NNDC OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE: ANGLIAN WATER QUESTIONS

Updates on last year's Scrutiny Committee outcomes:

1. **To implement improved means of communication with residents and tourists in North Norfolk to notify of emergency discharge of raw sewage in coastal, river and broads locations to allow members of the public to make informed decisions about swimming or other waterborne activities and the related health risks in these areas.**

We do not advise the public about whether it is safe to go in the water as there are many other factors which are outside of our control which can impact water quality such as misconnected private drains, run-off from highways and farmland, wild bird droppings and tidal hazards. Overall responsibility for this lies with the Local Authority and with the Environment Agency (EA) who monitor designated bathing waters in England between May and September.

Our Coastal Catchment Managers are working closely with councils, coastal communities and businesses to investigate and address issues of third party or diffuse pollution which can make all the difference to bathing water quality.

We have also developed sophisticated technology and marine models to understand the factors affecting the quality of bathing waters in our region and are transparent about when our assets may have an impact on water quality via our BeachAware system.

We have invested £2million to develop BeachAware. The system works as follows:

- We have a series of monitors positioned on local storm overflows which record any storm related discharges.
- This data is automatically provided to a company called Meniscus who use a programme called Sewernet to predict impacts to nearby bathing waters.
- If impact has been predicted, an alert is sent out to stakeholders warning them that swimming is not advised due to a storm related discharge.
- The model continues to predict impacts to bathing water quality and a BeachAware alert remains in place for 24 hours after no further impact is predicted at the bathing water. At this point an all clear notification is sent out to stakeholders.
- The independent Surfers Against Sewers (SAS) Safer Seas app uses this data, but they add another 24 hours on top of our alerts, even though our alerts include a 24 hour period where there is no further impact predicted before we issue an all clear.

More generally, we currently have nearly 95% of our storm overflows fitted with Event Duration Monitors (EDMs) across the Anglian Water region with 100% coverage in North Norfolk.

We publish details of the locations of our storm overflows and our EDM data on our website https://www.anglianwater.co.uk/services/sewers-and-drains/storm-overflows/.

We have, however, listened to our customers, and appreciate that they want this data translated into useful, near real-time data. We will therefore be launching a near real-time alert system for the whole of our region on January 1st, 2024.

2. **To develop partnership working with NNDC Environmental Health and other partners on data sharing of emergency sewage discharges and other pollution events harmful to human health and the environment, to identify trends and improve performance monitoring.**

It is standard practice that if a pollution event occurs, we liaise with the Council's Environmental Health Officer and the EA. There are also already established lines of communications in operation via Anglian Water's Coastal Catchment Team. Once the near real-time alert system is launched on January 1st 2024, this will enable our partners as well as the public to have all the information in relation to storm overflow discharges readily available to them.

3. **To work with NNDC and communities most affected by emergency sewage discharges to ensure that the causes of current problems are understood, and that all possible mitigation measures are taken to relieve issues and ensure that discharge events are less frequent and shorter in duration.**

Storm overflow discharges occur when the sewage networks receive rainwater or snow melt water from the catchments they serve. During these events, the storm overflows play an important role as they act as pressure release valves to protect homes and businesses from internal flooding, meaning the sewage network overflows into the river instead of overflowing into people's homes. We have permits to operate all our storm overflows and these are issued by the EA and they do not cause harm to the receiving ecological environment.

We recognise that storm overflows are no longer the right solution when sewers become overloaded with rainwater. Whilst they help us to protect homes and businesses, we also know that they are not seen as acceptable any more by our customers and that's why during 2020-2025 we are investing £200 million into reducing the activation of storm overflows – an investment which is set to be larger in our next business plan as we will deliver our largest ever programme of environmental delivery through the Water Industry National Environment Programme (WINEP).

