

Public Meeting Concerning Winchelsea Beach Flooding

Winchelsea Beach Community Hall – Winchelsea Beach

Saturday 23rd September

Present

Cllr David Smedley (DS)	Icklesham Parish Council
Cllr James Justice (JJ)	Icklesham Parish Council
Cllr Sue Lyward (SL)	Icklesham Parish Council
Cllr Hugh Sutton	Icklesham Parish Council
Cllr Natalie Eldridge	Icklesham Parish Council
Cllr Nick Warren (NW)	Icklesham Parish Council
Jenner Sands (Clerk)	Icklesham Parish Council
Cllr Keith Glazier	East Sussex County Council
Cllr Andrew Mier (AM)	Rother District Council
Cllr Lizzie Hacking	Rother District Council
John Penicud (JP)	Southern Water (Director of Wastewater Operations)
Catherine Marriott (CM)	Southern Water (Regional Operational Manager for Wastewater Networks)
Sue Cobb (SC)	Southern Water (Stakeholder Engagement Manager)

Item	Comments
1.	<p>Apologies</p> <p>Richard Parker-Harding (Environmental Health – Rother District Council)</p> <p>Sally-Ann Hart MP</p> <p>Environmental Health</p> <p>Cllr Smedley opened the meeting and gave introductions</p>
2.	<p>Update from Southern Water (SW) Following meeting held in March 2022 to include what works have been completed and what works still need to be done.</p> <p>JP thanked everyone for attending the meeting.</p> <p>JP started by giving context of the system in Winchelsea Beach and confirmed that there are 4.5 km of public sewers in Winchelsea Beach that SW are responsible for and the private system is greater which is owned by landlords and property owners. There are 5 pumping stations in total in this area, 350 residential property and around 700 caravans.</p> <p>The pumping station at Morlais Ridge receives water from 328 permanent residential properties with a population of around 900. The peak flow for these properties which is a calculation they do in conjunction with the Environment Agency (EA) equates to around 4lts a second. The pumping station has been verified as being able to pump at 30lts per second in dry weather. The system is designed to convey domestic and industrial waters but not surface water. There are a number of caravan parks in Winchelsea Beach that connect to the sewerage system and they all go to Morlais Ridge. It is estimated that these total 700 caravans and when fully occupied may increase the population in the area to 2,800 people. However this does not mean the waste water flow will increase by 400% as water usage in caravans is less than in homes as holiday makers are not usually there during the day.</p> <p>In dry weather they do not have issues with the capacity on the network. JP confirmed that SW know this is a long running issue which very much comes to a head in times of wet weather and SW have focused their time and resources on understanding the capability of the public sewer system for which they are responsible. The pumps at Morlais Ridge are regularly maintained to ensure they are available and the public sewer system has been surveyed by Closed Circuit TV</p>

