

Lake and Country Park – Encl. 3

Dear Mrs Groth

Thank you for your letter of 11 December 2019 to our Chief Executive, Sir James Bevan regarding the discharge of sewage into local rivers and watercourses in West Oxfordshire. James has read your email and asked me to respond on his behalf. He will receive a copy of this response.

We understand the concerns of the Town Council and can reassure you the protection of the health of our rivers is a high priority of the Environment Agency.

During high rainfall events it is sometimes necessary to release sewage direct to water courses from sewage treatment works. This is necessary to prevent flooding of properties with sewage following periods of heavy rain when the sewerage network becomes overwhelmed. The impact of this to the receiving watercourse is minimised due to significant dilution from rain. Such events should only operate in storm conditions and must be carried out in compliance with permit conditions which would limit environmental impact. Most sewage treatment works are also permitted to make discharges of storm sewage into the environment during periods of heavy rainfall when the sewage treatment works is operating at maximum capacity.

There are known issues of clean water infiltration within the Witney sewage treatment work's catchment. We will continue to push Thames Water to investigate and deal with the causes through the formal drainage strategy process. We will continue to monitor their progress.

We have received higher than average rainfall in recent months, so we would expect to see some release of sewage under storm conditions in the Thames catchment. The latest Water Situation Report for the Thames Area can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/water-situation-local-area-reports>.

We are investigating the discharge of sewage at Witney following recent reports made to us by members of the public, to ensure that any discharges made are compliant with the permit. If we find breaches of permits we use our Enforcement and Sanctions Policy to decide what action to take. Our enforcement and sanctions policy is available here: [Environment Agency enforcement and sanctions policy - GOV.UK](#)

We have also made West Oxfordshire District Council aware of the discharge of sewage from Witney Sewage treatment works so they can provide advice to the public about the health risks of sewage and the presence of sewage fungus in the Colwell Brook and Emma's Dyke, should they deem it appropriate.

If you would like to discuss this further, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Kind regards,

Emma Hill

Acting Area Director - Thames
On behalf of Julia Simpson
Area Director – Thames
Environment Agency
julia.simpson@environment-agency.gov.uk