We welcomed Defra's requirement for all water companies to submit a Storm Overflow Reduction Plan (SORP). Anglian Water's storm overflow reduction plan has been submitted to Defra for review. Our plan sets out how we will tackle all of the storm overflows on our network, with many ahead of the government's timeline. We will focus first on those with the most sensitive environmental locations for example, those that affect bathing waters.

We are also installing 22,000 sewer monitors throughout our network by the end of 2025 which will give us early warning of any possible problems and help us to tackle them before they occur.

We are committed to working with local communities, river groups, local councils and more to ensure the communities affected are given the information they need and see the improvements that they want. In many areas we are already working with communities in Norfolk, for example we work closely with the Norfolk Strategic Flooding Alliance (NSFA), and we collaborate with agencies and local authorities to deliver for people and the environment. We need these partners to help us raise awareness of the near real-time information which will be available to the public on the 1st January 2024. We also need groups to tell us how they'd like to work with us, and what support they need.

Storm overflows can also operate outside of rain/ snow conditions for example, when there is a mechanical failure or blockages on our network caused by sewer misuse e.g. flushing wet wipes. Around 80% of blockages in our sewer network are caused by unflushable items such as wipes, nappies, fats, oil and grease. We would welcome councillors' help with encouraging people not to

put such items down sinks and toilets. Information about our Keep it Clear campaign is available on our website - Why Keep It Clear (anglianwater.co.uk).

Questions for this committee:

Cllr Nigel Dixon:

1. **Can you update us on actions taken on each of the relevant actions agreed during your last meeting with NNDC OSC, please?**

Please see the updates provided above on each of the outcomes.

2. **Can you advise whether any other actions have been taken to prevent or reduce emergency discharges of untreated foul water across North Norfolk (including Belaugh) or to improve water quality around North Norfolk coast and its rivers or to improve communications with NNDC and arrangements for public warnings of such discharges to residents and tourism stakeholders, please?**

The bathing water quality at Sheringham, West Runton and Cromer is already meeting the 'Excellent' classification standard. We are hoping that East Runton will also have improved to 'Excellent' when the classifications for 2024 are formally announced by the Environment Agency (EA).

We plan to carry out investigations by March 2027 to identify what further infrastructure improvements are required to help protect the water quality at these beaches, subject to Ofwat approving our business plan for 2025 - 2030. Water Quality at these beaches, especially at East Runton, is not just determined by Anglian Water infrastructure performance. For example, when some elevated bacteria readings were taken at East Runton in 2022, there were no Anglian Water storm overflow discharges at the time but decaying piles of seaweed were present on the beach.

The water quality at Sea Palling is not linked to Anglian Water assets because we have no outfalls with connectivity to the sea in that catchment. There is a bigger picture of decaying seaweed and phaeocystis algal blooms affecting bacteria readings at the beach. The council may wish to consider removing decaying piles of seaweed from beaches on a regular basis during the bathing months.

At Mundesley we plan to invest nearly £2 million to reduce the frequency of storm overflow discharges in this catchment by the 2027 bathing season to help this beach return to 'Excellent' classification. This scheme is subject to OFWAT approving our business plan for 2025-2030. However, in this catchment there is a wider bacterial risk from non-Anglian Water sources, such as urban run-off.

As mentioned above, we have submitted our Storm Overflow Reduction Plan to Defra which sets out a plan for every single storm overflow on our network, including Belaugh which is in Broadland. Bathing waters are being prioritised for action along with other sensitive locations such as SSSIs.

Regarding communicating storm overflow discharges, we have a customer map showing monitoring information we send to the EA on an annual basis. On the 1st January 2024 we will also be launching our live storm overflow reporting system for the whole Anglian Water region.

Cllr Jill Boyle:

3. **When new housing estates are proposed, how much weight is given to avoidance of overloading the currents waste water systems, and what approach is taken if the existing system is already nearing capacity?**

Our Spatial and Growth planning team provide advice to planning authorities and major infrastructure applicants to inform their long- term growth plans and projects. We also review Local Plans when they are due for consultation so that we are aware of where new developments are planned and can identify where we need to take action or increase the capacity of our network, commenting where we can.

