

## THREE RIVERS DISTRICT COUNCIL

At a meeting of the Environmental Forum held virtually via zoom, on Wednesday 08 March 2023, 7.30pm.

### Chair:

Cllr Phil Williams

### Guest Speaker:

Simon diggings from Thames Water

### Three Rivers District Council Officers:

Joanna Hewiston, Jess Hodges

### Apologies for absence were received from:

Elen Roberts from Three rivers District Council, Cllr Chris Lloyd, Jane Lay from Abbots Langley Parish Council, Cllr Chris Lloyd, Cllr Reena Ranger to be represented by Alison Wall, Michael Hyde from Friends of Chorleywood Common, Stewart Pomeroy from Colne Valley Regional Park, Tony Bradford from Countryside & Rights of Way.

	Action	Lead Organisation
1.	<p>To receive the Notes of the Meeting of the Environmental Forum held on Wednesday 2nd November 2022.</p> <p>Notes agreed from previous meeting.</p>	
2.	<p>Matters arising:</p> <p><b>1. Questions raised by Rodger Bangs:</b></p> <p>A) As mentioned at previous meetings, does TRDC intend to take any action over the poor and dangerous state of the Ebury Way by the old Travis Perkins site. This is a separate issue to the work on the Ebury Way that HCC - CROW may be reviewing.</p> <p>Last November SPOKES had a work party clearing vegetation and dead wood giving more light to the path, but the surface is still dangerous, made worse by the proximity of the new building and the new fence occupying part of the original path. We wish to know if TRDC intends to take any action regarding the proposals submitted two years ago.</p> <p><i>Answer: TRDC are not planning any work over this piece of the Ebury Way. This land is not owned by the Council.</i></p> <p><i>We understand the tree roots are of concern and these would need to be considered in any proposals going forward.</i></p>	

	<p><i>A possible solution suggested would be the diversion of the public right of way adopted but this requires third party involvement. Nothing has commenced on a diversion.</i></p> <p><i>Councillor Williams will raise this stretch with Countryside Rights of Way to explore options.</i></p> <p>B) At the last forum I asked about the status of the local LCWIP. We were told it was imminent and would be available shortly. I am not aware of any recent consultation or proposals. When will the TRDC part of the LCWIP be made available for consultation?</p> <p><i>Answer: The Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) has been developed jointly with the County Council (a requirement) and Watford Borough Council (a logical partner given the distribution of settlements in the District around the Watford conurbation, and a partner which was required by the County Council).</i></p> <p><i>The Infrastructure, Housing and Economic Development Committee (IHED) at Three Rivers DC considered a report on the LCWIP on 11 October 2022 and agreed to progressing a full public consultation on the Plan. Officers are currently continuing work with Hertfordshire County Council in developing this consultation and it is expected early May 2023</i></p> <p>C) Another issue that is being discussed locally is the new path crossing Croxley Moor to the Ebury Way. Are the gates likely to be changed making it easier to cycle across the moor?</p> <p><i>Answer: The current route is not a permissive cycle route and previous proposals for a cycle route across Croxley Common Moor have been removed from the LCWIP following further work and confirmation from Natural England that it would not support cycling (due to noise/vibration) on this SSSI. In addition, cattle graze on the Moor and need to be kept secure. There are no plans to change the access gates.</i></p>	
3.	<p><b>A TALK BY SIMON DIGGINS FROM THAMES WATER.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Over several years water companies have been criticised for many reasons including not recognising the value of the rivers. Thames Water are trying to rectify this by working with local communities and NGOs on various projects, for example: support to the Chilterns Chalk Stream Project, which has improved the condition and signage on the River Chess Walk, in order to improve accessibility to the river.</li> <li>• Taking a more holistic approach, in 2020, Thames have created the Smarter Water Catchment (SWC) programme which is operating on three rivers, and which includes the Chess (the others are the Evenlode in Oxfordshire and Crane in West London). The programme is designed to bring together the water companies, local people, and businesses so that all may benefit. (NB. is also part of a wider government approach, known as the Catchment-Based Approach). The SWC is a 10-year programme, with guaranteed funding until Mar 25; and it is 3 years in, and there will be funding after Mar 25 but it is not yet known. So far, much work has been done on ‘baselining’:</li> </ul>	

assessing river health water quality and ecological data, collected in part through citizen science activities (and, of course, Thames Water's own monitoring).

