

Improving the management of surface water, flood risk and river health



All Party Parliamentary
Water Group

Date	Wednesday 24 May 2023
Time	13:00 – 14:00
Venue	House of Lords Committee Room 2A and on Zoom The meeting was hybrid, with some virtual attendees.
Chair	Baroness Anne McIntosh of Pickering Co-Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Water Group In attendance Liz Twist MP Co-Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Water Group.
Speakers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Helen Wakeham, Director, Water Transformation, Environment Agency• Dr Lucinda Gilfoyle, Head of Environmental Strategy, Water UK• Matt Wheeldon, Director of Infrastructure Development, Wessex Water

NON VERBATIM MINUTES

Co-Chair Baroness McIntosh of Pickering opened the meeting and welcomes panellists and attendees.

In her opening remarks she explained there are questions over who will pay and maintain to manage a SUDs system. She noted that Water Companies and highway authorities are not responsible for the water that comes off roadways which creates a responsibility issue. Baroness McIntosh wants to see all highway authorities take responsibility for all water coming off



roadways and flooding that can be caused by such water. She further raised concerns over the right to connect and emphasised the need to involve the planning system.

Baroness McIntosh welcomed **Helen Wakeman, Director of Water Transformation at the Environment Agency.**

Helen Wakeman started by discussing storm overflows and that they only make up less than 10% of the problem compared to other issues such as farming. She said the biggest impact is physical transformation of water ways. Highlighting the progress that has been made Helen explained that fresh water invertebrates are in a much healthier condition now compared to 20 years ago. Improvements in wildlife and environments are just about keeping pace with investments and although those investments are good, we need to consider how to support those environments in the future. She warned that all the negative stories can be detrimental to meaningful and productive conversations.

Baroness McIntosh thanked Helen and introduced **Dr Lucinda Gilfoyle, Head of Environmental Strategy at Water UK.**

Dr Lucinda Gilfoyle started by discussing Water UK's recent apology and forward plans to support water health across the UK. She explained that industry is ready to invest 10 million in water efficiency and health. She said there will be a National overflow Plan published in the late summer which focuses on how investments will be used to deal with overflows and excess rain water. The plan is project to cut significant numbers of spills.

Support for healthy inland bathing waters will include testing and engagement with local stakeholder to get localised expertise, and develop toolkits. On surface water Dr Gilfoyle noted that the government's decision to consult on schedule 3 is welcome as well as conversations about the right to connect. There needs to be further measure to address the stress surface water is placing on the network. Progress on unflushables is good to see, but blockages from other plastics requires further action, such as legislation.

Baroness McIntosh thanked Dr Gilfoyle for her comments and introduce **Matt Wheeldon, Director of Infrastructure Development at Wessex Water.**

Matt opened by discussing good rain water management. Rain water should be captured and considered as a resource and excess should be returned to as close to where it fell as possible. Rain water management leads to lower bills, lower carbon footprint and lower storm overflows. There are ways to be more rain water conscious in development but it can cost housebuilders more money. Schedule 3 doesn't remove the right to connect but requires it to go through SUDs first. All new developments should be required to include rainwater management. Upstream and downstream solutions do not address the fundamental issues. Matt suggested a more devolved approach to water management through legislation and societal changes.

Baroness McIntosh thanked Matt and asked the panel about affordability and how water companies are being asked to take on responsibility and costs for challenges in the water sector. She noted that there is only so much cost that can be passed on to consumers.

Matt explained that the affordability comes down to risk and reward, as customers are frequently asked to subsidise services, like council tax. He supported the idea of a revenue cap to help those who cannot afford it.



Lucinda said that Water UK is very supportive of social tariffs to support lower income customers to address affordability. She noted that some companies are putting their own money in as well. There is a further re-evaluation of how to support customers.

Helen added that there is a variety of factors which impact costs. She explained that it is important to invest resources effectively at the right time rather than when it is convenient.

An audience member asked what is and isn't good to cut water use and undertake sensible conservation techniques.

Lucinda replied that there is a campaign to identify good practice within water companies and usage and that more guidance would be coming out in due course.

Matt gave the example of capturing of rainwater and how incorporating that into the design and development of new homes as well as retrofitting existing homes. This doesn't necessarily happen because it is quite expensive to retrofit and the savings from using rainwater isn't highlighted and isn't as big of a saving to entice many people to switch.

Lucinda added that through consultations they have asked DEFRA to review the power water companies have to address the use of rainwater.

Helen noted that nobody is making the connection between storm overflows and river abstractions.

Matt agreed that the band-aid approach is failing and that the current approach is failing.