	<p>cameras to understand the structural integrity of the system. These surveys identified sewers that, although are structurally sound, have the potential for letting in water at pipe joints. Following these surveys, 1.1km of public sewers with defects likely to allow infiltration have been sealed. Further scans of parts of the private system in the caravan parks were undertaken in 2022. These identified a further 1.1 km of repairs which have also been completed over the summer of 2023. This is the entirety of their own assets in the area. SW have also gained access to a private sewer with defects which they were previously working on and the works have now been completed.</p> <p>JP confirmed that SW's focus is now on working with the caravan parks who have been open with them when conducting surveys at SW's cost on their land. SW are now focusing on ensuring that these private businesses have effectively sealed drainage and that surface water is not being let in to the system.</p> <p>Before the March 2022 meeting, SW focused on 3 key sources of flow. They surveyed the public network and they have addressed all leaks and defects. By May 2021 they had completed 75% of the 4.5km of sewers. By March 2022 they had surveyed 95% of the system and the 5% un-surveyed was above the water table. For context, JP explained that surface water is getting in to the system when the actual water table rises above the level of the pipes that are in the ground. Any defects in the system such as cracks are effectively working as a land drain which is allowing the water in.</p> <p>SW identified 740 m of sewer lining, they needed to wait for the water level to drop to do this. They estimated at that point that the defects may have been contributing to 2lts per second of infiltration flow which is a significant level of drainage.</p> <p>The caravan parks have committed to carrying out the repairs identified in the surveys.</p> <p>JP confirmed that SW have also completed the mapping and locating of manholes to see where all of the drains go. SW have sent all of the reports to the caravan parks who have responded positively and have committed to carry out the repairs and clear blockages. This includes the two large caravan parks, Winchelsea Sands and Rye Bay.</p> <p>SW have also surveyed private lateral drains which are private connections that come in to the public sewer. SW have also advised 11 properties of defects and have offered to carry out the repairs.</p> <p>CM then explained what SW have done since the last meeting in March 2022.</p> <p>CM explained that there has been a lot of activity in Winchelsea Beach.</p> <p>CM confirmed that in December 2022 there was a burst rising main from Morlais Ridge to Castle Farm. CM confirmed that SW did further investigation and found some hydraulic bottlenecks which they think contributed to the burst. They have also put new digital sewer level monitors on the system so they can pre-empt when there are going to be blockages, rising levels and how the sewers behave during certain times.</p> <p>CM confirmed that with the work they have done with regards to the sewer network they have actually reduced the tankering.</p> <p>CM confirmed that one of the recommendations taken from the previous meeting was to move the tankers so that traffic management was no longer needed. She confirmed that SW went back and the team looked into where else they could tanker from and the tankers have now been moved.</p> <p>CM confirmed they have completed the surveying and sealing of the public system.</p> <p>CM confirmed that they have undertaken further surveys in 'park B' to better understand their surface drainage.</p> <p>CM confirmed that they have also been looking at the pumping stations and how they have been performing.</p>
<p>3.</p>	<p>Future Plans to improve the Winchelsea Beach Sewer Network</p> <p>CM confirmed the next step which started work last week, is to install monitors on the sewers to capture the flow. CM confirmed they will be looking at what flows are coming in at certain points. She confirmed that SW already have flow meters on Castle Farm and Morlais Ridge pumping station but they are now looking on the sewers as well to see if they can pin point exactly where the water is coming in.</p>

CM confirmed SW are working with one of the caravan parks to look at their flows and what surface water drainage is taking place on the parks. They decided that they would wait until their summer period is over and so that will be happening in the next month or so. That work will include lifting manholes in the caravan parks to understand potential flows that could be getting into the system. CM confirmed that they have reduced the rate of flow over the last 12 months by the pumping stations but they want to see what more they can do.

CM confirmed that they have been working with the EA and the local drainage board and that work will carry on.

CM confirmed that they are looking at surface water drainage i.e. things such as water butts etc.

CM confirmed that they are looking at updating the infiltration reduction plan which was last updated in 2021.

4. Questions and Answers

A resident questioned why SW do not respond to planning applications. The resident explained that it is clear that the caravan parks are contributing to these issues and recently there have been multiple applications for caravan parks to increase their opening dates and SW have not objected to these applications.

JP confirmed that SW are not a statutory consultee. Whilst SW comment on planning applications, they cannot object and block developments from happening they can only comment on them.

DS confirmed that Icklesham Parish Council has, for many years, objected to planning applications in Winchelsea Beach for this very reason. DS confirmed that unfortunately the Parish Council do not get the right kind of response. DS confirmed that there have been many situations where extra houses and extended opening times have been allowed by RDC's planning department despite the Parish Council's strong opposition. DS confirmed that the Parish Council will continue to object to any such applications.

A resident confirmed that he has a soakaway and so is confident that his rain water is not contributing to the drainage issues. He said that last year he regularly had sewage in the back of his garden which means he cannot grow vegetables in his garden. He confirmed that his contract is with SW and he asked why residents should be expected to keep their side of the contract i.e. pay their rates when SW do not keep to their side.

