

# CROWD: Clean Rivers Of West Dorset

Notes and action points from the meeting of 14<sup>th</sup> April in Charmouth.

## Attending:

- **River Char (River Char Community Project, RCCP):** Andrew Carey  
**River Char (Lower Char Community Project, LCCP):** Dana Assinder
- **River Mangerton (River monitor):** Chuck Willmott, Margaret Morgan-Grenville
- **River Asker (River Asker Project):** Geoff May  
**River Asker (Riverfly Testing coordinator):** Howard Atkinson
- **West Dorset Rivers and Coastal Streams (Catchment Officer):** Ian Rees
- Chris Loder MP
- Harry Coutts (Constituency Assistant)
- **Wessex Water:** Andy Mears, Wastewater Engagement Manager; Ruth Barden, Director of Environmental Solutions

Apologies: **River Simene (Parish Councillor):** Steve Evans; **Winniford River (Winniford River Action Group, WRAG):** Peter Stapleton; **Litter Free Dorset:** Emma Teasdale

## Introductions:

Andy Mears explained his recent change of role to Waste Water Engagement Manager, leading a team of three, focused mainly on storm overflows (SOs) and community engagement around wastewater management. Ruth Barden described her responsibility for:

- investigating issues and potential solutions the the field, which feed into WW's investment plan.
- an in-house environmental consultancy
- a catchment delivery team made up mainly of agronomists working on reducing the impact of nutrients on local rivers
- working with Catchment Partnerships in the Wessex Water region

## Ian Rees Update:

- Ian reported Environment Agency funding achieved for investigative work with a geomorphologist on the River Brit. He outlined differences between the eastern and western parts of the catchment and the different challenges faced: e.g. the western part needs changing land management practices to reduce run-off, sediment load and other issues. The topography and land use to the east of the Brit lends itself more to working with natural processes.
- He also reported funding via Wessex Water's Bridport Community Connectors Fund for Riverfly and other CSI monitoring in the Bridport area, including plant, mammal and water quality monitoring. Howard observed that CSI usefully augments EA monitoring and over time builds a vital data set to record local environmental changes.
- Ian had given a rivers talk in April to the Bridport Local Area Partnership, in which he had introduced and outlined the role of CROWD.

## Chris Loder / Harry Coutts Update:

- Chris presented a detailed report on Government actions to date, including the new Integrated Plan for Delivering Clean and Plentiful Water. The Report is on the [CROWD webpage](#).
- Chris has been appointed Parliamentary Secretary to Defra

- Chris highlighted MPs' support for Ofwat's action on WASC dividends & poor performance, stating that our sewage infrastructure crisis is down to a historic problem of a failing regulatory system, which he believes has been addressed and that Ofwat are now up to the job.
- Chris is having a 4-6 weekly dialogue with South West Water(SWW) at a higher level. He would like this replicated with WW senior management. CL also has meetings with all MPs in the SWW region, and this could be replicated with MPs in the WW region .
- Chris reports that his ongoing dialogue with the Environment Agency (EA) is useful. He says he is trying to depoliticise arena so that action happens not poisonous dialogue.
- Harry will be on a 3-month sabbatical from May.

### News from the Rivers: (key points only)

- Dana reported that preparations for the Lower Char Community Campaign's [community engagement River Festival](#) on 27<sup>th</sup> May are well under way. The next pre-festival event is a [storytelling workshop](#) in Charmouth on 22<sup>nd</sup> April.
- Dana also reported on a fresh and environmentally disastrous influx of nurdles (not biobeads) along the West Dorset coast over the Easter weekend. Her report is [on the CROWD webpage](#). **Action: Dana to send video of nurdle spill to Chris Loder**
- Dana reported on West Dorset Wilding's (WDW) community consultation events relating to the reintroduction of beavers in the River Brit catchment. [Details on the WDW website](#).
- Chuck Willmott reported that the Mangerton & Asker have been grouped with the River Brit by Scott Morrison for CSI monitoring purposes.
- We are still considering options for who to invite to represent the River Brit. **Action: Ian will again contact Dave Dixon and Caroline Pearce before approaching Dave Rickard (leader of Bridport Town Council).**
- We agreed to ask Beaminster ECO Group to nominate a representative for the upper River Brit to attend future CROWD meetings. **Action: Andrew has contacted them and Rose Rychnovsky has been invited to join CROWD.**

### Wessex Water Session:

WW (Ruth Barden and Andy Mears) responded to our questions as follows:

#### 1. Supply details of the budgets, priorities and schedules for its 2025-30 Asset Management Plan.

WW presented a report on investment areas, bathing water criteria and statistics, and storm overflow (SO) impact data, which will be available on the CROWD webpage. **Action: WW to send CROWD a digital copy.**

**Budgets and Frameworks:** WW outlined the rapidly evolving legislative, regulatory and reporting framework (issued by OFWAT - informed by public consultation) that demands WASCs meet strict new environmental standards. WW noted that investment will reduce to £450m from the £734m shown in the report because OFWAT/Environment Agency (EA) have instructed it to divert £286m to the phosphorus removal scheme. But the investment is still considerably higher than that made in the current 5-year period. WW must submit its business plan to OFWAT by 02/10/23.

