



MINUTES OF THE PUBLIC MEETING WITH SOUTH EAST WATER
Held in Hadlow Down Village Hall, Hadlow Down
at 7pm on 30th January 2024

Cllr Michael Lunn welcomed Dave Hinton, CEO of South East Water and Rob Crumbie, Head of Communications to the meeting. Thanks was expressed to Cllr Standley from ESCC for attending.

Dave Hinton [DH] gave a presentation which covered what has happened, what they learnt and what they are implementing. The full presentation can be found under Appendix A.

The main headlines were the following:

- SEW supply only, they do not deal with sewage. They manage 88 treatment works. They deliver water 24/7 through 9,000 miles of pipe.
- SEW have seen a change in demand since covid changed the world. More people working from home has really affected SEW, the acceleration of climate events has also put on the pressure and the ability to meet demand during the peak times.
- The two recent outages were in Dec 2022 – Freeze/thaw and June 2023 – High temperatures.
- December 2022. There were 500 bursts in one week, an average week is 150. Two thirds of water lost was on customers' pipes. Mutual aid was limited but both events were Nationwide so this failed.
- June 2023 – they were losing water faster than producing. An additional 110 million litres of water per day was produced.
- What they have learnt is they have a better understanding of the demands and understanding where the pinch points are. More training has been done on bottled water stations. There is a new tool on the communications front, since June 2023, Aqualerter has launched and can now reach 75% of customers.
- Their emergency plan has changed to cover 30,000 households, it used to be 15,000. They have also added into the plan on how to deal with livestock.
- Planning for the future, a business plan has been produced with a headline investment of £1.9bn from now until 2030. They are aware they need to improve resilience in the South East and East Sussex.

Cllr Lunn thanked DH for his presentation and stated that there has been a water shortage 4 times now and it is felt that Hadlow Down get forgotten. The Q&A session of the meeting commenced.

Q. It sounds good what you have planned but am concerned as this has happened before in previous meetings, Hadlow Down does get forgotten and they do not get a water bottle station. If Thames Water has less demand, why can you not use them?

A. DH answered that the water industry is set up to deal with the position you are in now and it is not infinitely resilient. They attempt to meet the average peak week but with climate change, the impact is coming faster, as seen in June 2023 for example. The UK framework does not deal with those temperatures and there is not enough headroom. SEW are constantly working with the Environment Agency to get the water that is needed on demand. SEW do collectively plan with the other water places but this was Nationwide. SEW are building a reservoir in Kent.

Q. I have spent the last 2 days on the website, and I fully remember the 2 events that you mentioned. What are the fundamental issues you face? Do you know the problems? I feel that there are 4:

1. Problem moving water between water zones,
2. Haven't kept up with the ability to pour water out,
3. Problems with some of the sources being vulnerable,
4. You have storage issues.

A. DH responded, yes, you have nailed it. Climate change has got ahead of us. To the West there are treatment waters being built at Bewl which provides a big surplus for the infrastructure. This part of the world has interventions coming but they are happening later in the climate change impact. If we knew this was happening it would assist but the changes are coming after the situation. It was the unknown.

Q. I would like to raise leaks, I was taken aback by the information about infrastructure but not leaks. There is a leak on Five Chimneys Lane that has taken 18 months to repair, and it is still not 'repaired'. Along School Lane there is a leak, constantly gets reported but nothing has happened. This is incredibly frustrating when leaks are seen but we had no water.

A. DH responded that it is difficult to comment on leaks as he does not know the specifics on those ones mentioned. Leaks are prioritised on their size and the risk. He states it is very frustrating reporting a leak and nothing being done, he has dealt with this personally. With a standard water leak it will be costing around £10 a day, to repair costs £600/700 a day. No property is without water due to these leaks so there is no service impact. If the service was impacted due to a leak this would be declared an emergency and repaired ASAP.

Q. I have been to two SEW meetings now, 5 years and 2 years ago. The exact same was said then so I will believe it when I see it. I have 4 questions.

1. Does your system now understand where we are if we give you a postcode?
2. Are we on the bottled water stations list now?
3. Priority service register, it doesn't work, they do not get water if they are on the register?
4. When is SEW going to get your income level for the social tariff the same as Southern Water.

A. DH responded that he would need to check the postcode situation. Yes, Hadlow Down will get bottled water station, the last time it was not right. The logistics are being agreed where lorries can go etc. Cllr Lunn explained that out of the 4 situations they have only received water stations once. Hadlow Down are a close community and would work together to deliver the water to the

venerable. DH explained that the social tariffs is set up in conjunction with customers, it lines up with infinity but not with Southern. Priority services register, if they are on there, water should get delivered.