Baroness McIntosh circled back to social tariffs and asked about the success of social tariffs in the water sector.

Matt reiterated the importance of rainwater management and its impact on storm overflows as the standing water charge on consumers' bills is something they cannot control through consumption. This can be addressed if consumers can deal with rainwater themselves.

Co-Chair Liz Twist MP asked about how water companies are addressing the separation of clean rainwater and other clean water from unclean water in a more practical way. She also expressed her disappointment that social tariffs were not being pursued within this sector.

Lucinda explained that separating clean rainwater is very difficult to separate because it regularly goes into storm drains which need to lead to sewers in order to accommodate extreme weather conditions, thus there is no current mechanism to separate rainwater. Water UK has proposed that new powers over rainwater and surface water could address this issue.

Matt added that the highway authorities have different rules or lack thereof for surface water management.

Helen agreed and explained that there are many pieces of legislation that if changed would help to address the issues discussed today.

Baroness Berridge noted that there is a need to demystify the process of water companies and to develop more transparency for consumers.

Lucinda agreed that there needs to be a level of education and cooperation between water companies and consumers to create a better relationship.

Baroness McIntosh opened the floor to questions.

An audience member stated that many of the topics discussed today were being discussed many years ago. The cost of inaction is growing every day and asked what the tipping point would be for all parties.

A second audience member asked about a cost benefit analysis for water companies to make the changes needed.

A third audience member asked why we are not seeing the rainwater catchment system being used in the UK, despite it successfully being incorporated into many other countries.

A fourth member of the audience asked what needs to be done to ensure chalk streams remain clear.

Responding to all the audience questions, Matt said the cost of inaction is high and we won't want everyone to fully experience that before we act. There is no top down action meaning there is no changes to development requirements.

Lucinda said there is a wider issue beyond storm overflows and there is a need to innovate within the sector. In term of purple pipes there is no incentive.

Lastly, Helen agreed there is a lack of top down incentives and direction. She noted the Environment Agency is looking into the land bank and development.

Baroness McIntosh thanked everyone for attending.

Questions & comments from APPWG May Session

Brian (formerly Yorkshire Water) to Everyone 13:30

- Well said Matt. I couldn't agree more. The effective control and management of rainwater is key, but the current business model does not support this. 30 years after privatisation, is it time to review the ability of the water industry as currently configured to meet the challenges, which are in some respects more acute than 30 years ago, such as the successful not-for-profit model in Wales?

Diana (Thames Blue Ecosystem) to Everyone 13:31

- I agree with everything Matt said. In fact, SuDS are already legislated for - the government passed the Flood & Water Management Act 2010 in which Clause 3 MANDATES SuDS in all new developments. However, it was not enforced in the hope that local authority planners would do the job. This is currently being reviewed and should be made mandatory. Plus enact additional legislation mandating them to be retrofitted in all new developments since 2010 where they were not installed.

- https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sustainable-drainage-systems-reviewhttps://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1128073/The_review_for_implementation_of_Schedule_3_to_The_Flood_and_Water_Management_Act_2010.pdfhttps://www.edie.net/sustainable-drainage-set-to-be-mandated-new-developments-uk-government-confirms/?amp=true

Paul (Water Research Centre (WRc)) to everyone 13:31

- Schedule 3 has been implemented in Wales and many lessons learnt.

Diana (Thames Blue Ecosystem) to Everyone 13:34

- I have written answers to the agenda questions for discussion in the email. Posting them here now for discussion and for the APPG information.
 - What needs to be done to reduce pressures and increase long term resilience of drainage infrastructure?
 - Our answer: Embark on a 25 year project of IWRM/Blue Greening beginning with low-hanging fruit, easier, cheaper things (rain gardens, water gardens, green roofs, green walls, sponge city planting, rewilding, banning paving over front and back gardens and making urban realm paving permeable and directed into street planting, use of grey water in gardens to prevent going down sewers, make roads porous etc to prevent toxic chemical/microplastic stormwater runoff into sewers). Meanwhile, planning and beginning a major national infrastructure project of a paradigm shift from the Victorian end-of-pipe solution for sewage to harvesting rainwater and reticulating it into planting/green infrastructure to increase biodiversity, cool our cities and suck up carbon from the atmosphere. Mandate domestic septic systems and composting WCs where possible.
- <https://www.rgs.org/geography/advocacy-and-impact/impact/bluegreencities/>

Brian (formerly Yorkshire Water) to Everyone 13:35

- Water UK's comments are very encouraging, but I would go further to say that through the effective control and management of rainfall and stormwater at source using SuDS and nature based solutions, supported by active rainwater management/RTC, capture, recycle and re-use they can also reduce the need to augment existing networks and move towards integrated water resource management.

