

River Lim Monitors meeting with South West Water – 12th August 2022 and answers to our questions

Background

In 2021 4 of the 6 discharge points on the Lim released sewage 86 times for a total of 680 hours (Rivers Trust Sewerage Map just updated). We have been particularly concerned about what seems to be an unregulated outfall at Woodmead Bridge which has been causing persistent problems. Horn Bridge is also reported as a problem.

The River Char Monitors were recently set up and have already had a briefing meeting with Wessex Water. In the context of this meeting they are particularly concerned to understand any use of biobeads by South West Water which might be affecting the beach and river in Charmouth.

Our meeting

We met SWW at the Sewage Treatment Works between Uplyme and Lyme Regis. Our questions are in bold with the SWW answers in italics.

As a result of our meeting we would like to understand better:

1) The reason for and level of sewage releases into the Lim (and discharges at Woodmead Road and Horn Bridge which appear to be unregulated).

Most sewerage systems are “combined” in nature, this means that surface water from roofs, drains, roads etc. enter the sewers during wet weather, taking up capacity. Storm overflows act as safety valves to prevent homes, gardens and business being flooded. These allow the excess dilute storm water to be safely released to minimise the impact on the environment and to local residents. Storm overflows are designed to be used in heavy rainfall and are closely regulated by the Environment Agency, with the Agency issuing SWW with permits which qualify the conditions under which they are allowed to operate.

Below is the spill data for assets on the River Lim for the period 1st May - 25th August 2022

<i>Site</i>	<i>Number of spills (1st May-25th Aug)</i>
<i>Uplyme Sewage Treatment Works CSO</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Horn Bridge Pumping Station CSO</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Jericho CSO</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Mill Lane CSO</i>	<i>0</i>
<i>Goslings Bridge CSO</i>	<i>0</i>
<i>Gun Cliff CSO</i>	<i>0</i>

We are currently investigating misconnections at Woodmead Road.

2) Your plans to reduce these (eg specific allocated funding over the next 5 years and what additional infrastructure will be put in).

- *Misconnections in the Woodmead Road area are being investigated and funding is in place.*
- *In the Lyme Regis area, we currently have eleven storm overflows and we are investing over £1million this year to target a reduction in number of spills by c.90%. We will be upgrading Mosterton pumping station along with Broadwindsor, Uplyme and Thorncombe wastewater treatment works, which will help to significantly reduce spills.*
- *Bathing water quality at Lyme Regis front (Cobb) beach is already rated 'good' by the Environment Agency. We will continue to play our role and work with partners to maintain and improve bathing water quality.*

3) Other issues affecting River Lim water quality –including the use of septic tanks, the limitations of the existing sewage system and poor drainage from new developments.

There are no targets or measurements for this in SWW Waterfit strategy.

- *If a Developer comes to SWW to seek adoption of their drainage, then we have specific standards that we operate against and will not adopt the drainage until these have been met. This is a national standard under the Codes for Adoption - <https://www.water.org.uk/technical-guidance/developers-services/codes-for-adoption/> The drainage on the development site remains the developer's responsibility until it is adopted by SWW.*
- *SWW meet regularly with their regular developers to go through outstanding queries/adoptions and push them forward for adoption.*
- *There is currently no legal requirement to see adoption of sewers by a water company. If developers chose to construct their drainage and keep it private this falls into the remit of Building Regulations and it will be up to them to inspect/confirm the standards for these.*

4) What we should do in the event of an obvious sewage incident not following heavy rain and what response we should expect

- *Potential pollution events can be reported to SWW via its website <https://www.southwestwater.co.uk/report/reporting-a-suspected-pollution/>. This is the best method of ensuring we get appropriate information to help us target a prompt response. It is always helpful to ensure the reporters contact details are included in the report to help us verify what has been seen/reported and when. We also have a phone number 0344 346 2020.*

5) The use of biobeads in water treatment processes on the Lim (we will provide them) – can an audit be carried out to ensure that the biobeads in Charmouth are not coming from your processes on the Lim? Or from another SWW plant? Is there a list of where these are used?

- *Bio-beads are commonly used in the water industry on wastewater treatment. South West Water operates seven sewage treatment works (STWs) with bio-beads, out of a total of 655 STWs. The STWs with bio-beads were built as part of South West Water's £2.2 billion Clean Sweep programme, the biggest environmental clean-up of its kind in Europe, which stopped raw, untreated sewage being routinely discharged into the sea from 40 per cent of homes in Devon and Cornwall. In 2017, we reviewed and updated the technical standard covering their use at our treatment works. This included requirements for storage of used and new beads.*

- *We conduct regular site inspections and are installing secondary containment mesh, as an additional control measure, at the works with bio-beads.*
- *We have a bio-bead management plan and a daily check sheet for every plant with bio-beads.*
- *We also have a yearly inspection which the site manager will be carrying out.*
- *The only works in the area where bio-beads are used is the Uplyme Sewage Treatment Works.*

