

Mere Parish Council

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Mr. Christopher Greenwell,
Senior Environmental Planning Officer,
The Environment Agency
South Wessex Area Office,
Rivers House,
Sunrise Business Park,
Higher Shaftesbury Road,
Blandford,
Dorset, DT11 8ST

11th October 2011

Dear Mr. Greenwell,

Firstly, on behalf of the Parish Council, I would like to thank you very much for attending the public meeting on 26th September. We believe that approximately 150 people turned up for the meeting but many left because they could not find any room to sit or stand. Obviously, this number exceeded even our expectations but, we can only deduce from this that we must not underestimate the strength and intensity of feeling amongst our parishioners over this issue. As I am sure you have too, the Parish Council has received quite a good deal of correspondence since the meeting, some of it giving feedback on the meeting itself and some of it asking further questions arising from the meeting.

Fiona Bowles from Wessex Water admitted that abstraction would have an effect on the water levels in our rivers and it is clear that a large number of parishioners believe that the amount of water abstracted is the cause, if not the main cause, of low flows. Climatic conditions and the lack of rainfall over recent months is another explanation for our low flows. We could spend countless hours scrutinizing technical data, graphs and charts and arguing over irregularities, anomalies and inconsistencies. Whatever the reason, the fact remains that Mere has no water in its rivers and Wessex Water are still allowed to take up to 10 million litres of water out of our aquifers each day.

At the Parish Council meeting held last week, members deliberated over what they should ask you to do to try and resolve the situation. It was all agreed that some action needs to be taken and that it is not acceptable to sit back and wait for it to rain but members felt that they were not qualified to tell the Environment Agency what needs to

be done; it is for the Environment Agency to tell us what action it can take as we understand that in England & Wales the Environment Agency is the 'competent authority' for carrying out the Water Framework Directive which became part of UK law in December 2003 and is designed to help to protect and enhance the quality of our lakes, streams and rivers.

We would therefore be grateful if you could liaise with us over what actions or options you would advise and recommend in order to help resolve the situation and to advise us on how we may help the situation.

As I said, the Parish Council is certainly not qualified to make suggestions, examine or scrutinize all the technical data but, I am giving below a list of suggestions that have been presented to us over recent weeks:

'I hope the Parish Council can send a strongly worded letter to the MD of Wessex Water to the effect that they have got to be more flexible and relate extraction to rainfall. Otherwise our parish will continue to be robbed of one of its most cherished assets.' John Pelly, Church Street, Mere

'One agency that has not yet been involved is OFWAT. Is their presence at a future meeting warranted? They set the performance standards the Utilities are required to meet, including water wastage through the delivery system, as well as pricing and other performance criteria. There was a lot of reference to the ecology of the rivers and conservation, saving water at source is surely a primary requirement.' Mr. & Mrs. Boshier, Waterside, Mere.

'A lot of locals said that the Shreen Water had never dried up like this before but neither the EA or WW provided any evidence to support their claim that it is a winterbourne. Perhaps they could be asked to provide documentary evidence to support their supposition. Also, it would be worth asking if they can name any other winterbournes that have mills and cress beds in their courses.' Mr. Chris Woods, Mere Fish Farm.

'As the EA suggested, we need to pursue the matter further and to this end we need to gather information about the flow. The EA man said that they had not identified any suitable site for a gauge in Mere! Well, at the end of the fish farm at Ivymead there is a waterfall on the Shreen that used to be the entrance to the leat for the town mill which was blocked off 30 years ago. There is a 6 foot drop and a simple gauge could be put in at minimal expense to get us the data we need. I believe that most of the abstraction goes on at night (cheap electricity) and a reasonably sensitive gauge on the Shreen might be able to detect variations in the flow rates in low flow conditions.' Mr. Chris Woods, Mere Fish Farm

'Would the EA consider doing the following tests and investigations:

- 1. To restrict abstraction at Mere to 4MI/d for a period of six months from April to September 2012.*
- 2. To install a daily or telemetred raingauge at Mere PS so that the effect of rainfall can be assessed should the summer of 2012 be unusually wet or dry.*

In view of the perceived need to improve flows on the Shreen and Ashfield Water, and bearing in mind the reduction in water demand in recent years, would the EA commission a study to assess the ecological and amenity value in monetary terms of these two rivers down to their confluence in order to justify measures such as stream support at a rate of about 0.3 MI/d on each stream at such times as are necessary during the summer months.' Dr. Colin Clark

'I believe that the WW lady stated that one third of the abstracted water was used in Mere and returned to the river further downstream. Is it at all possible to return this water further upstream so that it provides some kind of amenity benefit for Mere instead of Gillingham?'

'In view of the strength and intensity of feeling amongst the parishioners of Mere, would the EA re-open the RSA investigation for Mere, with a view to reviewing the abstraction licence?'

Our next Parish Council meeting will be held on **Monday 7th November** and we know that members of the public will be in attendance, anxiously awaiting your response, so it would be very much appreciated if you could respond before the meeting.

Yours sincerely,

Mrs. L. C. Wood,
Parish Clerk.

NB – With reference to your email of 27.9.11: Dr. Colin Clark has recently sent me a copy of his comments and the specific points that he raised over the assessment of the abstraction at Mere and I am forwarding them to you (enclosed)– as requested.

Copies to:

Dr. Andrew Murrison, MP, House of Commons, LONDON SW1A 0AA
Richard Cresswell MBE, Regional Director, Environment Agency, Manley House, Kestrel Way, Exeter, EX2 7LQ
Colin Skellett, Executive Chairman, Wessex Water, Claverton Down Road, Bath. BA2 7WW
Consumer Council for Water (Wessex), 2 The Hide Market, West Street, St. Philips, Bristol BS2 0BH
Sarah Bird & Nick Mould, Duchy of Cornwall, The Old Rectory, Newton St. Loe, Bath BA2 9BU
Fiona Bowles, Water Resource Investigations Project Manager, Wessex Water, Claverton Down Road, Bath BA2 7WW
Dr. Colin Clark, Hydrologist
+ residents of Mere