

Long Itchington Parish Council

Summary History: Sewage overflow issues in Long Itchington 2017 - 2020

1. INTRODUCTION

Since construction commenced at the Spinney Fields housing development, Long Itchington has experienced repeated overflows from foul drains in Stockton Road, Southam Road and Church Road. Residents of some properties have also experience repeated foul water overflows from drains into their gardens. These sewage overspills flow directly into the village storm drains and ditches and then discharge into the River Itchen.

Long Itchington Parish Council (LIPC) has engaged with a range of agencies (particularly Severn Trent) in an attempt to get these issues resolved. However, as at August 2020 the village is still experiencing overflows of sewage from the foul drainage system and all attempts to resolve the problems have so far failed.

LIPC remains convinced that the source of the problem lies with the conversion of an old storm drain on Stockton Road into a combined foul and storm drain. The conversion of the drain was the direct result of an error by Severn Trent at the planning stage of the Spinney Fields development (of 150 new dwellings on Stockton Road). The combined drain is clearly not fit for purpose and continues to cause significant amounts of storm water to overload the foul system during periods of heavy rainfall.

LIPC believe that a new sewer is required along Stockton Road to ensure that the foul discharge from Spinney Fields can be conveyed safely to the SPS pumping station at Thorn Yard without being inundated by storm water.

The current situation is unacceptable and is causing misery and stress to residents. It presents a threat to public health, and is resulting in ongoing environmental pollution to the River Itchen. LIPC require Severn Trent to take urgent action to address the consequences of their own error.

This document summarises the issues and events and sets out the Parish Council's expectations of the mitigation required – no matter what the financial implications for Severn Trent. Attached is an appendix detailing the chronology of events from 2016 to the present.

2. BACKGROUND – events leading to current situation

2 (i) The Planning Process – Spinney Fields

In March 2014 Stratford District Council (SDC, the planning authority) refused planning permission for the construction of 150 houses on a site off Stockton Road situated on the eastern edge of Long Itchington village. LIPC had registered an objection to the planning application including highlighting the strain that such a large development would place upon the existing infrastructure of the village.

On 29 January 2014 Severn Trent had responded to SDC that, subject to certain conditions, it did not object to the housing development. LIPC does not believe that Severn Trent carried out any physical inspection or survey of the proposed site or the existing infrastructure prior to registering a “no objection” response.

The developers lodged an appeal against the decision of the planning authority and in March 2015 the Planning Inspectorate granted the appeal and gave permission for the construction of 150 dwellings on the site that became known as “Spinney Fields”. Construction began in 2016.

2 (ii) The Stockton Road “sewer”

LIPC understand that the Severn Trent asset register recorded that the nine-inch pipe running down Stockton Road was identified as a foul sewer. On the basis of this information (and without any inspection taking place) Severn Trent proposed that all the foul water pumped up from the Spinney Fields development should be discharged into this pipe which (it was assumed) would then be conveyed into the existing village foul system and down to the Thorn Yard sewage pumping station (SPS).

In late 2016 the first houses at Spinney Fields were completed and the foul system from the development was connected to the Stockton Road “sewer”. Around this time reports were made of sewage smells and overflows into ditches and streams in the Stockton Road area. Investigations had revealed that the drain running down Stockton Road was not in fact a sewer connecting into the village foul system but a storm drain that discharged via ditches and streams into the River Itchen.

3. ON-GOING ISSUES AND ATTEMPTS TO RESOLVE

3 (i) Severn Trent’s Solution

The solution implemented by Severn Trent was for the storm drain on Stockton Road to be converted into a combined foul and storm drain with the pipe being connected into the foul system at the bottom of Stockton Road. Severn Trent advised the Parish Council that the drain had the capacity to carry all the foul water from the Spinney Fields development as well as the existing storm water it took from Stockton Road without any problems.

It was known locally that the drain was at least 60 years old (and almost certainly older) and was not in a good state of repair.

3 (ii) The initial Problems (and attempts to resolve) 2018

Early in 2018 residents in Stockton Road experienced overflows of foul water into their gardens. Residents on Southam road also reported overflows from drain covers in the street and problems at their properties.

Severn Trent contractors investigated and identified blockages in the Stockton Road pipe that required jetting and cleansing. Residents observed building debris being

removed from the pipe. Severn Trent advised that the drain on Stockton Road (now designated as a combined storm/foul drain) contained a series of “catch pits”. These are characteristic of a storm drain but are unsuitable for a foul drain and required modification.

Further foul overflow problems continued to be reported and Severn Trent contractors attended on a number of occasions. Following further investigation Severn Trent reported that the combined drain has been ruptured in a number of places where utility connections (gas pipes) have been accidentally driven through the pipe. These were being clogged with “rag” (e.g. wet wipes etc) resulting in blockages and overflows. Further repair work had to be carried out to rectify these problems.

During 2018 regular jetting work was undertaken to cleanse the pipe and remove obstructions, however, the jetting itself caused further damage to some sections of the drain. In late 2018 Severn Trent advised that sections of the Stockton Road drain required “patch lining” to strengthen the pipe and prevent further blockages from occurring.

3 (iii) Continuing Problems (and further works to resolve) 2019/20

In the early part of 2019, a few further minor problems were experienced. In August 2019 Severn Trent reported that pressure jetting of the drain to cleanse the pipe and clear obstructions had caused further damage and that a whole section of the drain needed to be fully lined.

From September 2019 to January 2020 significant problems occurred on a regular basis, particularly during periods of heavy rainfall. This included overflows at individual properties and overflows from foul drain covers. The overflows from the line sewers were observed at drain covers at the bottom of Stockton Road, on Southam Road, on Church Road and in The Square.

