



Mr Stuart King
35 Felsham Road
Putney
London SW15 1AY

Major Projects

Name Phil Stride
Phone 020 3147 7718
E-Mail phil.stride@thameswater.co.uk

18 August 2009

Dear Stuart,

Thank you for your email dated the 8 July about the discharges of sewage into the River Thames in July. I apologise for the late reply, I have changed my email address and the manual system for checking the old address failed due to a handover issue when my PA went on maternity leave. Please note my new email address.

I will explain what happened in July and the plans we have in place to rectify the situation.

On 3rd July, and again on 7th, there was very heavy rain over West London. This resulted in storm sewage (foul sewage diluted with rainwater) entering the river in two ways. First, the sewer network became overloaded in places, leading to discharges to the river from Combined Sewer Overflows (CSOs). Second, our Mogden Sewage Treatment Works (STW) received more flow than it could treat. When this happens, surplus flows are diverted to the storm tanks for storage and subsequent treatment. When the storm tanks become full to capacity, as on this occasion, further flows are discharged to the river.

These discharges are, of course, unsatisfactory and no-one tries harder to prevent them than we do. I greatly regret the impacts on the river. However, it is a fact that London's sewerage system was designed to operate with overflows in this way and it will continue to do so following heavy rain until greater capacity is available. The discharges are legally consented by the Environment Agency, because the alternative would be for the excess flows to go back up into streets and homes.

We have been working with the Environment Agency and others over the last decade to identify cost-effective solutions to these problems. It is important to recognise that we are taking two separate (though of course related) sets of measures. First, we are significantly increasing the treatment capacity at all our main Tideway STWs. At Mogden, we have just secured planning permission to increase capacity by 40%. This will greatly reduce both the requirement to use the storm tanks and the number of occasions when the storm tanks are filled to capacity and discharges have to be made to the river. Our economic regulator,

Thames Water Utilities Limited

The Point
7th Floor
37 North Wharf Road
Paddington, London
W2 1AF

T 020 3147 7700
F 020 3147 7701
I www.thameswater.co.uk

Registered in England and Wales
No. 2366661 Registered office
Clearwater Court, Vastern Road, Reading,
Berkshire, RG1 8DB

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Ofwat, has approved funding for this work and the project will be complete by 2013.

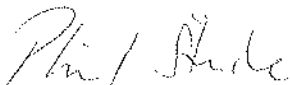
In addition, and separately, we are finalising the outline design for the Thames Tunnel.

The Thames Tunnel will capture flows from the 34 CSOs assessed by the Environment Agency as unsatisfactory and transfer them to our Beckton STW, in East London, for treatment. The unsatisfactory CSOs are all between Chiswick Eyot and the Thames Barrier. Above Chiswick, the sewerage system is largely split into two separate systems; a surface water system which carries rainwater and returns it directly to the river, and a foul system, which transports sewage to treatment works. This is the primary reason for the Thames Tunnel not going further west.

The Thames Tunnel has the support of the Government, the past and present Mayors of London, the Environment Agency, and a great many of our customers who believe, as we do, that it is unacceptable to continue to discharge millions of tonnes of sewage into the River Thames. Our priority at the moment is to design a scheme that will deliver the best balance of costs and benefits. Our current programme shows that the tunnel should be operational by 2020.

I hope this answers your questions, if you require any more explanation please let me know.

Your sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Phil Stride'.

Phil Stride
London Tideway Tunnels Delivery Team
Head of London Tideway Tunnels