

HALLS AND GREEN SPACES COMMITTEE

Date: Monday 13th January 2020

Title: Update on Lake & Country Park - Sewage Pollution of Emma's Dyke

Contact Officer: Operations and Estates Officer – John Hickman

BACKGROUND

The purpose of this is to update Councillors on the current position regarding the Lake and Country Park and the recent issues regarding sewage pollution within Emma's Dyke.

ACTION TAKEN

Councillors will be aware of the recent situation regarding Thames Water discharging treated sewage into Colwell Brook in mid-November during a period of heavy rain. The Operations and Estates Officer reported the initial contamination to the Environment Agency [EA], who confirmed the contamination of Colwell Brook and Emma's Dyke including the presence of sewage fungus.

It would appear that Thames Water have again been releasing treated sewage into Colwell Brook and Emma's Dyke during heavy rain fall during December.

CURRENT POSITION

Thames Water holds a licence enabling them to discharge treated sewage into Colwell Brook during wet weather periods.

The EA informed the Operations and Estates Officer during the first release of treated sewage that they are investigating the release of sewage into Colwell Brook to ensure that Thames Water have complied with the terms of the Licence.

Thames Water has informed the EA and the Town Clerk following recent communication that they will continue to discharge treated sewage into Colwell Brook and subsequently Emma's Dyke during periods of heavy rainfall.

Despite concerns that Emma's Dyke will contaminate the Lake this is very unlikely to happen as the Lake normally has a much higher water level than Emma's dyke. In fact when the river Windrush bursts it's banks on the Eastern side due to heavy rainfall it flows into the Lake, then in turn the Lake overflows on the Western side into Emma's Dyke which then flows into the Windrush again at a lower point.

The EA have stated they are only able to advise on the risk to wildlife and the environment.

The Compliance and Environment Officer and Operations and Estates Officer have placed temporary notices alongside Emma's Dyke stating as follows.

“Please keep dogs on leads along Emma's Dyke”

“Discharge of treated sewage from Colwell Brook into Emma's Dyke Swimming and food gathering is not recommended”

As this appears to be an on-going situation whenever there is substantial rainfall the Officers are looking to purchase permanent signs and installing in 2 or 3 areas to the bank of Emma's dyke.

The Officers will also be looking to install fencing and possibly hedging in areas where the footpath runs right against the bank of Emma's Dyke. Also, in areas where Emma's Dyke is easily accessed from the footpath in order to try to reduce easy or accidental access to Emma's Dyke. The associated costs involved will be brought back to a future meeting.

The Works team have also carried out fence and gates repairs and clearance of fallen tree bows within the Lake and Country Park.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

Having declared a Climate Change Emergency at its Council meeting on 26 June 2019 – with this in mind Councillors should have due regard to the environmental impact of any decisions they make with regard to its facilities and services it operates.

The discharge of Sewage Waste will obviously be having an effect on the environment and biodiversity of the lake however WTC has no control over the discharge of this waste and can only advise members of the public about the situation.

RISK

In decision making Councillors should give consideration to any risks to the Council and any action it can take to limit or negate its liability. Witney Town Council has a duty of care to members of the Public using the Lake and Country Park to inform them and prevent easy or accidental access to the sewage waste.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There will be a cost for signage, fencing and hedging, but at this stage they cannot be quantified.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are invited to note the report.