



Helen Grant MP
House of Commons
London
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13 NOV 2014

Our ref:
MW/JG/8000021872
Date:
14 November 2014
Contact:
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Dear Helen

Re: Flooding in Marden and Staplehurst, Kent

It was good to meet you last week and I hope that you felt that the meeting was productive and helped to improve your understanding of the flooding issue affecting the villages of Marden and Staplehurst.

I am writing to confirm the actions that were agreed at the meeting held on 12 November and also to respond formally to your letter dated 30 September 2014.

Firstly, I have detailed the actions already underway and those that we will be progressing in the near future.

- We have sealed the manholes in the sewer where we can to help reduce the amount of surface water entering the sewers
- We are working to increase the resilience and capacity of the Marden Road Pumping Station. There are currently temporary pumps in place at the moment and a permanent solution should be in place within the next week.
- We will continue to work with Kent County Council, the Lead Flood Authority, to develop a surface water management plan for the area to improve the surface water drainage in the area and crucially, reduce the amount of surface water that ingresses into our sewers
- Mel Karam, Director of Infrastructure, will provide you with a strategic review of the situation in the area, which you will receive by mid December
- I will meet with you again in the New Year to discuss the findings of the review
- Representatives from Southern Water's regional planning team will meet with Maidstone Borough Council to develop a better understanding between agencies when it comes to addressing plans for new development.

Secondly I would like to reiterate some of the key points that we discussed at our meeting.

The flooding that occurs in the Marden and Staplehurst area is due to surface water and groundwater entering the sewer network and inundating the pipes. This impacts on the operation of the system, causing flooding from manholes, restricting customer toilet use and putting additional pressure on the pumping station. The sewers have adequate capacity to deal with sewage waste from homes and businesses, but not for the excessive amount of water that is entering them during periods of heavy rainfall.

The actions that we are carrying out to seal the sewers and improve the resilience of Marden Road pumping station will help to mitigate this issue but will not solve it. Reinstating an effective surface water management system for the area is crucial to reduce the amount of water that enters the sewers and allow them to operate as they should do. The responsibility to develop Surface Water Management Plans sits with the Lead Flood Authority, in this case, Kent County Council. This is detailed within the Flood and Water Management Act (2010). Southern Water will play an active role in this process, alongside other key agencies.

I want to reiterate my apology regarding the language of the letter sent to the residents regarding the situation in Staplehurst. It was unacceptable and you have my assurance that we are making improvements in this area. However, there is a need for us to prioritise issues and as I'm sure you will understand that the highest priority is given to those customers experiencing internal flooding. As I said at the meeting we need as much information from residents as possible to help us understand the impact of the issues being experienced and allow us to prioritise our actions, so I do urge customers to report any issues to us.

I understand the residents' concerns regarding new developments. However as explained at the meeting, Southern Water is not a Statutory Consultee in the planning process. Planning and Building Control responsibility remains the decision of the Local Authority, and elected representatives of the local Council. Southern Water has no power to prevent a development from being built.

However, as a sewerage undertaker Southern Water is often contacted by the Planning Authority with regard to planning issues, as the planning process does take into consideration concerns about flooding issues. When contacted we will always comment on applications after checking our records for details relevant to that area. Therefore, where we need to provide new infrastructure to serve a new development we will do so, but we can not deliver this until there is planning certainty. I also would like to confirm that the contribution made by the developer towards new infrastructure is only used for that purpose.

I trust this information is of use to you. However, if you have any further queries, please contact my PA Emma Clarke, on 01903 272603. I look forward to meeting with you again in the New Year.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Matthew Wright', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Matthew Wright
Chief Executive Officer