Under the Water Industry Act 1991, anyone has an automatic right to connect to Anglian Water owned foul sewers. This means that legally we cannot object to any planning applications. We do however actively engage in the planning process by responding to major developments (10 dwellings or more). We also comment on specific proposals if requested to do so by the Local Planning Authority (LPA).

Where a proposed new development requires a surface water connection to the public sewer, the developer applying to build the new homes must provide evidence to the Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) that there isn't another way that they can deal with the surface water. If the LLFA approves a developer's drainage plans, then we will work with them to work out the impact of their surface water connection and any changes to our network that are necessary.

We welcome the Government's announcement that it will be consulting about the implementation of Schedule 3 of the Flood and Water Management Act which will remove the automatic right to connect to the sewer network and further promote sustainable development with sustainable drainage solutions.

4. **How has the amount of emergency discharge of sewage into our river and sea compared to the preceding 12 months.**

Event Duration Monitors (EDMs) record how often and for how long storm overflows operate rather than the volume they discharge, which is the statutory requirement. Across the Anglian Water region, the 2022 EDM data shows that the overall number of hours of spills from our storm overflows reduced by over 50 per cent compared to 2021. While across the Anglian Water region we are well on track to ensure all our storm overflows are monitored by the end of the year, every storm overflow in North Norfolk is already fitted with an EDM. However, it is important to note that storm overflows play an important job to protect homes from flooding and they will operate in response to rainfall events.

In North Norfolk, our EDM data since 2020 shows a positive result with the number of hours of spills falling every year. While we are pleased with this progress, there is still a great deal to be done to deliver our long term plan to reduce spills to rivers and waterways. This year, we are investing £39m to reduce storm overflows. We are also one of two water companies (with Severn Trent Water) to make 5 pledges under our Get River Positive plan to to prevent harm to UK rivers and ensure they can thrive.
Get River Positive plan (anglianwater.co.uk)

5. Why do some water leaks take over a week to repair?

Our first priority is to keep our customers' taps running and toilets flushing, so our teams must fix any leaks that are affecting customers' water supply first. The bigger leaks are the ones which could impact customer supply, so we prioritise these jobs according to their impact.

But we know that any leak is disappointing and preserving this precious resource is central to what we do. We have more than 500 people working around the clock to find and fix leaks and repair any bursts that may occur because of the weather. Tackling leakage has been a priority for us for years, and we are proud to have industry leading leakage levels which are half the national average. Last year we recorded our lowest-ever leakage level and our next business plan, if approved by Ofwat, sets out that we will deliver a further 8% reduction between 2025-2030.

Cllr Victoria Holliday:

6. I understand there were 6 storm overflows from Holt STW into the River Glaven in 2022 and at least one in 2023. This is a rare chalk stream and should be protected, and whilst AW say these 'are predominantly rainwater' have you tested the effluent to find out what exactly is being discharged?

We have permits to operate all our storm overflows and these are issued by the EA. Because storm overflows operate after heavy rainfall, we know the vast majority of what comes out of storm overflows is rainwater, so any sewage (which would still have had some sort of settlement treatment) will be heavily diluted and entering a watercourse which will very likely be in spate already, so fast flowing, meaning there is no ecological harm to the receiving environment.

We are not required to test these particular discharges because they are very low risk and scientific calculations have been carried out by the EA to assess this impact when we applied for the permits. However, if it is a pollution i.e. a storm overflow not operating as expected (in line with permit conditions - due to rainfall or snowmelt) then we investigate and test the receiving watercourse to check impact and take action to stop the impact. We have a duty to report to the EA if this situation occurs.

7. AW states that the site at Holt is within current operating parameters and does not require additional holding tanks. Can you justify this statement given you have storm discharges during rain events?

As mentioned above, the EA issue permits for our storm overflows and they will discharge storm water during rain or snow melt events. As long as we meet the conditions of the permit, we are not causing ecological harm.