- Thames Water is very conscious of its obligations and is committed to change, however it will not be rapid. Between now and 2027 significant investment will be made to reduce the amount of spillages by 2030 - 80% reduction to sites near SSSI's and to 50% of sites overall. Specifically, in the Chess, Chesham Sewage Treatment Works (CSTW) will benefit from £16.9m of investment, which should significantly reduce storm discharges.
- Thames are also aware that Maple Lodge Sewage Treatment Works is an issue of concern. Maple Lodge catchment runs from St Albans down to Three Rivers area including Watford. It is not working as well as it should be. Draft plans are being progressed for infrastructure improvement in the amp cycle between 2025-2030, the outcome of which will depend upon Thames's competing priorities and OFWAT decisions. (AFTER COMMENT (SD). Until I started working for Thames, I had no conception how tightly regulated they are and how all investment decisions are scrutinised and must be agreed against other, competing, priorities. That should not stop anyone lobbying, or advocating for change, and is the real purpose of the SWCs: to gain a better understanding of the issues in order that better decisions can be made. END OF COMMENT)
- TW is committed to improving transparency regarding sewage spills and up to date performance data can be found at, [EDM Map | Storm discharge data | River health | Thames Water](#). I commend it.
- Thames are working with Affinity Water to improve systems on both the Colne and Chess. Affinity provides much of the fresh water in the area so naturally, across the region, we co-operate. Both water companies are part of the ColneCan Partnership (the Chess SWC partnership is, in effect, a catchment within another Environment Agency-mandated catchment). They are also looking at how they can improve river systems locally; have worked on the Misbourne and Ver; and are now looking at both the Upper Chess (the Bucks part of the river) and, with Thames, the Colne/Chess confluence and the Colne Basin, which needs some work. As Thames are also planning on improvements in the Upper Chess, linked to the CSTW upgrade, it would be very helpful to fully engage local authorities and groups in what could be done elsewhere. (COMMENT The Chess/Colne confluence and Basin would be worthy of a large-scale River Recovery approach, as it could also be linked to the Croxley Moor Common (and even Ebury Way improvements END OF COMMENT).
- The SWC programme is going to be rolled out further, from 2025 onwards; the Colne is a candidate for this and would have strong support but: a. it is competitive b. there is a lot of work to get the Colne partnership ready.

Questions and Answers:

**Thank you for attending and report. Planning applications, what powers do you have at planning application stage to say that you cannot provide water/treatment?**

*Answer- Thames are a statutory consultee: looking at provision of fresh water, where Thames are the provider, (although here in Three Rivers it is Affinity Water) and Wastewater removal, where it is Thames's responsibility. Their role is neutral, and we are keen not to be used as a barrier against planning: it is their role to say whether that water and wastewater systems are/are not sufficient for the proposed development.*

*We are always keen to work with local authorities. Beyond development, important considerations are misconnections, whereby surface water run-off, or household 'grey water' is discharged into sewers, over-loading them. Tends to be more of a problem in urban areas but DIY or 'cowboy builders', often get this wrong.*

**Sorry didn't submit in advance. Using the Thames interactive map to show real time discharges and check other things. Were there any other discharges in the Chess in 2022 prior to November**

*Answer – There were less discharges in 2022 than 2021. Tony Booker clarified the Maple Lodge spill figures - 800 hours 2022, 1000 hours 2021. Spill time doesn't give the whole picture as they do not record the quantity (could be minor or major). There is an ongoing conversation in the Colne Catchment regarding causes of pollution in the Colne as Maple Lodge spillages are one part of the likely cause and it is critical the other sources are addressed too. Simon Diggins agreed, but advised it is very difficult to establish the true source of all the pollutants. He advised that they had established that 1/3 pollution due to water companies, and 2/3'rds from other sources.*

**Picked up 2 discharge incidents (October and one in Feb). Were there any others in 2022?**

*Answer – as above*

**Appreciate your report and commitment. Thames used to provide regular reports on spillages/discharges, this doesn't seem to be the case anymore, the map only shows the latest.**

