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22nd November 2023

SENT VIA EMAIL

Julie Marson
Conservative MP for Hertford and Stortford
Email: julie.marson.mp@parliament.uk

Dear Julie Marson

Al Cochran has asked me to thank you for your letter of 2nd November, about the release of untreated sewage into the Rivers Lee, Rib and Beane, and to reply on his behalf. I apologise for the delay in replying while we assembled the information requested.

I need to start by saying clearly that putting untreated sewage into rivers is unacceptable to us, to our customers and to the environment. We are absolutely committed to protecting and enhancing our rivers and the communities who love them, and we want to make these discharges unnecessary as quickly as possible.

I should explain that the discharges are designed to happen automatically when, after heavy rain, more flow is entering the sewer network, and is arriving at a Sewage Treatment Works (STW) than it can treat or store. We cannot control the amount of flow arriving at the works and trying to do so would cause flooding somewhere else, from the sewers backing up. For this reason, our sewage treatment works are designed so that any surplus, above the amount the site is designed to treat, is diverted automatically to storm tanks and stored until incoming flows reduce and the works once again has spare treatment capacity. Discharges of untreated sewage only take place when the works are operating at full capacity and the storm tanks are full. When that happens, any excess overflows automatically to the river, because there is literally nowhere else for it to go. This principle also applies to many of our pumping stations and locations where we have combined sewer networks, such as in London.

We recently conducted a reconciliation of our asset data and permit requirements, which identified further overflows that required investigation to determine whether sewage overflow monitoring was required. Those investigations and installations have been taking place this year, and we expect to complete this work by the end of December 2023, as you highlight in your letter.

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

In terms of what we are doing about the problem, we are spending £1.25 billion during the period from 2020 to 2025 on maintaining and improving our wastewater network and sewage works.

In terms of tangible targets, we're aligning to government storm overflow reduction plan, which refers to 'maximum number of spills', as the required metric.

In our recently submitted draft business plan (PR24) for the regulatory period of 2025 – 2030, we're planning for a maximum of 17 spills on average, per overflow per year by 2030. This will be a reduction in the number of storm overflows by 28% by 2030, at a cost of £885 million. In the medium term we're planning for a maximum of 10 spills on average, per overflow per year by 2050, at a cost of £10.9 billion.

While we continue to make these improvements, we think it is essential that we let local people know when these discharges start and stop. We are the first, and currently the only company to provide real-time notifications of discharges at all of our permitted discharge points. Details can be found here: <https://www.thameswater.co.uk/edm-map> .

We hope this information is helping people to decide whether or not to take part in recreational activities, such as swimming, in rivers. We need to be clear that there are also other potential hazards in rivers, including bacteria and parasites in the water, from livestock and other animals, along with pollution from farming, industry and roads. This is why we support the government's advice on open water swimming, which can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/swim-healthy-leaflet/swim-healthy>.

Overall annual performance of each of our storm overflows is available in our annual reports here - <https://www.thameswater.co.uk/about-us/performance/river-health/storm-discharge-data>

With regards to sewage discharges in the past seven days (25th October – 1st November), we've identified eight consented discharge locations which we believe are within your constituency, as marked on our storm overflow map.

- Stanstead Mountfitchet - Sewage Works
- Birchanger - Duck End - Pumping Station
- Bishop Stortford Main - Pumping station
- Bakers Farm, High Wych - Pumping Station
- Widford And Wareside – Sewage Works
- Hadham Mill – Pumping Station
- Rye Meads – Sewage Works
- Brickendon – Sewage Works

Of the eight locations, our data shows that we had discharges during this period at two of them. Our data indicates this was due to the wet weather and volume of water entering our network and our sewage treatment works. So although regrettable, the system was operating as it is currently designed and intended to function.

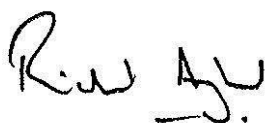
EDM location	Timestamp Start	Timestamp End	Duration Mins	Duration Hours
HADHAM MILL SPS	10/29/2023 12:05:01 PM	10/29/2023 2:43:54 PM	158.88	2.64

EDM Location	Timestamp Start	Timestamp End	Duration Mins	Duration Hours
BRICKENDON STW	10/28/2023 11:43:05 PM	10/29/2023 10:22:30 PM	1359.41	22.65
BRICKENDON STW	10/29/2023 11:07:30 PM	10/30/2023 12:06:40 AM	59.16	0.98
BRICKENDON STW	10/30/2023 8:14:33 AM	10/30/2023 8:45:00 AM	30.45	0.5
BRICKENDON STW	10/30/2023 10:58:39 AM	10/30/2023 11:55:07 AM	56.46	0.94

Hadham Mill discharges into the River Ash, a tributary of the Lee, and Brickendon discharges into Harmonds Brook, also a tributary of the Lee.

I do hope this letter is helpful in explaining the recent local discharges and provides some useful performance and target data. Of course, if there is more specific detail or data you require, we would be happy to provide what we can. I would also be happy to arrange a visit for you to see one of the sewage works in your constituency and meet the staff.

Yours sincerely



Richard Aylard CVO
Sustainability Director