



Office of Sarah Bentley
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SENT BY EMAIL

14th January 2022

Robert Courts
MP for Witney & West Oxfordshire
House of Commons,
London,
SW1A 0AA

Dear Robert,

Thank you for your letter of 9th January about the discharges of untreated sewage from Witney sewage treatment works (STW) over the last few weeks.

I am very sorry to confirm that these discharges took place. As I have openly stated, we regard all discharges of untreated sewage as being unacceptable, even when – as in this case – they are legal and permitted, and we are working hard to make them unnecessary. However, as you know, this will not be quick or straightforward to deliver and will require continued close collaboration with Government, our regulators, Local Authorities and local communities, as well as sustained levels of investment. That is exactly what will shortly be happening at Witney STW.

As you may know Witney STW is one of six sites in the Oxford area for which we are issuing pro-active notifications, in close to real time, to people who have registered to receive them. The information is also being made available via the websites of the Rivers Trust and Surfers Against Sewage.

The site's permit requires the works to be treating at least 240 litres per second before any flow is diverted to the site's storm tanks, and for the storm tanks to be full before there is any discharge to the Colwell Brook, at which point there is no alternative option available. These conditions were fulfilled throughout this period, with the actual volume treated frequently exceeding 260 and even 270 litres per second.

Nevertheless, despite the best efforts of the site team in treating more than the designed capacity of the works over the entire period, there were regrettably discharges on a daily basis from Christmas Day until 9th January, initially for most of the day and gradually declining to a few hours by the end of the period, at which point the incoming flows had subsided to the level which made them unnecessary. The storm tanks are now virtually empty and are being cleaned.

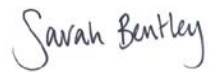
When we spoke on 12th March last year I explained that our business plan for this period, which was signed off in late 2019, includes a significant increase in treatment capacity at Witney STW, to deal with precisely this issue. I can now confirm that the contractors for the project, Tilbury Douglas, have been appointed and that the increase in capacity will be around 50%, i.e to 360 litres/second. The scheme will cost around £8m, with work starting this year and completing in early 2024 at the latest, though we will do our best to bring this forward into the latter part of 2023.

I would be happy to meet you and provide further details of these plans. If you can spare the time, I suggest we meet at Witney STW, where I can introduce the site team, of whom I am very proud, and show you what is planned. I have asked my team to contact yours and get a visit into our diaries.

In your letter you also mention your separate letter about the Environment Act, to which I replied on 17th December. I am attaching a copy for reference.

As a final point, I entirely agree with you that the people of West Oxfordshire, and of all the other areas we serve, are right to expect clean and healthy waterways. It is an absolute priority for us to deliver this, including through major schemes such as the upgrade of Witney STW, which I look forward to discussing with you.

With very best wishes,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sarah Bentley".

Sarah Bentley
Chief Executive Officer