

## **Motion of No Confidence in Thames Water.**

### **Witney Town Council notes that:**

- Thames Water has been releasing untreated sewage into our rivers for 20 years. In Witney, the Sewage Treatment Works (STW) has a Combined Sewage Overflow (CSO) that outfalls into Colwell Brook. Colwell Brook enters Witney Town Council land at the edge of the Lake and Country Park on the path from Ducklington. It merges with Queen Emma's Dyke, which joins the Windrush at the confluence in the Country Park, and later joins the Thames.
- Records show that illegal spills date back to 2004 or beyond. The Environment Agency fined TW £75 000 in 2006 for the presence of sewage fungus in Colwell Brook and £10 000 in 2009 for the deaths of 650 fish. [1]
- Sewage fungus was found more extensively in Colwell Brook in 2014 after a winter of spills, but the EA did not investigate. [1]
- Data analysed for 2019 revealed that sewage was discharged in Witney for 13 295 hours.[2]
- Thames Water received a petition from the people of Witney and West Oxfordshire in June 2020, including the comments left by residents who signed. [3]
- Thames Water received a letter from the people of Witney who marched in protest from the Bathing Place to the STW in March 2022 [4]
- In 2023, the Windrush in Witney received 5823 hours of sewage discharge including plants upstream, of which over 2000 hours were Witney STW itself. [5]
- Every time it rains, the poor repair of Thames Water's infrastructure across Witney allows infiltration. The inadequate capacity of the Sewage Treatment Plant, coupled with management decisions, leads to days of overflow into Colwell Brook. The last three Christmases are well-documented, but it happens all year round -
  - The spill from Christmas Day 2021 ran till 9 January 2022 [6]
  - The spill from 28 December 2022, which was reported in the Guardian 607 hours later, was still going at 18 January 2023 [7]
  - The spill from 30 December 2023 ran well into January 2024 [8]. Last Christmas, the CSO action was accompanied by Witney residents having sewage backing up into their homes too.The sewage spill map frequently shows discharges at times of rainfall that then turn to illegal dry spills.

- The "more than £17 million" (figure from TW report, 9 May 2024 [9]) upgrade pledged for Witney is under-ambitious (this was £8.5 million in January 2023, but the scope, unlike the cost, has not increased much - 60% to 66% increase in capacity). Thames Water has a target of 50% reduction in discharge by 2030, and compliance with the government's 2050 expectations [10] by 2040-45.
- A baby born today will be 16-21 before sewage overflows are "compliant". Whole childhoods are knowing nothing but hazardous water and mismanagement of resources.
- The UK is the one of two nations to have privatised water, with the other being Chile. This privatisation has been shown to be one likely cause of TW's financial issues and is clearly non-standard.
- TW is requesting a bill rise of 44% over the 2025-2030 period.
- Henley Town Council passed a motion of no confidence in Thames Water on 4 June 2024 and also a motion calling for renationalisation.

**Witney Town Council believes that:**

- TW's sewerage service is beyond inadequate. With illnesses on the rise, bringing serious risk of death, administrative change is needed.
- The privatisation of TW is a root cause behind the inadequacy of service.
- TW is not sustainable without direct intervention and renationalization.
- TW's request for an increase in consumer bills of 44% over the next 5 years is extortion and is a clear show of poor business management and decades of collecting payments from residents without using them to maintain the network.

**Witney Town Council resolves that:**

- Witney Town Council has no confidence in Thames Water's competence as a sewerage undertaker.
- Witney Town Council proposes that a letter should be sent by the Leader of the Council to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, urging His Majesty's Government to place full regulatory and administrative limits on Thames Water, suspending bonuses, bringing criminal charges to individuals responsible

where found and to evaluate the pros and cons of the renationalisation of Thames Water.

- [1] <https://www.windrushwasp.org/single-post/thames-water-showcase-their-work-at-witney-sewage-treatment-works-friday-9th-september>
- [2] <https://www.windrushwasp.org/data-analysis>
- [3] <https://news.westoxon.gov.uk/news/council-backs-river-pollution-petition>
- [4] <https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/19991708.dozens-protest-witney-river-pollution-thames-water/>
- [5] <https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/24017817.oxfordshire-sewage-discharged-thousands-hours>
- [6] <https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/19841738.witney-mp-accuses-thames-water-using-sewage-releases-a-routine-process/>
- [7] <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/jan/23/thames-waters-real-time-map-raw-sewage-discharges-rivers>
- [8] <https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/24028112.oxford-west-mp-criticises-thames-water-sewage-leak/>
- [9] <https://www.thameswater.co.uk/about-us/performance/river-health/frequently-asked-questions/information-about-specific-sites#w>
- [10] <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/storm-overflows-discharge-reduction-plan>