From: Greenwell, Christopher [christopher.greenwell@environment-agency.gov.uk]

Sent: 07 November 2011 15:51

To: Lindsey

Subject: RE: Mere Parish Council response

Dear Mrs Wood,

Thank you for your letter of the 11th of October, in which you kindly thanked me for my attendance at the public meeting. As you mention, the event was very well attended and it gave parishioners a welcome opportunity to listen to the presentations and discuss the issues that were raised. In your letter, you also identified a number of suggestions that you were keen for us to explore. Firstly though, I wanted to take this opportunity to apologise over the delay in our response, but as you will appreciate it takes time to ensure that all the relevant staff are consulted.

Two of the suggestions proposed, involved either a trial summertime reduction in abstraction for public water supply or a trial of stream augmentation. As you are aware, we have already carried out an extensive series of investigations at Mere and the Environment Agency has concluded that abstraction only results in limited changes to the flow in the upper headwater sections of the two water courses. No deterioration in the overall ecological wellbeing of the Shreen Water could be identified. For this reason, we closed down the investigation advising Wessex Water that we wouldn't require them to amend their abstraction at this location. We therefore do not feel that either a trial reduction of abstraction from the Mere source or augmentation is currently appropriate.

I think that it is worth reiterating our position that we believe that the low flow situation being experienced in parts of Mere is due to an extended period of below average rainfall. These conditions have been replicated on all our other chalk streams whether they experience abstraction or not. Looking at the climatic patterns over the past fifty years, it looks as if current conditions reoccur about once in every twenty five years. It must be remembered though, that low flows and droughts are natural events and the riverine ecology is fully adapted to cope with these extremes.

Another suggestion was to commission a review of the ecological and amenity value of the watercourses. The ecological situation is well understood following detailed assessment during the AMP 4 study. We don't feel we could justify the cost of another field investigation. I do accept that the amenity aspect did not undergo an economic benefits assessment at the time. I am happy to give this point some further consideration. It would be helpful to hear of the council's view about which stretches of the rivers have particular local amenity value.

You also asked if we could install a daily or telemetered rain gauge at Mere. Historically there appear to have been some sites in this area, but these are now closed. I am not able to commit the Environment Agency to reinstall a rain gauge in the area as we are currently under severe financial restraints and are being forced to

rationalise our monitoring networks. The Agency still operates 23 ‘tipping bucket’ rain gauges throughout Wessex with the nearest being only three miles away at Gillingham. We also have a network of fifty volunteer rainfall observers with the closest site being only 2 miles away at Norton Ferris. We would though be happy to give the parish advice about identifying a suitable rain gauge location if they wish to start recording local data. To satisfy Met Office guidelines, an exposed location is required where the gauge must be located well away from neighbouring structures. Specifically this distance must be twice that of the height of these objects.

Finally, you asked if the treated effluent from the Rook Street sewage treatment works could be returned to the Shreen Water further upstream. While this is an interesting option, the main issue is likely to be the considerable additional expense of further treatment and the environmental impact of pumping which may not be sustainable in the long term.

I would like to assure you that we continue our dialogue with Wessex Water about the impact on water levels of the current period of below average rainfall, but I'm afraid the situation remains pretty much as I described at the public meeting. Until we see significant recharge of the aquifer, we are unlikely to see an improvement to flows in the upper sections of your local streams.

Regards

Christopher Greenwell