We can confirm that our site at Holt is within current operating parameters and does not require additional holding tanks. We have enough storm capacity to meet the strict environmental standards set by the EA permit currently around 650m3 of storm capacity even though our permit only requires 607m3.

We appreciate, however, that storm overflows are no longer the right solution for our customers. We are working together with partners to eliminate surface water getting into the foul system which will see overflows reduced. In addition, as mentioned above, our storm overflow reduction plan has been

submitted to Defra for review and sets out how we will tackle storm overflows on our network, with many ahead of the government's timeline.

Cllr Mike Hankins

8. **Hindolveston Parish Council is concerned that sewage is being discharged into an open ditch on Melton Road. There is obvious sewage and white effluent which is very unpleasant for the people living in the nearby properties and could be a source of contamination. This problem has been on-going for some years. Is there any action that can be taken to ensure that the discharge of sewage into the open ditch on the highway is stopped. Perhaps the properties can be linked into the mains sewage?**

Back in 2005 we installed a first-time sewerage scheme and residents had the choice to connect at the time, for a fee, but it was not mandatory. The residents that chose to remain on private sewerage systems, such as septic tanks, are monitored for pollutions by the EA. We encourage people to report any suspected pollutions to both us and the EA.

9. **Can we have an update on AW investment plans at CSOs and whether AW are satisfied that monitoring equipment is all functioning correctly and providing data in every relevant location? (We previously learned of some issues where both moisture and potential rodents or vibration was interfering with monitoring and causing false readings.)**

   During 2020-2025 we are investing £200 million into reducing the activation of storm overflows as part of our Water Industry National Environment Programme (WINEP).

   We have also just submitted our proposed business plan for 2025 to 2030 to Ofwat. If approved, our plan will see us investing more than £9 billion between 2025 and 2030 to meet the needs of our growing region and ensure we are resilient to our changing climate. This includes a proposed investment of £1 billion into further reducing storm overflow spills. Our plan includes the creation of new storage, work to prevent surface water from entering the sewer network, the installation of additional monitoring, and increases in the capacity of our treatment sites to deal with more rainfall as a result of unpredictable weather. This investment will reduce the number of spills from storm overflows at high priority sites (those with the highest environmental impact) by 45% by 2030.

   Examples of investment in North Norfolk during 2020-2025 include:

   - Over £2.6 million for a first-time sewerage scheme at Knapton
   - Over £1.6 million to increase treatment capacity at Wells WRC
   - Over £470,000 investment at Runton Beach Road pumping station to reduce the frequency of storm overflow discharges
   - Over £190,000 investment in installing EDMs at storm overflows

   Examples of proposed investment in North Norfolk during 2025-2030 (subject to Ofwat approval) include:

   - Over £2 million to reduce the frequency of storm overflow discharges at Briston WRC

- Nearly £2 million to reduce the frequency of storm overflow discharges at Mundesley by the 2027 bathing season to help this beach return to 'Excellent' classification
- Over £1.2 million to reduce the frequency of storm overflow discharges at Horning Knackers Wood WRC
- Over £200,000 for new storm overflow screening at Runton West Water Pumping station

Our storm overflow reduction plan has also been submitted to Defra for review. As explained above, this sets out how we will tackle all of the storm overflows on our network, with many ahead of the government's timeline.

In terms of monitoring, we currently have nearly 95% of our storm overflows fitted with EDM monitors and in North Norfolk we have 100% coverage. These provide some of the most reliable data across the industry, with only around a 3% loss in communication. Due to the remote location of some of our devices, the signal strength can fluctuate from time to time. To tackle this, we have used new innovations to replace the monitors in these locations and continue to work to fix any issues as quickly as possible. We share learning with other water companies on these new innovations and implement learning we have taken on board from them too.

As mentioned above, we are also installing 22,000 sewer monitors throughout our network by the end of 2025 which will give us early warning of any possible problems and help us to tackle them before they occur.

