

The Old Vicarage,  
Low Road,  
Fressingfield,  
Eye,  
Suffolk.  
IP21 5QL

6th October 2019

Dear Mr. Simpson,

**Planning Applications in Fressingfield and the position of Anglian Water**

On 4 September 2018 I wrote to you about the sewerage problems in Fressingfield and you very kindly facilitated a meeting with your representatives, LPA and ourselves which took place on 12 October 2018. The meeting was very helpful in allowing me to gain an understanding of the issues, but failed suggest a solution to the problems. ( notes of the meeting attached)

Flooding and sewage are very serious issues in Fressingfield and of great concern to villagers. They affect the quality of life and create health issues, which have been brought to the attention of Public Health England by Suffolk's Director of Public Health.

There are two discrete but linked issues. Firstly surface water flooding, and secondly the egress of sewage onto the highways and into gardens. The latest incidence of flooding and sewage egress was on 1st October 2019 when 5 sewer covers were elevated. There was sufficient serious contamination for your Company to send a "clean up " team.



***October 1st 2019 - Low Road Flooding***



***October 1st 2019 - Sewer  
Overflowing***

**History of Flooding and sewage egress**

I recognise that whilst flooding is not the responsibility of Anglian Water it does impact on the sewerage in Fressingfield. We believe significant flooding is under reported. We know that it occurred four times in five months between 22 December 2017 and 24 April 2018. In addition to the recent event. It is a long standing problem and has occurred over a number of years (see SAFE web site [fressingfieldhousing.org](http://fressingfieldhousing.org) "Low Road Historical Flooding") where representative flood pictures are shown at 20 year intervals. This is not only a problem in winter, but also occurs in summer (12 July 2016.) Flooding is caused by 3 factors, the overtopping of the Beck, the excessive surface water running down from the high point to the low point of the village in Low Road and the sewerage manholes being raised.

The sewerage was planned in the late 1930s and building was delayed because of the war and was finally completed in 1946. Details of the sewerage problems can be found in the lobbying section of the SAFE web site [fressingfieldhousing.org](http://fressingfieldhousing.org) where there are many detailed papers.

The design of the system is well documented. Sewage from the current Post Mill development is pumped uphill to New Street and continues to Church Hill, down to Low Road (150mm pipe) where it joins, at the War Memorial, another 150mm pipe coming across the fields from the John Shepherd development. The two pipes then join and form a single 225mm pipe which runs 200 yards to the pumping station and continues along the Weybread Straight to the treatment plant in One Eyed Lane.

In Low Road, at times of heavy rainfall the sewerage manhole covers lift and raw sewage and sanitary products go over the road and into gardens and also runs back into the stream (the Beck) to be dissipated further.

This is a long standing problem. There exists correspondence in 1985 between our then MP, Michael Lord and the then Anglian Water CEO Peter Bray. The Chief Environmental Health Officer was also involved. It has variously been suggested that pump malfunction and failure to desludge the system was the cause. However, sewage egress has occurred following work to correct these problems, indicating they are not the cause.

The problem is becoming more common and more severe. The contamination has been so severe on occasions that Anglian Water has sent a "Clean Up Team", including the incident which occurred on 1st October 2019. The rain on this occasion was so torrential and the flooding so sudden that water butts would have had no effect on the flooding in the village. The volume of water was so great it would have been impossible to ameliorated the effect.

Abdul Razaq, Director of Public Health and Protection, Suffolk County Council, has been involved and wrote on 11th May 2018.

*"Thank you for your emails. I would agree that the situation relating to sewage leaks is not acceptable and unpleasant. The legal powers sit with the environmental health departments and so I have ensured that Mid Suffolk District Council know of your concerns, but from your email it seems both they and the water company are fully aware of the situation. I have informed Public Health England of the situation although they are advisory only and have no legal powers."*



***Sewage overflowing during flooding in Low Road 02/04/18***

*If sewage leakage does occur I am sure that you realise that it is important to avoid exposure and if exposure does occur scrupulous personal hygiene is essential"*

Because the sewage egress flows into the Beck it is further disseminated and has other impacts. Effect on wildlife may also have occurred (Dr. James Meyer- Suffolk Wildlife). It is noted that water voles have not been seen in the Beck after the latest sewage ingress. We have reported this to the Environment Agency as pollution of a water course.

