

Winterborne St Martin Parish Council

Sewage Overflow

12 February 2021

The report is provided as requested to support my request for an agenda item at the February meeting of WSMPC. The agenda item request is below.

I have kept the Council updated on my dialogue, as a resident, regarding Wessex Water's village sewer. As I said in the autumn the dialogue ended with Wessex Water stating there were no plans for permanent rectification other than pumping out. My email below indicates there is concern within the community; that concern is growing.

I think the time has come for the Parish Council itself to become formally involved, as an Authority the Council will have more impact than myself as a private resident. I would therefore be grateful if you could add the following proposed motion to the agenda of the February meeting...

Given this is the second year in succession that our main road, the South Winterbourne and resident's gardens, have been contaminated with over-flowing sewage from the Wessex Water sewer, and that the Wessex Water have no plans to provide a permanent solution, will the PC agree to develop an engagement strategy with other authorities, in the name of WSMPC, to resolve the problem permanently and oversee it to resolution.

1. Recent events

During this winter, Jan/Feb 21, the main village sewer has overflowed along its full length from the Hardy's turning to the Pump House. I reported this to this Wessex Water (WW), as a resident, who were on site the same day. WW have pumped out the sewer every day. In intending to conclude their work today WW telephoned me and told me they believed the problem was too much water coming down the sewer from Winterbourne Abbas. I was told not to be worried by the sewage as it only contained half the ammonia (urine) levels they were allowed to discharge from the Pump House into the South Winterbourne. I also understand a resident has been told by a Councillor that the problem is with the Pump House and WW will be upgrading it.

Last winter, Oct-Dec 19, a similar incident occurred which I also reported to WW. At this time WW reported there no blockages and that it was not a Pump House issue as the Pump House was only using 50% of its capacity. Once the pumping out completed, I pursued a permanent resolution with WW. After many months of waiting for them to complete their investigations I was telephoned by Brendan Sutcliffe, who explained his role as sewerage manager for this area.

He told me they have only done minor repairs in our area and are hoping ground water will not be so high this coming winter. He believed the overflow problem results from the foul water sewer taking in ground water from many of the branch sewers to private properties which may be fractured. He also said that as Martinstown's rain water drainage system is the South Winterbourne; many residents not directly adjacent to the stream may well have, illegally connected rainwater drains to the foul sewer and thereby impinging on the foul-water sewer's ability to cope. (The only apparent rain water drainage system is on the Manor Grove housing estate but even this discharges into the stream.) He said sewer overflow situation isn't uncommon in villages where population growth has exceeded the capacity of historic sewers and WW will pump out again next winter if needed but nothing more is planned.

2. History

I recall several mentions of sewer capacity during my two years on the Council but the only minuted reference, apart from my own recent comment that Wessex Water were not taking action to provide a permanent solution, I could find was in January 2020 when in relation to a development proposal where the minutes showed "Concerns that would be raised today is the state of the sewers and the capacity for further homes".

Dave Read then kindly provided correspondence from October 2017 that would indicate the problem is not just restricted to the last two years but has persisted over time. Wessex Water said:

As you are aware the sewers in Martinstown are susceptible to inundation of groundwater during periods of prolonged wet weather which can lead to sewer flooding. This is a common issue in areas of underlying chalk geology or shallow superficial deposits. To mitigate against sewer flooding from groundwater Wessex Water is:

- *Undertaking a programme of sewer inspections and sewer sealing (internal sewer sleeve).*
- *Devising a programme to engage with our customers to explain the issues and how we can work together to reduce the impact.*
- *Implementing an Operational Management Action Plan during times of risk to protect properties from sewer flooding.*
- *Responding to planning applications to ensure that development does not increase the risk of flooding downstream or result in an unacceptable risk on site.*

As this predates me I do not know if WW fulfilled their commitment; given where we are today it seems a least some of this work remains outstanding.

Dave Read also provided the flood investigation report commissioned by Dorset County Council in July 2013. Relevant extracts include:

5.3.6 Residents also reported significant surcharging of foul and surface water drainage, and also emergence from other utilities access chambers.

5.4.14 A number of residents reported concern with the high volume of Wessex Water tanker movements in the area during and after the July 2012 flood event. WW have advised that the purpose of this tankering was to remove flow from the foul drainage network, which had been inundated by very high infiltration from groundwater

6.2.25 Without mitigation, further development in the study area will increase surface water runoff and remove space for flood water, increasing the risk and impact of flooding. Development must be directed away from the high flood risk areas and be adequately designed not to increase flood risk.

2. Comments from residents

Traffic driving through the overflow water (sewage) is spraying it constantly over people and properties.

This is like going back to the Middle Ages.

Anyone who thinks that this isn't an issue - I suggest a nice glass of water from the stream!

Stream pollution. Sewerage is also being pumped, untreated, into the stream by WW. It is also running into the stream directly from the overflowing manhole covers.

why, after all this time, and as this could quite easily affect the health of residents, pets and/or livestock, has the PC not done anything already?

So in effect we have raw untreated sewage running down the roads and into the stream! I recommend that unless the Parish Council really wants to do something (!!!?)

property development to the east and west ends of the village is imminent, also at Church Farm, and the pressure this is likely to put on an already broken sewer is obvious. The PC will have to approve planning and it would be shameful to give the go ahead

We should not have to worry about our land and properties being contaminated by untreated sewerage whenever groundwater levels rise as well.

Overflowing sewer drains. This constitutes a health hazard

The sewer may have been installed a long time ago before the population of Martinstown grew, but WW have been receiving Water Rates from all residents, old and new, for all those years. The time has now come for WW to spend some of that money on upgrading their out-of-date pipework

3. Conclusion

The sewage overflow situation appears to have gone unresolved for the best part of a decade.

it is unlikely the issue could be handled effectively simply as an agenda item at our regular meetings. A Councillor or Councillors should be appointed to see this issue through; communication skills, both written and verbal, negotiation skills and some determination will be needed to get us to a resolution.

As this issue has been raised previously at, and by, the PC, if we decide to take action it will be important that this action is co-ordinated through to resolution or to a point where a public statement can be made that no more can be achieved. We would need to follow through so the community understand we have done all we can.

Recommendation

Given this is the second year in succession that our main road, the South Winterbourne and resident's gardens, have been contaminated with over-flowing sewage from the Wessex Water sewer, and that the Wessex Water have no plans to provide a permanent solution, will the PC agree to develop an engagement strategy with other authorities, in the name of WSMPC, to resolve the problem permanently and oversee it to resolution