

Robert Courts MP



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Sarah Bentley
Chief Executive Officer
Thames Water
Clearwater Court
Reading RG1 8BD

LONDON SW1A 0AA
robert@robertcourts.co.uk

Sunday, 9th January 2022

Dear Sarah,

I have been monitoring the performance of Thames Water in my constituency over the holiday period. It is reported that Thames Water have been conducting sewage releases from Witney STW on a very regular basis. The first occurred on the 25th December, with sewage allegedly being discharged for 30 hours. Another sewage release was reported on the 30th December and such releases have continued daily, from the 30th December to 9th January. There is no indication that today's sewage release will be the last.

This is extremely concerning. Sewage releases are currently permitted when there are exceptional rainfall events, albeit for a limited time going forward given the recent legislation in the Environment Act. Yet, the river levels in West Oxfordshire are all currently at or within their normal levels. Therefore, rather than this being an 'extreme measure', it appears that Thames Water are treating 'storming' as a routine process. This is clearly unacceptable to my constituents.

I therefore request:

- Confirmation that the above reports are correct;
- Confirmation of when Thames Water plan to stop these sewage releases.

It is absolutely clear that Thames Water need to urgently invest in the infrastructure upgrades our area needs to reduce storm overflows particularly, but not exclusively, at Witney STW. Sewage releases absolutely cannot be used as a matter of routine.

Consequently, I am requesting an urgent meeting for an explanation of these sewage releases.

I believe this meeting is especially vital as the landmark Environment Act which, as you know, received Royal Assent earlier this month, introduced a range of new legal duties on water companies to tackle sewage spills. I have separately written to you to ask for a detailed explanation of how Thames Water intend to comply.

The people of West Oxfordshire are clear in their expectation of clean and healthy waterways. They are right to expect so, I support them wholeheartedly, and will continue to press Thames Water to provide the upgrades our area requires.

I look forward to hearing from you by return.

Robert Courts MP

cc: Sir James Bevan, Chief Executive, Environment Agency

*From the Member of Parliament for the constituency of Witney in West Oxfordshire
including Bampton, Burford, Carterton, Charlbury, Chipping Norton, Eynsham, Witney and Woodstock.*