### **The Cause**

At the meeting held last October with your representatives the cause of the sewage egress was finally understood. When there are high volumes the pressure in the pipe coming downhill from the John Shepherd development is greater than the connection from Low Road because of gravity. This results in back pressure on the sewer in Low Road causing the manholes to "pop". The functional capacity is also unable to cope of times of heavy rainfall for reasons to be discussed.

Detailed investigations by your staff have confirmed there is **no** ingress of general rain water into the closed system. It is believed that the sewer is overloaded at times of heavy rainfall due to dwellings discharging their surface water directly into the foul sewer. When this happens the manholes lift. I understand that historical connections of surface water directly to the foul sewer are not illegal and no resident can be forced to remove the connection. No one has any idea how many houses are connected. Your representatives explained that the problem cannot be solved by increasing the diameter of the pipe work because it would reduce flows in "normal" conditions to such a level as to increase smells and blockages. Should the manholes be sealed to prevent egress then there would be backflow of sewage into peoples' toilets and wash basins. I understand that Anglian Water are not funded to invest in laying "storm pipes" for storm only events.

It seems that the basic capacity of the sewer is satisfactory, but that the functional capacity at times of heavy rainfall is not, because a large amount of capacity is taken up by surface water. At the meeting no solution to this problem was presented. The real issue for the village is that more houses will take up capacity in the sewer leaving less capacity for the surface water making the "tipping point" for egress of sewage lower. I.e. there would be less capacity for surface water than at present. The percentage of sewage in the leaking manhole effluent will also be greater. ie more concentrated

Flooding and the egress of sewage onto the public roads and into private gardens within Fressingfield are serious and unsavoury. These problems will be exacerbated by climate change.

This represents a serious deficiency in the infrastructure in Fressingfield and one, at this point seems incapable of any remedial action. As summed up by the Planning Officer in his report to the Planning Committee on deciding upon Applications 1432/17, 1449/17 and 1648/17, *'the pollution of parts of the village and the Beck, however occasional, with raw sewage, sanitary products and toilet paper is unacceptable pollution that will only worsen with significant levels of new development connecting to the Fressingfield foul water system. As it becomes increasingly common to experience extreme weather conditions in the UK it seems ridiculous and completely unacceptable to expect local people to endure what at times looks and smells like a medieval living environment.'*

#### **Anglian Water 's Current Position on Planning Applications in Fressingfield.**

There is some confusion in my mind as we have been repeatedly been told there that there is only one sewer in Fressingfield and that Anglian Water's statutory responsibility relates to the sewerage and have no role in Flood Risk Assessment. In response to Application 3872/16 - Land at School Lane, Anglian Water have approved an attenuated discharge of surface water into an "Anglian Water surface Water sewer." This discharge will, we presume ultimately discharge to the Beck. If this is so Anglian Water do have a role in surface water management which is very relevant to flooding issues in Fressingfield.

Recently an Application for 24 houses at Post Mill Lane was unanimously rejected by the Local Planning Authority. A main plank of the Planning Officer's Report (as identified above) centred on the problems around flooding and sewage egress. The Applicant Appealed the decision (App/W3520/W/19/3227159). The Appeal was rejected, but the flooding and sewerage issues formed **no part** of the grounds for rejection. In Paragraph 30 of his Report the Inspector stated *"Anglian Water raises no objections to the proposal subject to a condition requiring compliance with the agreed drainage strategy. This response from the relevant authority confirms that the development would not cause harm to the capacity of the sewer, and I have no reason to take a different view from their professional advice."*

I think we have a real paradox here. Your Company is taking a purist view that their sewerage in Fressingfield is fit for purpose and there is capacity within the system, in this case to accommodate a further 24 houses in terms of foul drainage. Undoubtedly this is a point of fact and is true under normal circumstances. The fact that in times of heavy rainfall there is not sufficient capacity is not seen as an issue for your Company as the domestic surface water connections to the foul closed system should not be there.!! The reality of the situation is that the surface water connections

(number unknown) are there. There is no mechanism or budget for removing them. The villagers therefore are faced with a real dilemma as Anglian Water, unless they take a policy decision, will continue to approve Applications in Fressingfield in the knowledge that this will increase the incidence of sewage egress. Whilst the Local Planning Authority fully recognised the argument the Inspector did not leaving the village very exposed in terms of future Applications.

I am sure that you appreciate the issues. I think the latest incident on 1 October really highlighted the need for me to do something, hence this letter. The contamination really was unacceptable with sanitary products floating in the flood water along the road and trapped in the manhole covers. I know that your member of staff who came to clean this up next day took a number of photos, which I am sure will confirm that I am not exaggerating. I have a large number of photos and a video of the incident itself should any of your staff wish to see them.

