

6 September 2011

## DISCHARGES INTO LOCAL HARBOURS

Report by Environment and Neighbourhood Quality Panel

Councillor Andy Lenaghan - Scrutiny Lead

Councillors Kennedy, G. Shimbart, H. Farrow and Edwards plus Portfolio Holder Cllr Collins.

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### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Environment and Neighbourhood Quality Scrutiny Panel selected to scrutinise discharges into Langstone Harbour following concerns over the number of occasions councillors had been notified of discharges into the harbour and also concerns over the water quality within the harbour.

### 2.0 BACKGROUND

2.1 We wanted to focus upon the effect of discharges on recreational users of the harbour and upon wildlife in order to reduce concerns amongst councillors and the public. What can be done to improve the quality of the water, establish why discharges occur and reduce the number of occurrences if appropriate?

### 3.0 HOW THE WORK WAS DONE

3.1 An appropriate list of regulatory bodies were included for interviewing plus regular users of the harbour including the Environment Agency, Havant Borough Council officers, Langstone Harbour Board and Chichester Harbour Conservancy. A site visit to Budd's farm was also included to help inform the scrutiny.

### 4.0 KEY ISSUES

4.1 One of the key elements of this scrutiny was to investigate the water quality within the harbour and surrounding area.

4.2 A meeting was held initially with Steve Mountain, Special Projects Engineer, of Havant Borough Council to explain the sewerage system in Havant and Portsmouth to us so we had a sound understanding of its development over the years. We discovered problems arise at an early stage in the process with domestic users taking the easy option with incorrect connections being made with rain water outlets on extensions, conservatories etc being diverted into the sewerage system. This is something that needs stronger supervision within the planning/building regulation framework.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Southern Water / EA also confirmed that large areas of Portsmouth are on Combined [surface water & foul] sewage systems, where surface water is being directed to Budds Farm along with foul sewage – resulting in storm flow surges. Illegal / accidental mis-connections likely account for a modest proportion of the inputs; Combined systems are likely the primary cause of storm surges within the system.

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- 4.3 All members were invited on a tour of the sewerage works at Budds Farm and given a guided tour of the process from arrival to disposal through the long reach outfall at sea. All members were impressed at this early stage as to the work of Southern Water in reaching a final effluent that meets EU standards and in fact surpasses most areas of the country.
- 4.4 At a meeting with the Environment Agency they confirmed they have no problem with the discharges of final effluent. Storm conditions produce excess and the system cannot cope and it goes to Fort Cumberland for storage. This is the area of concern for the Environment Agency as the screening system which stops solids being released cannot cope. All discharges have conditions, at Fort Cumberland before a discharge is made it has to go through 2 6mm screens in 2 dimensions. This means no solids should go through and this is legal in emergency situations. The screen has been failing though, it needs redesigning as solids have been released into the water, this is why Fort Cumberland is the Environment Agency's main concern. Why does the screen fail? Mainly due to two reasons, 1) Pure volume 2) The pumping pressure is too much, this is one of the design flaws and one reason why it needs redesigning.
- 4.5 The Environment Agency investigates everyone of these discharges and sometimes prosecutes, although not always as they feel a balanced approach is required. At our meeting with Southern Water they confirmed the solution to the problem of the release of unscreened raw sewage is in hand within their five year plan and £10 million is available, but they want to get it right and the design process has started along with the consultation needed to achieve the correct solution. Within the design they will have to allow for even more development and climate change which may bring more storm water into the system.
- 4.6 It is unlikely that funding will be able to be brought forward to improve the screens at Fort Cumberland. If it is to be brought forward there needs to be pressure not only on OFWAT but also the Consumer Council for Water (CCW). The CCW decides what is important to the customer and their focus is probably on things such as tap water rather than discharges into harbours. All Southern Water final effluent meets Environment Agency standards and the new Bardenpho process at Budds Farm is very efficient, allied with skilled scientists and strict controls final effluent quality is very stringently monitored and Budds Farm has never failed to meet agreed standards of any tested samples since the construction of the new works. Southern Water take any failings very seriously as it would affect their funding from OFWAT. £20 million will also be spent in the catchment area, one area Southern Water is looking at is introducing a storm separation scheme which will affect the flow to Fort Cumberland, this could reduce the flow to Fort Cumberland by 10-15%, albeit an estimate at this stage.
- 4.7 A major problem which can result in discharge problems is the use of the drainage system as waste facility for disposable nappies, cotton buds, grease which solidifies and condoms. In response to this Southern Water have designed a fat trap for domestic users which can then be placed in the normal domestic waste.
- 4.8 There is also no correlation in the harbour between the high quality of water and the diminishing quality of the shellfish. Langstone Harbour water quality has improved

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over the years and the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (CEFAS) cannot find any correlation between the quality of water and shellfish. Discharges of effluent shouldn't affect shellfish. Also animal waste gets washed into the harbour (dogs, cows, geese) and in response Defra has a sensitive farming policy to try and keep cows away from water courses. Defra is working hard on diffuse pollution, sources of which include run-off from roads, commercial areas, farm areas etc, this accounts for approx 80% of water pollution which is the most likely cause of shell fish contamination.

- 4.9 There is a perception Southern Water is always to blame for water pollution, they contend that this is not the case and it is working hard to change this perception. The panel were of the opinion this is the case and no further improvements could be made to water quality at this time. Benefits of pursuing the scrutiny at this time would have no added benefit.

### 5.0 Recommendations

- 5.1 The report be endorsed and progress of work to improve facilities at the Fort Cumberland works be monitored over the next 4 years;
- 5.2 The public be educated in using correct disposal methods of all waste, through possible Serving You articles and potential joint PR with Southern Water;
- 5.3 Building regulations ensure that rainwater is disposed of correctly through monitoring of improper connections.
- 5.4 All participants in the review be thanked for their co-operation.

