

**Sent:** 20 December 2019 16:13  
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**Subject:** Our Ref: 33430352 Your ref: H3

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20 December 2019

Our Ref: 33430352

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## Witney Sewage Treatment Works

Dear Mrs Groth

Thank you for your letter of 11 December, in relation to your concerns about discharges from Witney Sewage Treatment Works (STW) into local rivers and watercourses. I have spoken with my colleagues across the business and welcome the opportunity to update you.

It may be helpful to explain, we have recently been in contact with West Oxfordshire District Council about this matter and it is something we are taking very seriously. It is evident residents are understandably concerned about discharges into the river and I can assure you, I wholly appreciate their worries. If it were possible to change our operation at once to prevent these reoccurrences, we would of course do so, without hesitation.

Waste water treatment is governed by physical and biological factors, which limits the amount of waste water the STW can reliably and effectively treat. We cannot increase the size of our treatment works to accommodate higher volumes from storm flows instantaneously, it requires much meticulous planning. Doing so could result in other issues during dry spells, relating to excessive retention times through the process treatment stages, leading to septicity, odour and growth of unwanted bacteria. This would then very likely result in deterioration in baseline effluent quality, impacting the health of the river, as opposed intermittent storm spills.

Nevertheless, it is important to mention, a careful review of the flows treated at Witney STW, confirmed we are exceeding our requirements and Public Health England are pleased with the current controls we have in place. However, we are of course happy to support with communication forewarning residents these watercourses are not suitable for bathing, should they, or the Council, advise these are appropriate.

I can assure you, we are working very hard to stem this problem at the source and prevent such vast levels of rainwater entering our sewers in the first place. However, this is an incredibly complex matter which requires careful mapping of underground networks and the identification of all sources of infiltration. This meticulous and detailed work is being delivered in a number of areas, through our local Drainage Strategies. We will then further develop these, in collaboration with Local Authorities and the Environment Agency, as we build the new statutory Drainage and Wastewater Management Plans.

I trust you find this information useful and it offers reassurance we are taking this problem extremely seriously. If you have any further queries or concerns in relation to this matter, I have asked Tish Maybanks, a Senior Case Manager in our Executive Office, to be available. You can contact Tish on **0800 009 3965** between 8am and 5pm, Monday to Friday.

Yours sincerely

Steve Spencer

Chief Operating Officer

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