Diana (Thames Blue Ecosystem) to Everyone 13:36

- Domestic water butts are laudable and necessary but there is so much stormwater runoff from public buildings, urban realms and roads. This must be captured and reticulated. But cleaned first as road runoff especially full of plastic particulates and other toxic chemicals from air pollution.

Lance (Binnies UK) to Everyone 13:37

- Large water butts should be included with all 'new builds' with gardens in the same manner as energy efficiency is addressed.

Brian (formerly Yorkshire Water) to Everyone 13:41

- The current business and regulatory model does not allow for a strategic approach to integrated water resource management.

Paul (Water Research Centre (WRc)) to Everyone 13:41



- We will not meet our net zero targets by rushing to build storage tanks to address the storm overflow issue. We need to look at other options, Nature Based Solutions / SUDs and others

Diana (Thames Blue Ecosystem) to Everyone 13:43

- What are the barriers to renewal of water company assets? How can regulators balance customers' long and short term interests?
- The fact that water company executives are able to pollute our rivers with raw/partially treated sewage and not face criminal charges of ecocide and severe risks to public health. They do not deserve to own their assets; they are destroying them - destroying aquifers, destroying nature, destroying our rivers, lakes and waterways. All the while removing vast sums for foreign shareholders, sums that could have funded Integrated Water resource Management, Rain Water Harvesting and Blue Green Technologies across the nation over the last 30+ years since privatisation. Integrated Water Management projects were beginning to be embarked on by the public water utilities before privatisation but were shelved. Why?

Diana (Thames Blue Ecosystem) to Everyone 13:47

- Long and short term interests? I'm not sure what that even means? Customers' long and short term interests should be that they can expect their government to regulate water companies to provide fresh, clean water at fair cost, not dump billions of gallons of almost raw sewage into our rivers and coastal waters and preserve the natural environment for future generations. Shareholder dividends have asset-stripped our commons, our water. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/ng-interactive/2022/dec/01/down-the-drain-how-billions-of-pounds-are-sucked-out-of-englands-water-system>

Brian (formerly Yorkshire Water) to Everyone 13:47

- Water companies have the right to discharge to highway drains under a s115 agreement of the WIA 1991 This is a reciprocal agreement which should not be unreasonably refused - WaSCS can use highway drains for surface water.

Paul (Water Research Centre (WRc)) to Everyone 13:49

- The impact of highway drainage (which contains some very toxic ingredients) on water quality in our watercourses also needs to be addressed.

Diana (Thames Blue Ecosystem) to Everyone 13:49

- I agree, permeable pavements and urban realm and porous roads are Blue Green Technologies that are part of IWRM, which is actually mandated in the UN SDG6 on Water & Sanitation. Yet we as signatories to the UN SDGs are not embedding IWRM across the UK.

Diana (Thames Blue Ecosystem) to Everyone 13:51

- How could a national plan for rivers work in practice? By giving all our rivers legal standing ie legal rights for rivers, with guardians appointed to represent them and ensure their rights are protected and stand in for them to defend them in court if necessary. Giving nature and rivers their legal rights is gaining traction around the world - it seems to be the only way to protect Nature on which we all depend for our survival. Despite the many UK laws and regulations which superficially appear to protect water and nature but are not being enforced with sufficient determination, in reality our waters are dwindling



and polluted, wildlife populations are crashing and Nature is struggling to maintain her eco-systems. We need a new law, Nature's Law, which will give her legal standing equal to that of any man-made corporation.

- <https://www.parliament.nz/en/get-involved/features/innovative-bill-protects-whanganui-river-with-legal-personhood/>
- <https://www.garn.org/rights-of-nature/>
- <https://www.rightsofrivers.org/https://iwrmaactionhub.org/learn/iwrm-tools/the-rights-of-rivers>
- <https://theecologist.org/2022/aug/09/rights-rivers>
- <https://www.npr.org/2019/08/03/740604142/should-rivers-have-same-legal-rights-as-humans-a-growing-number-of-voices-say-ye>
- <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/article/these-rivers-are-now-considered-people-what-does-that-mean-for-travelers>
- Where can sectors ensure co-benefits for their investment? The government should explore re-nationalisation of water companies or converting them into other more sustainable business models e.g. not-for-(shareholder)-profit public-private partnerships. All water utility debt was written off by the government on privatisation and yet now there is a huge £54M debt hole in their finances which the customer is funding by paying the interest through their bills. This is nothing less than outrageous and shameful that successive governments have allowed this to happen. The environment and the customer should be the key considerations of 'benefits'.