CM asked when the last time was that the resident had sewage in their garden. The resident confirmed that it was in the Spring. CM confirmed that the measures that SW have put in over the last year will greatly reduce the chances of sewage backing up in to back gardens and over time he should see a change in his soil. CM confirmed that with regards to paying the waste water bill, all of the things SW have been through this morning with regards to the works that have been done it is clear that SW have invested a lot of money in the system.

JP stated that SW acknowledge there is a problem and that is why they are here today. JP confirmed that SW are not walking away, they are committed to sorting the problems out in Winchelsea Beach and that is what they have described with the lining of both their pipes and privately owned pipes. JP confirmed that the problem is with the groundwater and how this is getting into the pipes which is taking the capacity of the system away not necessarily the house building or the expansion of the caravan parks.

A resident stated that the indication seems to be that this is the responsibility of the caravan parks but the tankers only operate in the winter, not in the summer when the caravan parks are at the busiest. It seems to be that the system gets inundated with rainwater and the issue seems to be to find out where the rain water is getting in. The resident stated that the pipe from peoples properties is generally a 4 inch pipe which goes in to a sewer that is 5 inch. He said that he imagined a sewer would be bigger. The resident stated that the lining of the pipes sounds great but this is obviously reducing the size of the pipes even further.

JP confirmed that the problem is the leaking pipes that are there all year round. JP confirmed that the EA website tracks the ground water levels quite accurately. The levels of chalk and limestone in the ground in this area means that typically there is a higher ground water level than other parts of the country. That ground water will then go into those pipes, it is not necessarily down to whether there is a caravan park there or not. It is down to whether the

caravan parks are letting the surface water or rain water get in to the system and that is what is restricting the capacity of the system. In terms of the size of the pipe, they are designed because they do not want stagnant sewage in the system. The reason they are that size is because they want it to be conveyed quickly so there is not settlement out of any solids before it goes off to the pumping station and then off to the treatment works. The whole system is designed to speedily carry solids and liquids away. That is why they talk about people being careful about what they put down their drains. JP confirmed that with the pipe lining you lose about 5mm of the diameter.

A resident asked SW if they were aware they are polluting the water course.

The resident confirmed that the sewage backs up under the river at Old River Way into his garden, it then goes out into the river. The resident confirmed that he had contacted SW and the EA.

CM confirmed that at the end of the meeting she would take the resident's address and would ask her team to look into this. CM confirmed that she had noticed that there are pollution spotter signs in the area. CM explained that where SW know they have got historical pollution issues, especially in bathing water areas such as here, they put up signs telling people to call SW if they spot something.

A Labour Candidate for the area stated that she was in attendance by request of residents. She said that she thinks that something that would be really helpful is a dedicated contact from SW who people can go to if they experience any issues. She also asked if people would be compensated for the issues.

CM confirmed that they have used community boards in other areas to give customers updates etc. She also confirmed there is a customer team who she believes some people have already met on hand to help with issues. CM confirmed that she would supply all of these details.

JP confirmed that he would have to check regarding the compensation question.

A resident asked what will happen to the ground water now that the pipes have been sealed as there is a real issue with ground water in Winchelsea Beach as it is.

JP confirmed that the groundwater management is dealt with by the EA. JP confirmed that SW have been dealing with the EA throughout the project and involve them in any works in Winchelsea Beach. They are currently working with the EA to update their ground water management plan. SW have suggested to them that they should lower the level of the water in the drainage ditches throughout the season but particularly in times where there are higher ground water levels to assist the drainage of the water away from the area.

A resident stated that the pumping station is called Morlais Ridge but it is not in Morlais Ridge it is further down. The resident confirmed that she is not on the system, she has a septic tank. She said that they have tankers mistakenly coming down an unmade narrow track. The resident confirmed that she has raised this with SW and Sally-Ann Hart before. She said that the pumping station needs renaming.

