

**EXETER CITY COUNCIL**  
**SOUTH WEST WATER LIAISON GROUP**

Tuesday 9 July 2013

**Present:-**

Councillor Lesley Robson (Chair)  
Councillor Greg Sheldon

Jay Harris, South West Water  
Jack Board, South West Water  
Kevin Bingham, Residents Representative

Simon Ruddy, Principal Environmental Health Officer  
Kate Thomas, Environmental Health Officer  
Jo Quinnell, Assistant Democratic Services Officer (Committees)

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**APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Councillor Rob Newby and Mary Evans, Residents' Representative.

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**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 11 OCTOBER 2011**

The minutes of the meeting held on 11 October 2011 were agreed.

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**MATTERS ARISING**

Following the last meeting, it was noted that there had been a significant reduction in the complaints figures relating to odours from the sewage treatment works, and as a result of the Group meeting, better lines of communication were in place. It had been agreed to discontinue annual meetings of the Group, but with the ability to call ad hoc meetings in future should the need arise. Due to the number of complaints now being received, the decision had been made to resurrect the Group.

Jay Harris welcomed the meeting, and suggested that these continue in order to retain relationships.

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**OPERATIONAL UPDATE**

Since April 2013, the number of complaints had increased significantly.

Due to mechanical breakdowns in April, there had been no ability on site to process sludge as part of the treatment process. This resulted in the backing up of sludge in the primary tanks, which had subsequently gone septic and created odours.

In June a temporary measure was put in place to empty the primary tanks. Three of the four tanks had been emptied, with the fourth being worked on this week. It was anticipated that the back up of sludge would be dealt with by the end of this week/beginning of next week.

The problem occurred when the sludge thickener had failed, so the sludge was unable to be moved.

Work was underway to get the depths down to a reasonable level in order to deal with the sludge without the thickener.

In addition, there was also a problem with the storm tanks. The scraper had been reliable up until the last two months but had now twisted and was out of action. Work was currently being undertaken to ascertain if a temporary repair can be done. There is sludge remaining in the tanks and this is giving off odours.

There will be a requirement for a shutdown, as the storm tank will be needed for storage when the other works are taking place.

It was queried whether the odour from the storm tanks was less of a problem than the primary tanks. The complaints figures would be looked at again since the centrifuge had been on site to see how much of an impact this had made, although it was noted that the telephone number to report complaints had recently been placed in the residents newsletter.

The residents' representative advised that he had been monitoring odour nuisance since 2011, and reported on the recent occurrences.

The temporary centrifuge was treating raw sludge in the open atmosphere. Odour masking sprayers were in place to mask the odour to a certain degree. When the primary tanks are running correctly, if treated quickly enough, this doesn't create odours. It was not practical to cover the primary tanks.

A mechanism had previously been in place whereby SWW would inform Members if there was a problem with the treatment works that could result in odours which could affect residents. Also, the SWW switchboard were informed if there were problems which ensured that residents were made aware of the problem and the likely length it will take to resolve should they ring SWW directly. SWW also emailed Environmental Health to update officers if there was a problem or works were planned which could affect odour emissions from the site, and Environmental Health would also advise SWW if complaints were made direct to them.

There was concern that the 0800 number where complaints could be made was not satisfactory, as complainants often did not get the information they sought.

Jay Harris advised that he would be looking at customer contact and how to deal with customers that call in. He acknowledged that there was a need to advise customers of any problems and apologised that there had been issues with some of the processes. Simon Ruddy would create a contact list and would pass this to Jay Harris. This will ensure a common approach for all parties to react to any incidents.

There is also a need to advise the City Council when works are being undertaken on site, and to get communication channels up and running again. Jay Harris agreed to look at how this worked and try to get a mechanism in place.

In relation to capacity, it was noted that there are old assets on site and time will tell as to whether they need to be replaced. A number of pieces of equipment on site have been replaced. Funding streams were complex and are agreed with OFWAT for a five-year period and it was not always easy to get funding for on site for improvements.

The residents' representative referred to a fish odour. It was advised that commercial tank waste is accepted, and there is a duty of care to know what food waste this contains. Acceptable waste does not include fish.

A guarantee could not be given that no odour would be generated in the future but they would do their utmost to avoid this, subject to unplanned breakdowns.

Photos were circulated at the meeting:

- Photo 1 showed two of the primary tanks. The tank on the right hand side of the picture was how the tank should look, with the tank on the left hand side showing sludge on the top which was the cause of the odour as it cannot be taken out of the tank quick enough. When working to full capacity, the scrapers will scrape the tanks every hour.
- Photo 2 shows the storm tank scraper which is twisted in the centre. The residue of sludge can be seen in the tank.
- Photo 3 is a photo of sludge drying out. In the event of rainfall, this will fill up and create more residue on the floor again. This will give off a background odour.
- Photo 4 is an open tank of raw sludge. It was anticipated that by the end of the week this tank will be empty. The digested sludge is usually odourless.
- Photo 5 shows the centrifuge in the barn. This is taking raw sludge and adding lime to it which kills off pathogens and bacteria. It strips the water from the sludge to generate cake. In normal circumstances, the sludge is usually pumped underground to the tanks. There is a daily limit as to what interworks sludge can be taken on site and if problems are experienced, the sludge is diverted to another centre.
- Photos 6 and 7 shows construction work on site for a new sludge centre and additional Biological Aerated Flooded Filter (BAFF) plant, which will take 6-12 months to build.

A supply and demand study had been undertaken for the future catchment area in terms of additional developments in the city. In order to cope with future development and the expansion of population, an additional Biological Aerated Flooded Filter (BAFF) would be also be built taking the total from five up to six.

It was noted that the catchment area for the site also included Rockbeare, Whimple, Broadclyst and Cranbrook. A discussion was held on the number of potential development sites across the city and the capacity for this increase.

A department within SWW was looking into vulnerable parts of the works in the event of a flood, and were working closely with the City Council on this.

Reference was made to noise nuisance during the night. It was noted that once the operators have finished their shifts, the site is remotely monitored by a control room in Peninsula House. It was considered that the low droning noise was attributed to the blowers that generate oxygen as this is the only machinery that is run 24/7. The company would be looking to replace these blowers over the next year.

## **COMPLAINTS**

A revised schedule of complaints was circulated as additional complaints had been received since the agenda had been dispatched.

It was suggested that officers from SWW should visit areas outside of the site to assess odours.

Reference was also made to odour from sewers, and it was noted that during dry weather the flow was less and therefore there was more concentration.

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**ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

There was no other business.

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**DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The date of the next meeting would be arranged in due course, but would be held in approximately three months time. A site visit would also take place.

(The meeting commenced at 10.00 am and closed at 11.20 am)

Chair