Two residents stated they are on the register and did not receive any water. One resident did receive water, but 2 days after the water was turned back on.

Q. Thank you for giving us information on how the business is run and how the business suffers but what is the criteria for water bottle stations?

A. DH responded that is the population of the area, the length of time the water shortage will likely be and the ease of delivery.

Q. It was explained that Hadlow Down does not have a bus network and the majority of residents are vulnerable and elderly.

A. DH agreed that SEW failed and did not put enough water out. There needs to be bottled water stations with stocks, even unmanned stations would work as the community is close and helpful and would ensure everyone receives the water. Rob Crumbie [RC] stated that DEW need to link in with the Parish Council when this happens again.

Q. Yes there is a risk to humans but what about the livestock issue? Hadlow Down is a rural community and there was no contact to get a water supply to those with livestock. In June 2023 they had to liaise with an emergency volunteer fire company out of Alfriston to bring them water to a farm who needed it for their cattle. How do you plan for the farming community? How are you going to support the humans and farming community when this happens again?

A. DH responded that the farming livestock issue had not been seen previously. SEW are liaising with the NFU to discuss water supply sites on site from 2025, either discounted or free. It would be a double benefit. He asked whether ponds dried up? Residents stated they did not. DH stated that farmers could get a delivery of untreated water.

Q. With the new peaks in demand and the new houses being built, how do you cope?

A. The housing growth forecast is in the bigger plan, and it can be dealt with. SEW are not consulted on any developments and the impact they may have.

Q. One challenge as Parish Councillor was being on the ground and picking up vital information which was fed back to Gold Command at Wealden District Council for reporting, but nothing was escalated and there was a complete communication breakdown. This was incredibly frustrating. Why did this happen?

A. DH responded that SEW attend the Resilience forum. They meet daily when events such as this happens, and the information should have been fed into them to assist. The forum has the ability to divert Fire and Sussex 4x4 where needed.

Q. I want to reiterate that this is my 3rd meeting like this, and I don't have any faith anything will change. The postcode problem continues, still not water bottle stations. The population increase projection has been significant higher recently, are you predicting in advance?

A. DH responded that SEW are using the population forecast from the last 10 months. We have figures that we use to aim demand and we have gathered behaviour awareness from meters, different tariffs, smart meters etc.

Q. The system does hopefully work however on the last issue, when I called and gave them my postcode, I was told I had water. I did not! It is felt that it is an issue with the map and that Hadlow Down is in the middle of two points and gets forgotten.

A. DH responded that water is balanced, it is art and science. Call handlers were looking at the map and it showed you had water, but the house may have been higher. Resources were stretched. It was not ideal.

Q. Doesn't technology have flow meters?

A. DH responded that yes, they do, it states the water going through but not the direction. As water pipes do not have a current, it is based on a battery powered maps/flow. An investment is needed in network control.

Q. We need to know who to call when the PC gets told there is no water. Is there a specific person for Hadlow Down?

A. DH responded that there has been some feedback that the phone line is not working, and issues should be fed through the stakeholder portals. Cllr Lunn stated the following that route through the resilience forum, but this did not work.

Residents explained that the Parish Council is a big part of the village and that they all work together. Hadlow Down should not be a problem in events like this as they will work together.

Q. In 2018, you said you were going to sort out the plans but maybe the best thing is to have a plan? Can you please publish the plan that tells us what you are going to do when there is an outage. If you published the plan, we might even be able to input?

A. DH responded that there is an emergency plan although not sure it can be published. It may have some security issues in order to publish it, but RC is going to look into this. **Action.** We sat in the Scrutiny Committee back in September at WDC, will take the point away to see what can be published.

Comment made by resident. 2/3 years ago, you had a temporary water bottle station, water was delivered and by 08:30 all the vulnerable in the village had water. You need to accept the input from the Hadlow Down Parish Council and community.

Q. How does communications happen when water is cut off in the village. How do we know where the bottle station is and when they are getting a delivery?

A. The Aqualocater says where the station is being held. Phase 3 will have a stock control system also which will be delivered in 2-3 months' time. You will get water stations. DH stated he would deliver it himself if needed.

Q. When we have a power cut, we find out straight away on the phone. Can SEW have this?? How do you access?

A. You get a text on your mobile via the Aqualauncher. The system is great. It launched in June 2023 and has been used 35 times since and has been positive. It was agreed that residents would be happy to be given information and regular updates.

Q. On a shared account, how do you get notifications.

A. You can't, it is just the bill payer.

Q. How much debt do you have?

A. Infrastructure is common issues across the water industry, many assets, around 75% debt.

CLlr Lunn thanked everyone for attending.

The meeting closed at 20:30.