CM confirmed that SW have now starting using "What 3 Words" now. CM confirmed that when they put the orders through for the tankers they have to use the What 3 Words location. JP explained that "What 3 Words" is a separate company that divide the entire surface of the globe up into metre squares, each metre square has a unique three words.

A resident stated that earlier this year the Government announced that water companies would not have to use their profits to do this sort of work because it would come out of the money the customers pay.

JP confirmed that SW are funded by customers and there is not another source of revenue. SW take the money that customers pay and that then pays for SW's operations. Investment they make in the system (i.e. the relining) that is done like a mortgage and is what they call their capital programme and they borrow that money in the markets so it is not coming off the customer bills. That keeps customer bills lower. Other Countries that do not operate like that (i.e. America) typically expect the customers to fund everything straight away, water bills in America are typically equivalent to around £18,000 per annum and in SW's area they are around £400. JP confirmed that this system is not changing and this system has been in place since privatisation. JP confirmed they are just about to go through a price review. Every 5 years they work with Ofwat (which is the economic regulator), the EA and the Drinking Water Inspectorate and they then negotiate an investment programme which covers things like

reducing infiltration, protecting water supplies, becoming more resistant to drought and resisting climate change. They put that in to a plan and SW get told what they can spend from customer bills and what they can borrow to invest in the infrastructure and assets. That system isn't changing and it has been that way for the last 20 years. JP confirmed that if they are borrowing the money this has to be paid back at some point.

A resident asked how SW can pay shareholders out when they are in a position where they have to borrow money.

JP confirmed that SW shareholders have not received a dividend since at least 2017. They are not receiving any dividends for the foreseeable future. JP confirmed that they have recently got new shareholders and whilst they might not get any dividends right now, SW as a business has a value and the view is that SW. This means that investment funds can come in and shareholders can sell their shares for more than they bought it for and that is how they would make their money from SW, not on an annual dividend basis.

A resident asked who owns SW.

JP confirmed that 82% of the shares are owned by McQuarie Investment Bank who are an Australian investment bank and they act like a fund manager. They would invest other funds through them such as pension funds. Because people will always need water, SW is seen as a stable company and deemed to be a good long term investment.

A resident stated that the tankers are there to take the excess surface water and relieve the pressure on the system and so, because of the work SW have done lining the sewers, presumably the hope is that the tankers will no longer be necessary and there will be no further inundation. The resident asked whether this coming winter is effectively an experiment to see whether it is working so far.

JP confirmed this is the case. He said that we have had a very wet period and as CM has explained, SW now have the digital monitors that sit in many man hole covers around Winchelsea Beach now and SW are monitoring the system. They are waiting but they now understand the system in Winchelsea Beach and how rainfall and surface water level interact with the flows around the catchment. JP confirmed that SW have upgraded the capacity at places such as Morlais Ridge so they know that the pumping stations are processing the flows that they should do. JP confirmed that the tankers are there to prevent sewage from backing up into people's homes. SW have monitors now so they should be able to spot that and respond to it quickly to prevent that from happening and to prevent flooding. JP confirmed that following on from the last session the tankers have been moved so they are not on the road and disrupting people who want to use the co-op. JP reiterated that SW are not going anywhere. They have got all of the CCTV and records, they know there is an issue and will continue to drive out surface water from the system because that is the problem.

NW confirmed that he is the Chairman of Icklesham Parish Council's Planning Committee and he wanted to confirm what DS had said that the beginning of the meeting regarding the fact that for a number of years, IPC Planning Committee have consistently objected to any planning applications for additional caravans in Winchelsea Beach or to extend the time of use. A number of those aren't used all year round however increasingly more and more people are using the caravans as their main address. Although IPC have consistently put objections in, very rarely have these objections been supported by RDC's Planning Department. NW called upon colleagues present from RDC to ask when IPC put objections in concerning these issues, can those objections be considered more carefully.