*Answer – Will take this up, but I do know Paul Jennings is on the steering group of smarter water catchment programme, it could be a good idea to talk to Paul.*

*Jo. H – Meetings were suspended for a most of 2022 but have now resumed. At the last meeting it was confirmed there have only been 2 discharges since autumn 2022 (Oct and Nov). Slides from the last meeting are attached to these minutes.*

**Question from Chris Mitchell: Thames Water did solve big problem in Croxley Green and believe to be successful. When are we to get an update on Bateman road?**

*Answer – work should have resumed 13<sup>th</sup> March 2023 weather depending. Permissions have been received.*

**More information on pollution/discharge incidents:**

*Tony Booker explained that he will shortly receive a report on micro pollutants obtained upstream in Watford. He will assess the findings and offered to share at the next Environment Forum. He expects that the concern of pollutants will shift away from water treatment/storm outflows (except for materials they weren't designed to treat).*

#### 4. TRDC CLIMATE EMERGENCY AND SUSTAINABILITY

Following the climate emergency declared in 2019 the first strategy was launched in 2021. It included a target achieve net zero on council operating emissions by 2030 and to enable and inspire the District to achieve net zero by 2045. Since then much has been learned, achieved and evolved , and consequently an updated strategy is going to LEC 15<sup>th</sup> March, and the papers can be found [here](#) The report requested the Leisure, Environment and Communities committee (LEC) to recommend the strategy be available for public consultation May after the purdah and elections are complete. The final draft will be return to LEC in the autumn for adoption. The current [action plan](#) will not reflect the objectives on draft strategy March 2024. We will circulate the consultation to members of the Environment Forum and hope you will share to your contacts and provide us feedback.

Details of progress on the climate emergency can be found in the [draft strategy](#). If you are aware of households on incomes of less ££31,000 per year with an EPC of D or below grants may be available for insulation so please ask them to contact our home Energy Support Service Emergency on 0800 107 0044 to establish grant opportunities

Questions and Answers:

**Thank you for the report, deep retrofit on rental properties with EPC of D or below. Is the deep retro fit going to be open to landlords despite income?**

*Answer – Yes, it if the house qualifies from an EPC perspective and tenant qualifies on income, then they are included but the landlord will have to contribute a portion.*

**When committing to net zero, is the economic impact being considered as it can cause the economy to struggle much more. Very expensive to buy a heat pump and already have a cost-of-living crisis.**

*Answer – the economic opportunity for the district to work towards net zero is enormous - every home needs more insulation or an air source heat pump. However, there is a drastic shortage of suitably skilled labour, and this needs to be addressed centrally and through higher education. We are struggling to source contractors locally. Net zero provides employment opportunities in several sectors including ecologists as the Environment Act comes into force. All council buildings and commercial buildings along with biodiversity work (BNG, environment act).*

*From a homeowner's perspective the current high fuel costs means the need to reduce emissions is even more urgent, and payback periods are reduced. TRDC have applied for a grant to enable us to assist the able to pay sector, aim to improve access and understanding green finance option for people, if don't win the grant we will have to figure out another way to do this.*

**Thank, you very important work. Agree with the skill shortage. Question is for the consultation on the strategy in May. Will there be materials for notice boards, library displays, Parish council schools etc. It is very important to get the message across. I offer to help.**

*Answer - Thank you for the nudge. Will be trying to attend all the local area from meetings and will be using all media channels we can to spread the word.*

