
SEWAGE DISCHARGES, FORENESS SEWAGE PUMPING STATION – OVERVIEW

To: **Thanet Beaches Contamination Review Task & Finish Group - 06 September 2012**

Main Portfolio Area: **Operational Services**

By: **Mike Humber, Engineering and Technical Services Manager**

Classification: **Unrestricted**

Ward: **All Thanet Coastal Wards**

Summary: The report provides an overview of the sewage discharge from the Pumping Station at Foreness Point which occurred over a period commencing at the end of May 2012 and coinciding with the Jubilee Bank Holiday weekend.

For Information

1.0 Introduction

1.1 During normal operation the sewage Pumping Station at Foreness Point, which is owned and operated by Southern Water, receives foul sewage from the Thanet area, mainly via gravity sewers. This is pumped across Thanet to the Weatherlees Treatment Works for treatment. The treated effluent is then pumped back to Foreness where it is discharged into the sea via the long sea outfall.

2.0 Background

2.2 On Wednesday 30th May 2012 it is understood that untreated sewage was allowed to discharge directly onto the foreshore in front of the pumping station through spillways in the seaward wall of the station. This is understood to have occurred again between the hours of 3am and 1pm on Sunday 3rd June 2012 and again for a shorter duration on Monday 4th June. This discharge of raw sewage was unscreened meaning that non bio-degradable matter, which is normally removed during treatment, was also discharged.

3.0 Timeline of Events from Initial Council Involvement

3.1 This section provides a broad outline of the main events associated with this incident and allows the basis for further more detailed exploration by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel. All the details are based on information from the perspective of the council.

3.2 Friday 1st June 2012

Initial notification of a minor sewage discharge affecting northern end of Botany Bay received by the Council and being dealt with by Southern Water Services (SWS). SWS requested the assistance of TDC's Surf Rake (Beach Cleaning Machine) for Saturday morning. Environmental Health, Environment Agency (EA) and RNLI informed of situation.

3.3 Saturday 2nd June 2012

Clearance action undertaken by SWS assisted by TDC staff and following consultation with EA the decision was made not to close the bathing waters.

3.4 Sunday 3rd June 2012

Notification received early evening by TDC from EA of further discharge of unscreened raw sewage between 3am and 1pm on Sunday via the outlet sluices in the rear wall of the pumping station building and across the adjacent beach.

Arrangements were made for the surf rake to remove any observed debris supported by mobile teams of TDC cleansing staff on Monday 4th June to manually pick debris from the shoreline as required.

SWS informed that beaches were likely to be closed for bathing on Monday 4th June and that they should take on the responsibility for the preparation and distribution of public signage.

RNLI informed the situation and the high chance of requiring a closure of bathing waters on Monday 4th June.

3.5 Monday 4th June 2012 (Bank Holiday)

An early morning site inspection was undertaken by TDC and EA and revealed a large amount of visible sewage related matter along the high tide line. The rough conditions meant that large quantities of seaweed had been detached from the chalk reefs around the coastline which had been carried by wave action and stranded in the inter-tidal areas of the foreshore. A high concentration of sewage related matter was also found to be mixed in with detached seaweed on the foreshore on east coast bays. Stranded debris was also found in significant quantities on the surface of some lower promenades which was a result of the large waves overtopping the sea wall and leaving the debris behind.

As no water quality test results were available the decision to close beaches for bathing was made with immediate effect based on visual observation around the coast and the likely impact of the reported discharge.

RNLI informed of the Council's decision to close tidal part of beach and bathing waters. Red flags were flown on all 10 patrolled beaches indicating that it was not safe to bathe and lifeguards were requested to reinforce this message.

SWS organising mobile teams to undertake a warning and informing role on all beaches that were not patrolled by lifeguards.

TDC were notified by the EA of a further discharge by SW for a 3 hour period.

SWS had been tasked with provision of warning signs but these were not erected on Monday. Signs printed overnight to be distributed around the Thanet coastline on Tuesday morning.