LIPC held a multi-agency meeting on 6 November 2019 in an attempt to finally get the problems resolved. At that meeting LIPC questioned whether the combined drain had the capacity to cope with both foul and storm water during periods of heavy rainfall. Severn Trent responded that until all the lining work had been completed and the entire length of the foul drain down to the Thorn Yard SPS had been surveyed and confirmed to be clear and in good repair it wouldn't be possible to state categorically that a hydraulic (capacity) problem existed.

Severn Trent further advised LIPC that if the outcome of all the repair and survey work were to conclude that the problem was one of capacity the matter would then be subject to an internal process between different departments within Severn Trent to establish a solution. LIPC also understood that any mitigation work to resolve the issues for Long Itchington would need to be prioritised against mitigation schemes for other communities.

In February 2020 Severn Trent advised LIPC that the lining and repair of the combined drain on Stockton road had been completed and that approximately 350M of the camera survey of the line sewer from Southam Rd down to the SPS at Thorn

Yard had now been undertaken. No issues had been identified and a final section of 200M remained to be surveyed and cleansed.

The spring and early summer of 2020 were extremely dry. However, in late June and early July two further incidents were reported of foul water flowing from a culvert into a storm ditch.

In August 2020 Severn Trent reported to LIPC that the final 200M section of the line sewer down to the Thorn Yard SPS had been surveyed, no defects had been found and the pipes were all confirmed as clean. Severn Trent also confirmed that discussions would take place with other departments to achieve a permanent solution. No timescale was given.

On 16 August 2020 an extremely heavy rainfall event resulted in overflows from drain covers in Stockton Road, Southam Road and Church Road. The Fire and Rescue Service had to attend as a foul drain cover at the bottom of Stockton Road was forced off by the volume of water erupting from the sewer. Several residents on Southam Road also reported overflows from the foul drains into their gardens.

Further heavy rain on 25 August 2020 resulted in overflows from drain covers on Church Road. The foul chamber at one of the drains on Southam Road was observed to be full to within a few centimetres of the top.

As at the end of August 2020 the problems that commenced in 2017 and are a direct result of the conversion of the Stockton Road storm drain into a combined storm/sewer remain unresolved.

3 (iv) Church Road

The location that has experienced the most frequent overflows from foul drain covers is Church Road, specifically the foul drain cover close to Bizzy Tots nursery and the foul drain cover outside the Old School House in The Square.

This raises the question of whether the overflows at these drains are caused by a different source from that creating the overflows on Stockton Road and Southam Road. The Church Road drain covers are not located on the line sewer that flows from Stockton Road, Southam Road and via Leather Street to the SPS at Thorn Yard.

LIPC has not (yet) commissioned its own hydrology survey of the drainage system within the village but has concluded that the evidence (including a wealth of local knowledge) does suggest the Church Road overflows are directly linked to the conversion of the Stockton Road storm drain into a combined storm/sewer.

The line sewer on Church Road runs from West to East and flows from The Square, down Thorn Way and terminates at the Thorn Yard SPS. The line sewer carrying the discharge from Southam Road also terminates at the Thorn Yard SPS – but arrives from the opposite direction. It seems probable that when the line sewer flowing down from Southam Road is inundated with storm water this backs up the sewer flowing in

the opposite direction from Church Road. The foul system just cannot cope when significant additional storm water is discharged into it.

LIPC would also point out that it was not until 2017/18 that regular problems began to be experienced with overflows from the foul drains on Church Road. The central area of the village (from The Square to the Green Man pub) has for many years experienced occasional problems with the storm drains overloading. However, this is almost exclusively when the level of the River Itchen has risen above the non-return discharge flaps set into the flood defence wall. The Environment Agency pumping station at Manor Farm on Church Road ensures that water feeding into the storm system continues to be pumped out into the river.

Prior to 2017/18 there were few (if any) instances of the foul drains on Church Road overflowing following periods of heavy rainfall. Currently any rainfall above 15 – 20mm per hour, or sustained heavy rainfall for periods over about 4 hours or more inevitably results in overflow from the Church Road foul drains.

4. CONCLUSION

Long Itchington Parish Council concludes that the cause of all the sewage overflow problems on Stockton Road, Southam Road and Church Road are the direct result of the error by Severn Trent of wrongly identifying the Stockton Road storm drain as a foul sewer.

Had Severn Trent maintained accurate records of the drainage system in Long Itchington and/or conducted a survey before submitting a “no objection” response to the Spinney Fields housing development this would have identified the need for a new sewer, the cost of which would have been met by the developer.

The conversion of the storm drain to a combined foul and storm drain was an attempt by Severn Trent to rectify their error at minimal cost to the company. This has clearly failed to resolve the problem and the residents of Long Itchington continue to experience overflows of sewage whenever there is a heavy rainfall event.

Severn Trent, as a matter of urgency, must resolve this situation at whatever financial cost to the company. It is unacceptable for Long Itchington to be placed in any kind of “queue” or to have to wait until funding is made available through a Severn Trent internal prioritisation process.

The mental and physical health and wellbeing of Long Itchington residents is being placed at risk and ongoing environmental damage is being caused. The Parish Council and residents of Long Itchington have been extremely patient while Severn Trent has attempted to resolve the problems. Our patience has now expired.

NOTE: Long Itchington Parish Council would like to acknowledge on record our appreciation of the efforts made by locality colleagues at Severn Trent to address the sewage overflow problems experienced in Long Itchington. Luke McCusker and his predecessor (Aaron McCusker) have worked hard to address our concerns. They

have always responded in a helpful and timely manner. The reasons they have been unable to solve the problems are as set out above.

Long Itchington Parish Council

September 2020