6) How SWW will provide real time information about water quality in the Lim as part of its WaterFit commitment on the provision of information

- *The requirement and mechanism for the provision of near real time data on the water quality of streams and rivers upstream and downstream of discharges, required under the Environment Act 2021, is in development. As you may appreciate the scale of this programme is significant in terms of the provision, placement, landownership, installation, power, telemetry and data collection. Given this, we are exploring the mechanism for delivery of this data including local QR codes, website, APIs etc.*
- *We monitor all of our storm overflows and alerts are provided to customers via our free BeachLive service, which notifies when there may be a temporary impact on water quality.*

7) How we can work together to get Back/Church Beach re-designated as a bathing beach. It was de-designated in 2015 because the water quality was poor. Instead of trying to improve things the bad publicity was felt to be harming the town's reputation.

The water quality in the Lim - which discharges by the beach there – is what we think causes the problem. The beach was being used for swimming daily in June during the fine weather and when the dredging of the harbour was causing water quality issues on the main bathing beach. South West Water claims 100% excellent bathing water across its patch. This is only because beaches that don't meet bathing water standards – like Church Beach – have been de-designated.

- *Promoting beaches for designation is normally the responsibility of the local authority or town council, but this can also be promoted by a local swimming group. The application would need to go to Defra and would need to be supported by the appropriate evidence base on use. The guidance advises that designation is appropriate where there is a "large number of bathers". Defra would then consult on the proposed designation, this would include the Environment Agency, South West Water and other interested organisations.*
- *The de-designation of Church beach in 2015 by Defra was not as a result of water quality but the Environment Agency's survey evidence on the lack of use, which was initiated by Defra. SWW is not responsible for the designation or de-designation of bathing waters.*

8. The Environment Agency monitoring of our bathing beach (Front Beach in Lyme Regis) showed an e-coli spike when it was last monitored about a week ago. South West Water did not issue any alerts about sewage in advance of that. Here's where I found the data: <https://environment.data.gov.uk/bwg/profiles/data-samples.html?search=Lyme%20Regis&bw=ukk2205-21500#current>

The same spike occurred at the same time last year. I'll also contact the EA but we'd like to ask SWW:

What investigations are being carried out by SWW into that level of e-coli (which I think puts our beach into the "poor" category for that period after being excellent)?

What might have caused it? Were there any alerts in advance that we may have missed or concerns raised about unregulated discharges that may have caused the problem and fall outside the notification system?

- *The 'spike' you noticed is very likely to be due to contamination of the surface water discharging via the outfall immediately adjacent to the Bathing Water sampling point. This surface water outfall is not a South West Water asset, but one managed by the Council. It has been the subject of investigations by the Environment Agency.*
- *Whilst not prejudging Defra's classification, due at the end of the season, based on the Environment Agency's 2018 to 18/08/2022 sampling data and applying the statistics under the regulations (including sample discounting where appropriate) Lyme Regis Front beach should be classified as 'good' at the end of the 2022 season. This is the same classification issued by Defra at the end of the 2021 season. Currently there are 75 samples in the rolling 4 season data set, so 5 more samples are due to be taken before the end of this season, which may change the compliance status subject to the results.*

WaterFit Plan – some points and questions

- 1. Is there an accessible version of this Plan as it's rather long for people to find the information they need?**
 - *There is an accessible version available on the website at: <https://www.southwestwater.co.uk/siteassets/document-repository/environment/ourplanforhealthyriversandseas.pdf>*
- 2. Will the Plan include a target for a reduction in the number of hours that a spill will last for, as well as a target for reducing the number of spills from storm overflows? Is there baseline data so we know if the problem is improving or not? There is no apparent process for reporting back to people who report spills so we do not know what has been done or if the problem will be sorted eg the discharge from Woodmead bridge outfall going on from August 2021 till now.**
 - *Under WaterFit we have committed to reduce our impact on rivers by 2025, by one third and put forward plans to target zero harm by 2030. We will deliver zero serious pollutions by 2025, and target a year on year reduction in all pollutions.*
 - *At CSOs across all locations including rivers – we will target an average of 20 spills by 2025. At Bathing Waters we will target 10 spills on average by 2025. Delivering these ambitions, we will upgrade assets and increase storage at wastewater treatment works, pumping stations and network overflows across the region, as well as identifying ways to reduce surface water flows and groundwater infiltration into the wastewater network*

3. We would like to see improved monitoring at all four of the Lyme Beaches (Monmouth, Main, Back and East Cliff Beach) – real data over a longer period of time. We'd like water companies and the EA to extend their testing window to year round monitoring rather than just for the summer season - given that water sports, swimming etc are increasingly enjoyed year round - plus wildlife doesn't take a winter break either.

- *We have extended year-round monitoring for some beaches and our intention is to extend that looking forwards.*
- *Through WaterFit, we have committed to maintain our excellent bathing water quality standards, all year round, so that everyone can enjoy our 860 miles of coastline, whatever the time of year.*
- *Please refer to EA with regards to their position on testing*