

Meeting held on the 2nd of December to discuss local concerns over the state of the watercourses in Mere

(Attended by representatives of the Environment Agency, Wessex Water and the local MP, Mr. Andrew Murrison)

Background:

The EA took this opportunity to review the unusually dry conditions experienced in 2011 and referred to the recent press release (externally available on the EA website at: <http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/research/library/publications/131328.aspx>) that indicates that even with 100% average rainfall this winter, areas within the Wessex Region will continue to experience dry conditions in summer 2012.

WW then confirmed that the abstraction has not changed significantly in recent years and thus the change in extent of the Mere headwater streams is a response to climatic variation primarily, although abstraction does reduce the water available and thus the length of drying to a small degree.

Concerns:

Andrew Murrison expressed his constituents concern over the extent of stream drying particularly in 2011, primarily in the Shreen below Sharp Street, and asked what could be done?

Proposal:

WW offered to trial a reduction in abstraction to meet local needs only, but this would have to happen during a year with appropriate winter recharge and spring/summer rainfall, so as to demonstrate more clearly the response of the groundwater and river flow to both climate and pumping. Whether this will be feasible in 2012 will depend partly of whether the aquifer recharges sufficiently over the winter/spring period, which at present is looking unlikely.

Since abstraction is driven by customer demand, any trial would be assisted by local demand reductions, perhaps through metering and the promotion of water efficiency. This could be implemented within the water supply area supplied by the Mere source.

Next steps:

WW and the EA will now start discussions over identifying suitable conditions / triggers for the trial. Then at a relatively early stage in this planning process, these proposals would be discussed with the parish council, to allow local views and suggestions to be incorporated. It may also be possible that residents at Mere could assist in any such trial. To ensure the trial is deemed robust, an independent third party may also be invited to review any final proposals.