**Storm Overflows:** The number of SOs and Sewage Treatment Works (STWs) to be improved in the period will, as a result, be cut from 195 to 150.

**Investments and improvements in the CROWD area:** SOs to be improved in the CROWD area in 2025-30 (subject to final approval of the Plan) are:

- Charmouth Headworks/Sea Outfall WRC - SO
- Chideock, Mill Lane WRC – SSO
- West Bay Sluices SPS – SO/EO
- Puncknowle Gully Knap Farm WRC - SSO
- Bridport Wych Farm WRC

**Action: Ruth has sent CROWD full details of each of these 5 sites (see spreadsheet supplied)**

**Action:** Chris Loder to write to Colin Skellett to insist that these SOs and STWs definitely be included (referencing the fact that they discharge in or close to a bathing water and in or close to protected sites - Lyme Bay MPA and SAC, which make it a high priority.)

- Ruth stressed that whilst designated sites are given priority, local factors and interests are taken into account. She suggested that we can raise the priority given to our local waterways (it's one of several criteria) by: **Action:** CROWD to make strong, informed representations 1) via the Wessex Water website 2) by attending the [‘Your Water Your Say’](#) event on 28<sup>th</sup> April and 3) via Andy Mears (referencing river and coastal water use, the negative impacts of storm discharges, and BRAVA data).

**Rainwater separation:** WW reported on the problem of water runoff. In January, the Government published its long-awaited review on surface water drainage. This includes a commitment to implement Schedule 3 of the 2010 FWMA. [Here is a link to the review](#). According to WW, implementation of the new policy will involve a considerable amount of further work and Defra will be expecting a significant contribution to this work from water companies.

WW discussed the legal loophole allowing developers to discharge rainwater into sewers. Chris Loder reported on Southern Water's pilot Pathfinder Project on the Isle of Wight, which includes Upstream Source Control. All agreed that urgent reforms to the planning system are required to legislate tightly for rainwater separation in all new developments. **Action:** WW to brief CROWD so Chris Loder can follow up.

**Surface water separation:** WW reported on the problem of water runoff from roads, which accounts for around 30% of water entering sewers. There is no mechanism for highways to address this (WW is looking at charging highways agencies). **Action:** WW to brief CROWD on this so Chris Loder can follow up (early days – nothing will happen for a while).

#### Other:

- WW's investment is coming mostly from bills / borrowing, not from private / government investment.
- Shareholders will have to invest further in WW to build it by 50% to cover infrastructure improvement costs which will allow WW to meet its legal obligations. According to WW "Looking at the size of the Business Plan which is being developed primarily to address storm overflows and nutrient levels, WW will need a further £500million investment over and above that which will come from increases in customer bills to deliver the scale of work required. This investment will come both from the shareholder and private investors who we will seek to attract."
- The SO Discharge Reduction Plan defines the spill sources to be prioritised on the basis of spill frequency and environmental impact.
- Groundwater-impacted SOs (including Chideock) are a high priority.
- All SOs will be completely monitored by end of 2023.
- At STWs, it needs 4 tonnes of carbon emissions to remove 1 tonne of phosphorus.
- OFWAT will determine dividend levels in future based on water company performance.

- 2. Supply full sewage release data for 2022 and, at least quarterly, from Jan. 2023 onwards, incl.:**
- the date, time, duration and volume of each release (including unpermitted releases) to marine and freshwater environments.**
  - the duration and extent of rainfall causing a storm overflow at each site.**

WW reported that no data is available on volume / strength.

**Action:** WW has sent CROWD [a link to spreadsheet with data \(2022\)](#).

- WW cannot share quarterly data for this year but is developing a near-real-time spills data map, that will go live by end of 2023. WW is keen to get feedback on the map. **Action:** WW will invite CROWD to review the real time reporting system before it goes live.
- WW offered to supply some quarterly data for priority spill sites in the CROWD area. **Action:** CROWD to compile list of priority sites and send to WW.
- WW doesn't monitor rainfall but is looking to pull in live rainfall data. WW is not aware of any SOs that spill in dry weather except those identified as susceptible to ground water infiltration, or where spills can occur some time after heavy rainfall due to prolonged draindown of the sewerage system.

### 3. Indicate the increased storage volume needed at each overflow site to reduce releases to <10/year

Where WW is looking at improvements, this is based on computer models. WW is happy to share its modelling data. The company increasingly recognises the efficacy of interacting systems. Whilst WW has always been data driven (trying to deliver exactly to the EA's specification), it is broadening its approach.