10. **What have AW learned from procedures of sharing information on discharges with Environment Agency over the last year? We are aware of at least one incident where information was not shared at the time, and perhaps inaccurately. This led to wrong information being shared on the Surfers Against Sewage App.**

In September of this year both the East and West Runton storm overflows discharged due to extreme rainfall. The East Runton discharge was reported to the EA immediately, but the West Runton discharge was not. As a result of this we have carried out a full review into the procedures for sharing information on discharges with the EA.

The reporting to the EA did not, however, impact the information shared on the Surfers Against Sewage app – they are two separate lines of communication. Instead, it is our Beach Aware system which informs the Surfers Against Sewage app.

Our Beach Aware system detected both the East and West Runton discharges and modelled whether or not they would cause the water quality to drop to the poor standard for bathing at both of the designated bathing areas. The system forecast that West Runton had dropped to poor, but the slight deterioration forecast at East Runton was not enough to reduce the standard to poor. For this reason, the system only generated a Beach Aware email for West Runton – which the council, the EA and Surfers Against Sewage received.

11. **In respect of discharges and events like those seen at Mundesley with the failure of infrastructure related to a pumping station:**
    - **Should we be advising beach users not to bathe for an extended period in future - ie longer than the 48 hours currently advised?**

Our Beach Aware system issues an 'all clear' alert when poor bathing water quality linked to storm discharges is forecast to have passed. As a result, we feel this is more accurate than the Surfers Against Sewage app which keeps alerts in place for an extended period of time.

It is a decision for the Council as to what advice they issue to beach users. But in the event of an infrastructure failure and crude sewage discharge, the most appropriate advice for beach users would be reviewed on a case by case basis in partnership with the local authority.

- **Have AW assessed the vulnerability of assets on Promenades and other seafront locations for climate change, sea level rise, greater precipitation and future maintenance requirements?**

In the Anglian Water region, 28% of land is below sea level and there is 1,200km of coastline. As a result, we assess the vulnerability of our assets along the coastline. For example, further down the coast we recently finished a £4.7 million project to relocate sewer pipes that were at risk of erosion. We are already working with coastal communities, local authorities and partnership schemes and we would be very happy to work with North Norfolk District Council. We have also entered into partnership funding agreements with local authorities and Coastal Partnership East to help take forward schemes to protect infrastructure from these risks. For more information on our long-term climate change resilience, please see our Climate Change Adaption Report here.

12. **In respect of investment in CSOs and drainage generally. What impacts would this likely have on resident's bills, and other service provision and repairs, for instance repair of water supply leaks, in the years ahead? There are concerns that water supply could become the poor relation.**

We have recently submitted our proposed business plans for 2025 –2030 to Ofwat. The proposed plan will deliver £9 billion of essential investment and was created in consultation with our customers. It represents our biggest ever proposed investment and would be paid for upfront by our shareholders with customers paying back this investment over the lifetime of the assets.

Our proposals balance ambition with affordability. By 2030 average bills will be £1.57 per day, a total rise of 21p a day (15.5%) over the five-year period (excluding inflation). We will have also doubled our package of financial support for customers.

Ensuring a reliable water supply is an absolute priority for us. By 2030, we will have prepared two new reservoirs for construction, which will supply 625,000 properties across our region, and £476 million will be allocated to support new housing, plus the extension of our strategic pipeline will help ensure the region remains resilient to drought. We are also continuing to work with the EA to drive significant year on year reductions in abstraction levels across the region to meet the challenge of providing water for residents and businesses whilst still ensuring there is enough water left in the environment.

Our customers are among the most water efficient in the country, using 20-litres per day less than they did four years ago. As part of our proposed investment, we will support our customers to use even less water with, for example, the continued installation of smart meters, helping to reduce usage down to around 124 litres per person per day by 2030. We will also do our bit to continue tackling leakage by reducing already sector-leading leakage levels by a further 8% to new industry-leading lows.