3.6 Tuesday 5th June 2012 (Bank Holiday)

SWS and TDC cleansing teams continuing to remove debris from beaches.

The A4 laminated signage produced by Southern Water was displayed on beaches from early in the morning.

3.7 Wednesday 6th June 2012 (Council Offices Reopened)

An officer briefing was held to review the incident response over the weekend and agree actions for the continued management of the beach restrictions and clean up operation.

A further telephone number was requested from SWS to provide to the public for contact.

SWS advised that 3 of the 4 pumps at the pumping station were operational.

150 A3 laminated warning signs were produced by the Council's printing section and of these 100 of these signs were fixed in prominent locations on the coastline during the day.

SWS displayed a further 40 of these signs on timber posts and boards.
All blue flags were taken down pending the reopening of beaches and bathing waters.

3.8 Thursday 7th June 2012

A further 50 TDC signs fixed on railings and sign boards around the coastline, and the operation to clean beaches of debris continued.

The criteria required for reopening of the beaches was discussed in detail by TDC officers and are summarised as follows:

Receipt of favourable bathing water quality test results

Visible debris on beaches significantly reduced

The effective physical operation of the pumping station.

The weather forecast and its potential impact on the pumping station operation

TDC received notification of further sewage discharge following heavy rain late on Thursday afternoon for a period of one hour. In this case the discharge was screened and was released via the 1.9km long sea outfall.

3.9 Friday 8th June 2012

A further 75 public warning signs were printed and installed on timber signboards on main bays to reinforce the no bathing message.

A meeting was held with SWS, EA and TDC officers and cabinet members. The primary purpose of the meeting was to seek confidence from SWS on their ability to recover the full operational status of the pumping station.

Although the first bathing water quality results received on Friday 8th June were encouraging, clearance work on beaches was still underway and there was uncertainty over the weather. It was decided to maintain the restrictions over the weekend.

RNLI Lifeguard Manager advised that the restrictions and 'red flag' status would remain in place over the weekend.

3.10 Saturday 9th and Sunday 10th June 2012

RNLI Lifeguard service in operation over weekend on all 10 patrolled bays. Red flags flown and over 200 warning signs in place around the coast at all bays.

3.11 Monday 11th June 2012

As formal results from further water quality tests were not available it was decided to wait a further 24 hours before reopening the bathing waters.

3.12 Tuesday 12th June 2012

Further water quality results indicated that the bacteria concentration was significantly below the mandatory failure level.

SWS confirmed in writing higher level of contingency in their storage tanks with 3 of the 4 transfer pumps in operation.

Inspections revealed that the coastline was largely clear of obvious debris although both TDC and SWS teams continued to undertake cleansing operations.

A decision was made at 9.30am to fully reopen beaches and bathing waters with immediate effect.

TDC and SWS deployed staff to remove warning signage from coastline and replace this with 100 A3 laminated 'Beach Open' public notices.

Media Actions

The incident was widely reported through all local and regional media outlets, with officers participating in a number of radio and TV interviews throughout the week.

Regular press releases were issued to local and regional media contacts to keep the public informed of the latest situation as it developed.

Regular updates were published on the front page of the council's website, which included the latest press releases and also responses to the most frequently asked questions.

Updates were sent to a number of key partner agencies to ensure they were kept informed of the situation as it developed.

4.0 Conclusions

4.1 This report is intended to provide the main elements of the incident up until the bathing waters were reopened. This is done from the perspective of the information received by the council and the actions it took or requested.

4.2 Work on removing further detritus and seaweed continued until Sunday 1st July, together with further investigations based on public reports and officer observations. Observations of the coast are still underway.

4.3.1 The report does not at this stage provide conclusions or recommendations, but is the potential basis for the Overview and Scrutiny Panel to undertake further investigations.

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Annex List

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| None | N/A |
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Background Papers

| Title | Details of where to access copy |
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| None | N/A |

Corporate Consultation Undertaken

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| Finance | N/A |
| Legal | N/A |