

MARKYATE PARISH COUNCIL



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Clerk to the Council: Mrs V Tilley

3rd July 2024

Dear Mr Harding.

Markyate Parish Council has asked me to write to Thames Water because it is extremely concerned about the continuing discharge of untreated sewage from the Markyate Sewage Treatment Works into the River Ver, an internationally important and irreplaceable ecosystem. The Ver has received a constant 1880 hours (according to your EDM-map) which started on 20/03/24 at 06:15, and a total so far in 2024 of 2476.5 hours of discharge as I write.

In England in 2023, untreated sewage was discharged for a total of 3,606,170 hours through storm overflows – more than double what it was in 2022, yet in 2023 Markyate STW reportedly discharged for only 10 hours across four events. Although the beginning of 2024 has undeniably been very wet, 2021 was similar, so what other factors have contributed to this horrifying increase in discharge?

Given the upstream location of the Markyate STW, and the length of time the discharge has been ongoing, the potential for ecological harm from this point-source of pollution is very much greater than most outfalls and we would hope this site would be a high priority.

I'm sure Thames Water is aware that at River Hill, Flamstead the nitrate and phosphate levels are 'unhealthy', with nitrates returning the maximum (10+) result, high phosphate levels downstream at Luton Lane, and well over recommended levels at Redbournbury Mill (Ver Valley Society June 2024). Sewage fungus in the Flamstead area is bank-to-bank with the 'high priority habitat' (as designated in Storm Overflow Discharge Reduction Plan, Environment Agency) River Ver practically ecologically dead, and filamentous algae reducing oxygen levels beyond the Mill. Even with the low river flows of 2023 and apparently low levels of discharged sewage, River Hill still recorded very high nitrates, grey coloured water and persistent brown scum in July 2023 (Ver Vally Society, Oct 2023)

With the likely effects of climate change well documented, and organisations like the Ver Valley Society and River Chess Association locally and The Rivers Trust, Friends of the Earth and others nationally raising the alarm for many years the lack of foresight and action by Thames Water is especially shocking.

In your own Markyate Groundwater Infiltration System Management Plan written in 2021 it states *'Within recent years there have been unplanned unconsented unavoidable discharges in the network as a result of surcharging manholes causing pollution. This has been as a direct result of the influence of groundwater infiltration. We anticipate that this situation may continue until such time we are able to*

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implement a long-term solution. So, we would ask what the long-term solution is beyond monitoring, and what progress has been made towards it.

The report concludes *'With regard to Markyate we do not envisage needing to undertake mitigation work within the network.'* Clearly, with approaching 2000 hours of continuous discharge, and nearly 2500 hours of total discharge, this statement needs revising.

In the face of a climate and ecological emergency we need our waterways to be clean, healthy, functioning systems, where wildlife thrives. Unfortunately, this is not the case here. Our waterways should be a haven for wildlife, with a wide variety of aquatic plants, invertebrates, amphibians, fish, mammals, such as water voles and otters, and birdlife, such as kingfishers. These waterways should act as safe wildlife corridors, allowing these species to move through our countryside. The Cost Benefit Analysis and Best Technical Knowledge Not Entailing Excessive Cost assessments frankly sound inappropriate in the face of the desperate need to prevent future harm and begin to restore the sensitive chalk catchments.

Markyate Parish Council looks forward to a comprehensive reply with details of the planned remediation to be implemented in the next funding period from 2025, and when those works are expected to be carried out.

Sincerely,

Vicki Tilley
Clerk to Markyate Parish Council