

GREEN FORUM

The Dover Society, The River Dour and Sewage Disposal

LEO WRIGHT

It is exceedingly difficult to report the saga of the River Dour and the Sewage Situation at reasonable length. To recount it in full would be tedious – unless I were allowed even more space for anecdote! I will therefore just give a blow by blow account of the steps taken.

First in the field were Thanet, when they succeeded in getting agreement for a new sewage processing plant at Richborough.

5th Sept. '90. We came in at the large public meeting at Deal: "Deal with Sewage", over which our Chairman presided.

3rd Dec. '90. Folkestone came next with a meeting, again chaired by our Chairman.

18th Jan. '91. The Dover District Council called a public meeting about the flow of the Dour.

4th Feb. '91. We had our well attended public meeting about the River Dour and Sewage Disposal. It was, oddly enough, at this time that the Temple Ewell Dour began to flow again!

Relevant reports of these meetings have appeared in earlier *Newsletters*. Much correspondence followed, with no replies from the Folkestone and District Water Company until David Shaw, our M.P., intervened.

21st Mar. '91. When the FDWC published a Drought Order Application there were so many objections that a hearing by a Government Inspector (shades of Gogol!) was ordered, to be held in Temple Ewell. The objections were not against the Drought Order as such but concerned extraction and the drying up of the Dour and above all of the lakes. The problems of prolonged drought were appreciated but it was impossible to know whether FDWC were doing their best, as there was no communication.

16th May '91. The enquiry was conducted with the traditional courtesy and firmness of Inspectors by Mr David Ward of the D o E. It lasted nearly three hours, so that I can give only an impression here, to keep within reasonable length.

The NRA explained their recommendations. While recognising the severity of the drought, they still considered that the tributaries should be safeguarded as far as possible: this to be achieved by imposing restrictions, thereby reducing demand, by continuing the control of levels and by the discharge of compensatory water, *although reducing both*. (These last two refer only to extraction from Stonehall.)

Temple Ewell, River and Dover were all represented. Although the meeting occupied a weekday afternoon between 30 and 40 people were present. There were several very expert, specialised and well-informed local speakers. Everyone on both sides of the

floor agreed that there were wider problems than those under discussion. The local historic and scientific knowledge established the relentless lowering of the water-table throughout this century, unrelated to climate and owing to extraction. Also, that extraction, other than at Stonehall, affects the tributary streams and lakes and that neither a return to normal average rainfall nor reducing demand will solve the problem.

14th May '91. The Inspector recommended that the Drought Order be made, subject to the Special Conditions (Stonehall).

4th Jun. '91. The Secretary of State accepted the recommendation and made the Drought Order, "subject to the modifications". The fountain in the Market Square was duly turned off.

The revised Drought Order, with the modifications (which include a "reduced" minimum flow and compensatory water *if pumping takes place at Stonehall*) will not ensure that the stream will flow and the lakes remain full. It was agreed at the hearing that it might even be advantageous to FDWC *not* to make use of Stonehall and therefore *not* be required to discharge compensatory water. They could continue, as in 1990, to use Lye Oak, Drellingore and Lower Standen, where the licenced conditions are not related to river flows. In 1990 this led to the drying of streams and lakes. But only Stonehall (and Coombe Farm) were the subject of the enquiry.

The only subsequent event at the time of writing has been a meeting of Mr Dunks, General Manager and Secretary of FDWC and Mr Shaw at the House of Commons. Mr Shaw is seeking to arrange a further meeting in Temple Ewell of Mr Dunks and interested parties.

So, where do we stand, well advanced into another summer of drought? To quote the government inspector's report: "In the absence of heavy rain the river is likely to cease again this summer". It will be very surprising if it does not dry up again. The enquiry meeting did establish that there had been a grave lack of information. It urged more energetic location of leaks and more rapid repairs. It looked towards metering and the construction of a Broad Oak reservoir. What then can amenity societies do that is positive? One answer is that they should positively support and indeed press for work to start on the proposed Broad Oak reservoir. This could save two years of a public enquiry.

13th Jun. '91. Our Committee decided to press for the Broad Oak reservoir. We shall of course be vigilant over the other suggestions.

What progress have we made towards our second target; better sewage disposal? Headlines in the local and national press announce: "Beaches Fail Test" – including our beaches, even St. Margaret's beach, where it was hoped to reach the coveted Blue Flag standard. Well, the NRA has at last made an interim, albeit a cagey reply to our enquiries about the future of the outfall at Dover. I quote from their letter: "The standard of treatment required will be set by the NRA on the basis of the sensitivity of the receiving water As you will understand, it is not appropriate for me at this stage to indicate which standards would be applied to sewage discharged from the Dover outfall". The NRA and Southern Water are being overtaken by legislation. Changes in Government policy announced in 1990 and the requirements of the EC Directive adopted in March 1991 require more action than had been planned. So what can we do? We can continue to write, to press, to lobby by every means to persuade the NRA

174 to classify the seas off the White Cliffs as "sensitive". "Sensitive" because they are used for bathing, sailing and fishing. That classification would necessitate better sewage disposal than the minimum: i.e. repairing and lengthening the sea-outfall and the mere removal of screenings and "settled sewage solids".. (See what has happened at Sandgate!)

To quote from Blake's "Jerusalem" – well, not quite:

We will not cease from Environmental Fight
Till we have
Improved the water and sewage situation
In White Cliffs Green and pleasant land!

POSTSCRIPT

Screened sewage effluent into the Dour.

Correspondence in the local press and questions from numerous members and others made it clear that Dover was very alerted to the Council's application to the NRA to discharge screened sewage effluent, in an emergency only, to the River Dour from land adjacent to Wood Street Pumping Station.

It sounded horrific and we asked for explanations. The "emergency" has to deal with exceptional flood water. In such exceptional circumstances, estimated as once in ten years, houses in Wood Street can be flooded. (At such times the river Dour itself would be in flood, which would reduce the impact.) Our Committee resolved that the application could not be opposed. A differing long-term solution can only come as part of an upgrading of the infrastructure.

L.W.

Correction to: the account of 4th Feb. Meeting in issue No. 10. Page 116.

para 5 should have read "As the River Dour met the 1B classification standard etc." (not 16)

Deadline

for CONTRIBUTIONS

The Editor welcomes contributions suitable for the Newsletter. Illustrations to articles and other appropriate visual materials, are particularly appreciated.

The deadline for Newsletter No. 12 is Monday 18th November. Please note that contributors should state the number of words in any article submitted.

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