I would be very grateful if you could review your position when responding to Planning Applications in Fressingfield in the light of the arguments presented in this letter. I strongly believe that Applications should only be approved where there is local "on-site" facility for treating sewage ie a septic tank or similar and Applications from Fressingfield should be assessed by those who are aware of the conditions that exist in this village.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. John Castro

#### **ADENDUM**

Since writing this a further episode of severe egress of sewage and flooding occurred in Low Road/ Cratfield Road. On 6th October 2019 egress of sewage started at 9am and was still continuing at dark. Seven manhole covers were leaking sewage and the contamination with biological and sanitary material was the worst we have seen.

Contaminated water flowed back into the Beck to be dissipated further.

Below are some photographs of today's events.



***October 6th 2019 -  
Sewage overspill into  
Beck, Low Road near  
Baptist Chapel***



***October 6th 2019 –  
Contamination leaking onto  
Low Road***



***October 6th 2019 - Low  
Road Sewer Overflowing***

**Notes of an Informal Meeting held on 12th October 2018 to discuss Sewerage Issues with Anglian Water**

**Present**

**From Anglian Water**

Luke Crump  
Hannah Wilson  
Nigel Minter  
Grant Tuffs

**From MSDC**

Lavinia Hadingham  
Vincent Pearce

**From SAFE**

John Kelsall  
Elizabeth Manero  
John and Pam Castro

**Introduction**

John Castro welcomed those present and stated that the purpose of the meeting was to discuss sewerage issues and to gain a better understanding of Anglian's position in addressing those issues. His note of the 3rd September ( copied to all ) would form the basis of the discussion.

John C explained his understanding of the sewerage system, which is generally correct. It was pointed out that the two 150mms pipe connect at the War Memorial into a single 225mms pipe. Agreed that the pressure in the pipe coming downhill from John Shepherd would be greater than the connection from Low Road due to gravity. John C was concerned that this could result in back pressure on the sewer in Low Road causing the manholes to "pop."

There are two areas of "small surface water sewers " (conduits) which ultimately discharge into the Beck. They have no connection to the foul sewerage. This fact had not been appreciated by SAFE members, who had understood that there was only one sewer. Noted that because of the topography surface water runs down the four hills( Church Hill; Buckingham Hill; Back Street; Harleston Hill) to the Beck in Low Road. The soil in Fressingfield has low permeability.

**Why do we have egress of sewage in Low Road?**

Detailed investigations had been undertaken by Anglian and there is **no** ingress of rainwater into the closed system. It is believed that the sewer is overloaded at times of heavy rainfall due to dwellings discharging their surface water directly to the sewer. When this happens the manholes lift.( five times in the last year). Historical connections of surface water directly to the foul sewer are not illegal and no resident can be forced to remove the connection. No one has any idea how many houses are connected. The problem cannot easily be solved as to increase the diameter of the pipe work would reduce flows in "normal" conditions to such a level as to increase smells. Should the manholes be sealed then there would be backflow of sewage into people's properties. Anglian Water are not funded to invest in laying " storm pipes" for a storm only events. Anglian stated that under normal conditions only 50% of the sewerage network was currently used. Which disagrees with the



SAFE assessment. There was agreement that the egress of sewerage relates exclusively to periods of heavy rainfall and the Beck need not flood for this to occur. The problem is that when it does flood effluent enters the water course. The point was made that there is no deliverable solution and the egress of sewage may continue. John Kelsall highlighted the fact that with the potential for more houses to be connected to the sewer then more of the spare capacity would be utilised within the sewer making the "tipping point" for egress of sewage lower. ie. there would be less capacity for surface water than at present.

### **Bill Abatements**

Unknown how many households have bill abatements for not discharging surface water to the sewer. This cannot therefore be utilised for modelling purposes.

### **New Properties with surface water connected to Sewer**

New properties are not permitted to connect surface water to the sewer, but for developments under 10 houses Anglian Water are not involved. Vincent stated that the Building Regulations would prohibit connections of the surface water drainage to the sewer, but it was pointed out that it is impossible to say that this never happens. **( Please see foot note )**

### **The Chapel Scheme(3872/16 )**

Confirmed that this scheme discharges to a "surface Water Sewer" and ultimately to the Beck at an agreed attenuated rate.

