as part of a wider plan to reduce the impact in future years. As you will note above they will provide materials to assist in education and practical disposal of fats for the Annual Parish Meeting (indeed John Hole might attend).

They also committed to continuing to use CCTV to review possible trouble spots, particularly the pipe across the field from Steepleton as this is frequently below the water table, and to reline damaged areas and to seal man-hole covers where this is safe.

We also discussed the option to store the excess when the system cannot cope. They are driven by carbon-neutral legislation (and cost) to be against any form of concrete reservoir but approached our attitude to a potential wetland (aka reed-bed) option to the East of the Village. I mentioned that I had already heard of such a possibility and thought that we were cautiously in favour. This should not be seen a panacea as there are serious issues to overcome, not least that the obvious valley location already floods so would be unsuitable. However, Matt was enthusiastic and believed that the technical issues could be overcome which would at least mean that if our success at clearing the stream did again flood Winterborne Monkton, in future it would be flooded with clean water!

All in all I was delighted that we had reached into Wessex Water at the level that we had, and that they were proactive in facing our issues. I believe that now we must hold them to their promises, and focus our Parishioners on being part of the solution whilst learning how to focus our complaints more effectively if, or more likely when, the issues recur.

Mark Pemberton

3rd April 2023

Note: I have already reported to the Clerk that as part of this visit WW bought me (and the other members of the home a team) an orange and soda. I do not consider that this swayed me.