WW uses a hierarchy of approaches as follows:

- **Rainwater separation** – domestic (from roof to sewer). Trialling in Chippenham.
- **Rainwater separation** – larger scale: e.g. Portland Bill car park runoff & lighthouse runoff (£0.5m investment).
- **Water treatment** – nature-based solutions (which are low carbon) or UV (which is not low carbon). WW is looking at planted wetlands in Litton Cheney.
  - Land ownership is an issue as wetlands require a large surface area.
  - As wetlands need to be damp all year, areas with a high water table and a corresponding ground water infiltration problem are best suited to a reedbed water treatment process
  - Permits for reedbeds are hard to obtain. The EA requires a 2-year trial and evidence to be submitted and approved before a permit is issued
- **Water treatment**
  - UV treatment helps swimmers (treats bacterial load) but not the environment
  - Green concrete is being used by WW for grey infrastructure projects. Still carbon hungry.
  - On the required increase in capacity, WW will take away CROWD's request to quantify the scale of investment required. WW is reporting to Defra by 24th June 2023 and **Action: WW to share this data with CROWD in early July.**
- **Simple additional storage solutions.**
  - WW said it had only two Emergency Permit Overflows in the CROWD area, including Newlands Bridge in Charmouth. Action: WW to clarify details of the other overflow.

### 4. Identify all Storm Overflows that the company considers unsatisfactory or substandard in regulatory terms.

- RB / AM not familiar with the BRAVA framework highlighted by Howard Atkinson. **Action: CROWD to request BRAVA framework from WW.**
- WW is instructed by EA to make the required improvements.
- WW reported that there are no longer any 'unsatisfactory' SOs in the CROWD area. (In 2021 WW did a survey; 2 sites were identified and rectified.)
- Around half the SOs in the area are classed as substandard because they spill frequently, or have a very old permit (>30 years). 'Substandard' is an odd and rather unclear category.
- WW said it had only two unauthorised SOs in the CROWD area, including Newlands Bridge in Charmouth. **Action: WW to clarify the other unauthorised SO.**

### 5. In view of the reasonable presumption that any release of untreated sewage constitutes an environmental and human health hazard, supply evidence (or, failing that, the company's reasoning) that:

- **none of its releases represents a human health hazard to year-round recreational users of rivers and coastal bathing waters.**
- **none of its releases represents an environmental hazard in CROWD's protected environments [SAC/shellfishery/SSSI].**

WW reported:

- It's the EA's responsibility to measure water quality, not WW, in rivers and bathing waters.
  - From 2025, the Environment Act will require WASCs to monitor water quality above and below all SOs as they are discharging. From 2030, discharges to lakes, estuaries and coastal waters must also be monitored as they spill. An EA consultation on this is now open. **Action: WW has shared the consultation link**

- All bathing waters in the CROWD area (excluding Lyme Regis) are currently classed as having 'excellent' water quality (95% compliance is required). Other water quality isn't measured. The EA monitors only bacterial contamination.
- WW recognises that arguments can be made for 99% or 100% compliance targets, year-round bathing water quality monitoring and more or adjusted locations for sampling - all EA responsibilities.
- EA choose 20 samples to make a statistically significant analysis - more samples would not make a statistically significant difference
- Microbial DNA analysis can help identify human / animal faecal sources. EA doing this, but delayed by Covid as uses PCR tests, and none were available.
- We could challenge the EA on the limitations of the designated bathing season and the 95% tolerance for water quality testing.

**6. Identify any areas or opportunities for CROWD or its river group members to work with the company to achieve local improvements through community engagement, developing nature-based solutions or other support to Wessex Water as it seeks to meet its legal requirements.**

- WW can run awareness campaigns and community events. It has more information about what individuals/communities can do to help, e.g. water butts / separation at source. **Action: WW will write a briefing or send further information to CROWD on this.**
- **Action: CL will ask Ofwat to identify blocks to investment in helping homeowners to install soakaways.**
- In a storm, 1 house roof connected to the sewer generates as much rainwater entering the sewage system in an hour as 50 houses' sewage over a week.
- WW have a coastal citizen science monitoring programme in Boscombe - we could look to roll this out locally using the WW lab to grow on the samples.
- If CROWD comes up with a 'long list' of desired actions, WW will evaluate and help where possible. **Action: CROWD to agree and submit long list.**

**Other business:**

- Next full meeting (with Chris Loder) Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> June, 11-12.30., Wootton Fitzpaine Village Hall.
- It was agreed that CROWD should become open about its work (in an 'objective' and non-political way. As part of this, Chris Loder/Harry Coutts will draft a press release on CROWD for agreement by CROWD before publication.

*17<sup>th</sup> April 2023*