

RIVER RHYMNEY TASK GROUP

NOTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT THE COUNCIL OFFICES, TREDOMEN ON TUESDAY, 19TH AUGUST 2003 AT 11.00 A.M.

PRESENT:

Councillor N.G. Turner - Chairman

CAERPHILLY COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Councillors M.G. Parker and R. Woodyatt, Mr. A. Brown, Mr. R. Van Gemeren,
Miss H.C. Morgan

WESSEX WATER ENTERPRISES

Mr. P. Oaten

ENVIRONMENT AGENCY WALES

Mr J. Gregory, Miss M. D'Onofrio, Miss C. Murphy

RHYMNEY RIVER FEDERATION OF ANGLING CLUBS

Mr. B. Pritchard, Mr. D. Roberts

APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was received from Mr S. Hill (Coal Authority).

RIVER POLLUTION TASK GROUP

The meeting was convened with interested parties and involved organisations to consider the creation of a task group which would establish accepted communication lines and rapid response systems to tackle the various problems on the River Rhymney.

It was agreed by all present that a task group should be established with the aim of developing a mutually acceptable scheme which will tackle the pollution problems and restore the River Rhymney to a pollution free waterway (it was anticipated that the approved scheme could be modified to fit the circumstances on other watercourses). It was accepted that this could only be achieved if all parties work together sharing information and local knowledge, pooling resources and creating mapping systems and databases, which could be utilised by each organisation. As such, the task group would meet on a regular basis to achieve this aim.

Concerns were expressed at the effects pollution is having on the ecology of the river (fish stocks, insect and plant life) and it was pointed out that pollution is created from a number of sources (former mine workings, accidental spills, sewerage overflows, surface water run off, illegal connections (e.g. where a washing machine or toilet has been accidentally connected to storm water drains or sewers rather than the foul water drains or sewers) and the illegal dumping of rubbish in the water course). The need to highlight specific problem areas and take necessary action to prevent regular occurrences were discussed and it was felt that a constant and regular series of monitoring checks could assist in pinpointing specific problem areas.

The responsibilities of the Environment Agency were noted and the role of Wessex Water Enterprises (as Dwr Cymru Welsh Water Sewerage Operating Contractor) in undertaking routine maintenance works and attending incidents to carry out clean up operations were

highlighted. It was accepted that there is a need to more quickly determine which organisation is responsible for dealing with specific incidents (e.g. an incident is reported to the Environment Agency who investigate the matter and find that it is an issue for the Wessex Water who then have to also investigate the issue before any action can be taken). In the meantime the incident remains untreated until responsibility is determined and action can be taken.

Clarification was sought on the process of advising complainants of the action that has been taken and the Angling Association requested that a comprehensive system of recording incidents and reporting back following pollution reports be introduced. It was accepted that under the Data Protection Act the details of a complainant who has contacted the Environment Agency cannot be given to a third party. As such, if Wessex Water then deals with the complaint, it would not have access to the details of the complainant to report back on action that has been taken.

The amount of reactive work required to be undertaken was noted but it was felt that with greater co-operation between the agencies more proactive works could be identified to prevent incidents re-occurring on a regular basis.

It was noted that the Rhymney River Federation have been working with Wessex Water and identified specific problem areas and numbered manhole cover locations on plans. This information has enabled certain incidents to be dealt with more quickly by use of map reference numbers. The Federation have also offered to provide manpower to assist in the drawing up of definitive maps of problem areas and to initiate checks on the river length to ensure that the most accurate information is available.

It was accepted that if a database were to be established detailing combined sewerage outlets and storm water discharges and other sources of potential pollution into the river and this was supported by information on the regular and periodic incidents which have been logged, proactive rather than reactive works would be undertaken. The requirement for collating the information from each data-collecting department within the organisations would be a vital part in its success.

Reference was also made to concerns in relation to the trunk sewer in New Tredegar, an undertaking that an extensive ecological study would be undertaken by the Ecological Assessment Team and the problem of illegal connections. These were specific issues, which were in the process of being addressed by the relevant organisation.

Mr Oaten indicated that he is in the process of preparing a report to be presented to Dwr Cymru which deals with issues regarding illegal connections and request consideration be given to the reintroduction of the regular joint inspections of certain sewers. He would present a report on the outcome in due course.

It was agreed that the Task Group, facilitated by the county borough, should meet on a regular basis and, by the next meeting (to be scheduled for the end of October 2003), the respective organisations should give consideration to how best to achieve the aims and submit any reports that they wish to be considered.