A resident confirmed that the amount of development in Winchelsea Beach is dwarfed by the amount of development that has taken place at Rye Harbour i.e. the industrial units and the two housing estates Mary Stanford Green and Oyster Creek.

JJ stated that the data given regarding population is very out of date and that SW do not have an accurate view of what is going on in Winchelsea Beach. JJ confirmed that last year we have 200mm of rain in November and the tankers were pumping for 12 hours a day. JJ confirmed that the Parish Council have previously asked SW how much they have spent on tankers and were told that SW do not need to provide that information as they are a private company. JJ stated that the tankers cost at least £1,000 a time so 12 hours a day for a week, that is £70,000 a day that they are spending on tankers. It would be nice if we could know how much SW are spending on tankers when that money would

be better spent on doing the works. JJ confirmed that every year we are told that SW have fixed the issues.

JP confirmed that he has not said that SW have fixed the issues. JP confirmed that this is an ongoing commitment that SW have got to the residents in this area. JP explained that in relation to the data, they have got the sewer level monitors in the ground which are giving them data every 15 minutes so they can share that with the Parish Council.

JJ confirmed that when SW originally started working on the issue they issued residents with a specific reference number because when people call SW, the call centre operatives have no idea where people are talking about or the issues. JJ asked if SW could issue a reference number to the residents in Winchelsea Beach so they can get a direct response from SW.

JP confirmed that SW will do this and they also have their own people who live and work in the community that can come and talk at sessions like this and be much more present.

AM confirmed that he is the Chairman of RDC's Planning Committee. He confirmed that he has been listening and he will take some of the issues raised away with him and will do what he can. He said that he cannot make any promises but he will do what he can.

SL confirmed that this meeting is being held today because Icklesham Parish Council had requested SW to attend, SW do not ask the Parish Council to attend meetings or attempt to update us without us asking. SL stated that the money used for the tankers would be better invested in our infrastructure rather than keep tankering. SL confirmed that she has been attending these meetings for 14 years and we are no further forward. SL said that guaranteed at winter time, the tankers will be back. SL confirmed that the tankers have been moved but they are affecting more people where they are now as opposed to where they were. She said that the tankers are noisy throughout the night, the operatives are outside having cigarettes with the engines running because they are cold. SL said that SW should consult with residents before they do anything.

CM agreed that communication is paramount. JP confirmed that one of the main things that they will take from today is communication and how the local team can get better at communicating what is happening.

The owner of Rye Bay Caravan Park confirmed that Rye Bay have co-operated and will continue to co-operate with SW and the Council in every way possible. Rye Bay does not open in the Winter and will not open in the Winter whilst it is under their ownership. They have also not opened the touring site since the pandemic because they thought it was unfair to bring people to Winchelsea Beach during the pandemic. The touring site will not reopen. It is managed as a football field and of course that cuts down the amount of sewage going in to the system. During the winter large parts of the drains on the site are gated so that surface water cannot get in to the sewerage system. They cannot gate the whole lot as there is a flat above the club and they have a bungalow which is the office which has to be connected to the system. He confirmed that there is a surface water problem and Rye Bay have been pumping surface water into the shingle to try and solve the surface water issue. They are doing everything they can to alleviate the problems.

A resident confirmed that the new caravans that are being brought in have all got dishwashers and washing machines and the people live there which has made a huge difference.

DS thanked SW for attending the meeting and for updating residents.

5. Actions

- **SW to continue to work with caravan parks to ensure private systems are not letting water into the system and to ensure effective surface water drainage is in place.**
- **SW to install flow monitors on sewers to monitor flows.**
- **SW to set up direct contact and reference number for residents in Winchelsea Beach.**
- **SW to update infiltration reduction plan.**
- **AM to liaise with RDC's Planning Department re planning issues identified.**

6.	Date of next meeting TBC
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