5.	<p>Misuse of nature reserves</p> <p>Standing item</p> <p>Topic to be removed from the agenda for future meetings, if there are issues, they can be raised in AOB.</p>	
6.	<p>Member Exchange.</p> <p><b>Rosi, Sustainable Three Rivers (S3R)</b> - After long struggle with TRDC S3R have been given permission for a small community garden in the orchard in Rickmansworth adjacent to Three Rivers House for a 12-month trial. Once the license is received, they can start fund raising and crowd funding. S3R thanked everyone who helped and have requested that anyone who can assist with examples of policies such as Health and Safety, equality and diversity would be much appreciated.</p> <p>2 trees are going to be planted in Rickmansworth High Street, It has taken a lot of time and effort, with thanks to Russell Ball whose dedication and determination has achieved this outcome.</p> <p>Cllr Williams – advised S3R highlighted option to apply to their County Cllr for locality funding.</p> <p><b>Cllr Andrea Fraser</b> –Another round of water butt giveaways for Batchworth residents has been launched, and Cllr Fraser would like to hear from anyone who benefited from the scheme.</p> <p><b>Tony Booker</b> –</p> <p>1) The Colne micro pollutant report will shortly be available on the ColneCAN website and will be an opportunity to look at the bigger picture, go on the <a href="#">ColneCAN website</a>.</p> <p>2) Re-AP has just obtained charitable status, and there will be a hub in the Colne valley to collect plastic from aquatic environments that is generally unrecyclable - and it will be re-purposed into useable items.</p> <p>3) ColneCAN is the Colne catchment partnership that delivers the Catchment Based Approach of river basin management utilising a small amount of funding from DEFRA. Unable to appoint a host, Tony Booker is helping to lead this as a consultant for the foreseeable future with a key objective to bid for the next round of Smarter Water Catchment funding an opportunity which cannot afford to be missed.</p> <p><b>Cllr Harry Davies</b> – Mention that CWPC community garden at the allotments is now up and running with gardening session every Wednesday morning 10-11.30 – anyone with time to spare is welcome.</p> <p>Cllr Williams suggested that Harry could help S3R in their set up phase.</p> <p>Cllr Davies is happy to be contacted by Elen Roberts to share the garden and its’ work through TRDC marketing channels</p> <p><b>Jan Smith</b> – Is TRDC aware of the following DEFRA Plan and if so, how will TRDC incorporate it into its Planning system, Environmental Protection, Climate Change Strategy, Local Plan and other relevant</p> <p><i>Written answer from Marko Kalik Head of Planning Policy: -</i></p> <p><i>We are aware of the DEFRA Environmental Plan and its goals and ambition is in line with ours for the Local Plan, though many of the interventions included in the plan are not necessarily possible through planning policy. We are working with Hertfordshire County Council on biodiversity net gain and Local</i></p>	

	<p><i>Nature Recovery Strategies. We have included biodiversity net gain in our emerging Local Plan policies and will be preparing a biodiversity net gain supplementary planning document to support this.</i></p> <p><i>Several other areas covered by our emerging policies are as follows:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Water efficiency</i></li> <li>• <i>CO2 emissions</i></li> <li>• <i>Waste and contamination</i></li> <li>• <i>Green Infrastructure</i></li> <li>• <i>Sustainable transport (including active travel)</i></li> </ul> <p><i>Each policy contains elements from the Environmental Plan however they are not directly based on it as it is not a planning document.</i></p> <p><b>Jan Smith</b> –. What is TRDC doing to protect the historical meadow, site CFS56, The Horsefield, Bedmond, from proposed development? This site was proposed in the Local Plan consultation of 2018 and still has not been screened out of the Local Plan process. This site is important for its biodiversity and climate change mitigation purposes. It is a perfect example of the type of environment that we should be saving and yet for the past 5 years, has faced the constant threat of destruction.</p> <p><i>Cllr Williams advised the land was put forward to local plan so process must be followed.</i></p> <p><i>Written answer from Marko Kalik Head of Planning Policy: -</i></p> <p><i>Site CFS56 is being considered as a potential site for allocation in the Local Plan. The site has been consulted on and representations are being considered as we move to the next phase of the Local Plan. We will be consulting on lower housing numbers in the autumn, and as such some sites will be removed. At this stage no decisions have been made. It should be noted that the site does not have any official designation in planning terms. It is not a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), a Local Nature Reserve, Local Wildlife Site or a Wildlife Trust site.</i></p>	
7.	AOB:	
8.	<p><i>Suggestions for future speakers – Please contact Elen Roberts.</i></p> <p>Tony Booker –to present the micro pollutant study.</p>	

**EF06/19 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The Forum noted that the date of the next meeting is Wednesday 21<sup>th</sup> June 2023.

*Associated documents/links related to meeting and action points:*

**A note from Simon Diggins, Thames Water:**

The River Chess Community Fund is open for applications, with community grants available of up to £5,000.

You can find out more and apply for the grant here: <https://chilternsociety.org.uk/river-chess-community-grants-of-up-to-5k-available-now-do-you-qualify/>