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Our ref: MC2021/07382/SA

14 April 2021

Dear Joy,

Thank you for your letter of 15 March to Victoria Prentis MP on behalf of your constituents about floods and future flooding risk from the nearby water management works in Dorney/Slough. I am replying as the Minister responsible for this policy area.

The Environment Agency (EA) is aware of the issues regarding the watercourses surrounding Eton Wick, having worked with the local community since 2014. The EA continues to sit as a partner on the Eton Wick Waterways Group (EWWG). Members of the EWWG represent the local community, land owners and the local authority and collectively discuss the concerns of the residents and solutions. This group also includes Thames Water Utilities Limited (TWUL), which operates Slough Sewage Treatment Works (STW).

The water situation in this area is complex. In dry weather, the majority of the flow within the Roundmoor and Boveney Ditches are made up of treated effluent from Slough STW. The hydrology of the area in times of flood, and how groundwater, rainfall and the effluent from Slough STW interact to cause flooding of local watercourses and Dorney Common, is complex and not fully understood. There are some areas of breached bank and cattle poaching that may be further contributing to the flooding of Dorney Common.

Some local riparian owners are working together and plan to apply for a Flood Risk Activity Permit to carry out some watercourse maintenance that may improve the flow within the watercourses surrounding Eton Wick. The EA does not carry out routine maintenance on these watercourses but will assess flood risk caused by any blockages, for example fallen trees, and remove them if necessary.

The discharge of treated effluent from Slough STW is regulated under an Environmental Permit issued by the EA. There is a separate permit for the storm overflow that permits discharges of settled storm sewage in rainfall or snowmelt events, as long as the STW is fully treating the required amount of incoming flow. Whilst it is undesirable, it is sometimes necessary for untreated sewage to be discharged via the storm overflow to protect sewage backing up through the sewer network and flooding homes. Both the final effluent and settled storm sewage are discharged into the Roundmoor Ditch which leads into the Boveney Ditch and then the River Thames. No discharge from Slough STW enters the Jubilee River at any stage.

In February 2021, an incident was reported to the EA's Incident Hotline in relation to possible sewage pollution in the Roundmoor and Boveney Ditches. An environment officer attended the site and confirmed that Slough STW had made a discharge of settled storm sewage to the Roundmoor Ditch. TWUL has stated that Slough STW was fully treating the required amount of sewage, and that this overflow of storm sewage was made as a result of rainfall. The EA has requested some flow monitoring data from TWUL and is in the process of analysing this data to assess whether this storm overflow discharge was made in compliance with permit conditions.

### **Future Investment at Slough STW**

The Water Industry National Environment Programme represents a set of actions that the EA has required water companies to complete between 2020 and 2025 in order to contribute towards meeting their environmental obligations. There are a range of schemes in place for Slough STW. These include:

- improved flow monitoring;
- increasing the capacity of the works to treat more flow, reducing the volume that is sent to storm tanks; and
- improving the quality of the final treated effluent by reducing levels of ammoniacal nitrogen, to prevent water quality deterioration in the receiving watercourse.

TWUL is also currently investigating a longer-term solution to reduce the impact of Slough STW discharges on the Eton Wick watercourses, including the option of moving the effluent outfall to a different watercourse. The EA has been in discussion with TWUL on this matter and will assess any proposal to determine if it is environmentally acceptable. TWUL is currently assessing various options and it is expected that they would engage with local interest groups before a change of this nature is made.

### **Improved strategic planning for drainage and sewerage management**

Understanding our long-term, as well as current, needs for drainage and sewerage (including wastewater) management is essential in order to help us manage the challenges of a changing climate and extreme weather events.

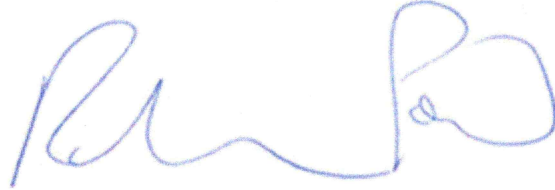
A non-statutory planning process for water and sewerage companies was initiated in September 2018 with the first cycle of non-statutory planning, currently known as Drainage and Wastewater Management Plans, expected to be completed by all companies in spring 2023. Those companies, including Thames Water, will be consulting on their draft plan in summer 2022, on which your constituents will have the opportunity to comment.

This planning process will help companies to assess wastewater network capacity fully and develop collaborative solutions with local authorities and other bodies who are responsible for parts of the drainage system.

Recognising the importance of this planning, the Government consulted in January 2019 on making it a statutory planning process in England. Respondents were generally supportive. The Government is therefore taking action to make it statutory through the Environment Bill.

On the matter of storm overflows more generally, last year the Government set up the Storm Overflows Taskforce for England to eliminate harm from storm overflows. The taskforce is considering a range of issues to achieve this and will be reporting to the Government in summer 2021.

Thank you once again for taking the time to write about this important issue.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Rebecca Pow', with a stylized, cursive script.

**REBECCA POW MP**