### **The Three outstanding Applications**

Hannah confirmed that none of the major Applications would discharge surface water into the used(foul) water sewer, but all three would ultimately be discharging surface water to the Beck. SAFE believe that this will increase the risk of more flooding.

### **Desk Top Modelling**

Luke explained how the computer modelling worked. SAFE were concerned as to how robust such modelling is. Without knowing the amount of rain water entering the system it is impossible to know the starting point in terms of capacity. The models did not feed in exceptional storm events.

### **Revised Site Layouts**

It was asked whether revised drainage strategies should be prepared if site layouts changed. For example, in the case of Stradbroke Road there is now more hard landscaping. Hannah reported that if the developer makes amendments to the onsite design, reducing permeability of the site, the developer would need to construct additional on site attenuation and still only discharge at the agreed rate. Concern was expressed by SAFE over this approach " a paddock will not have the same run off rates as a car park."

### **Issues around Flooding**

Whilst accepting this area is not directly the responsibility of Anglian they do work with local Flood leads and model 1:30 year events using predictions from the Met Office. The model which Anglian Water uses is an industry wide standard model agreed by other agencies

including the Environment Agency. Vincent reported that the Environment Agency were now using 1:1000 year event modelling.

It was noted that residents in Low Road had had difficulty in obtaining house insurance as the area has been designated as a flood zone.

SAFE is also concerned over the proposed attenuation restricting flows from the new developments to the water course. In times of heavy rainfall flooding to the new developments would be mitigated, but the flows, if excessive could overcome the systems and excess water flow to the Beck, causing off site flooding, contrary to NPPF.

### **Environmental Information Request**

Grant apologised for the delay in response and for the fact that some of the information was incomplete and not totally accurate.

There was confusion in respect of data collection. Nigel confirmed that records for day to day incidents have been recorded since 2011. The Environment Agency(EA) has collected data since 1997, BUT for an incident to show on the EA records it has to meet certain criteria as to the level of pollution. For example whilst the incident in April 2018 was submitted it has not been placed on the EA list of incidents. Since 2011 Anglian Water have reported five incidents in Fressingfield to the EA. Anglian Water are dependent on Fressingfield residents to report incidents. Only 2 of the 4 incidents this year were reported to Anglian.

Elizabeth drew attention to an email from the EA stating that Anglian Water should take steps to reduce the amount of surface water going to the sewer and that they would be discussing the pollution issues in Fressingfield with Anglian . None of the Anglian representatives were aware of any approach from the EA and agreed to follow this up.

Anglian have no powers to require residents to remove their surface drainage connections from the foul sewer and do not have any power to object to a Planning Application nor can they prevent a connection to the foul sewer from taking place. Anglian's legal position is understood. It must be recognised that there are risks in accepting a system that will be under greater strain at a time of heavy rainfall. Vincent recognised Anglian Water's legal position in the consultation process and suggested that he write to Hannah with specific questions on which he required answers. Hannah confirmed that Anglian would be in a position to respond to the specific questions relating to the Planning Applications.

### **Key Messages**

-It is highly likely that the egress of sewage is due to overload of the system at times of heavy rainfall because of historical connections of surface water to the foul sewer.

- There is NO obvious deliverable solution, therefore egress of sewage in Low Road will continue in the future, regardless as to whether there is further development.

-Site topography and the fact that the Post Mill , Stradbroke Road, and John Shepherd Road all ultimately discharge surface water to the Beck which must increase the risk of flooding in Low Road.

It is important that the relevant authorities maintain the Beck to keep it clear.

- There has been serious under reporting of incidents by residents. Anglian Water assessment can only take account of the known issues.

*-More houses will increase the volume of effluent in the sewer decreasing the spare capacity for rain water thereby increasing the risk of sewage egress in Low Road. This is contrary to the NPPF and Anglian's policy of not causing disadvantage to existing customers. Anglian will respond to written questions by the Principal Planning Officer on this issue.*

PEC 25/10/2018

**Foot Note**

**Anglian Water Amendment**

**New Properties with surface Water Connected to the Sewer**

*New properties are only permitted to connect surface water to the foul sewer network if all other methods of surface water discharge have proven to be non-viable, but for developments under 10 houses Anglian Water do not normally make comment unless requested to do so by a customer or an LPA case officer. Vincent stated that the Building Regulations would prohibit connection of the surface water drainage to the sewer, but it was pointed out that it is impossible to say that this never happens.*