

WATER MATTERS

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DOVER SOCIETY members with long enough memories will recall that already in 1988 one of the very first causes which concerned us was water. First it was sea-water quality and cleaner beaches which focussed attention and led to a whole gamut of meetings. That early battle has been won. Work is going ahead on the Dover-Folkestone Waste-water Treatment Plant at Farthingloe and the longer sea outfall.

But already six years of low rainfall were beginning and the cry of 'Rescue our River' was raised. '89, '92, '95 and '96 were years of drought. There were hose-pipe bans in five out of eight years. In 1996 there was only 27% of the long-term average rainfall and water-levels were the lowest since records began. Letters with questions and theories abounded in the press.

The Dover Society put particular questions to FDWS and the Environment Agency, collated their responses and, in November 1996, we wrote, on a wide distribution, urging a public debate, informed by scientific facts. The letter listed eight particular matters that needed further investigation.

On Friday, 21 February 1997 a meeting of interested parties was called by David Shaw, M.P. It was held at Kearsney Manor and was opened and closed by our hostess, Sister Ambrose, always a leader in water matters, who above all wanted an assurance that her lake would never dry! It was chaired by David Shaw and presentations were made by Graham Warren of the Environment Agency, Steve Robinson of FDWS and Bob Kearsney of Dover District Council.

The meeting was optimistic, - in strong contrast to its predecessor in 1994. - not in producing solutions, but in the generous -

indeed lavish - availability of information. (This followed on the very timely and encouraging distribution, a few days previously, of the handsome fifty-page Environmental Performance Report 1995/96 by General Utilities Group to which FDWS now belongs.)

Perhaps the most concise method to report the meeting is to set out how far it answered the eight questions posed in our November letter.

They were as follows:

1. *A balance sheet of water resources and annual renewal compared with usage. Has a comprehensive survey been made of resources and usage?*

Ans. A very comprehensive survey of resources and usage has been made. A balance sheet of resources, renewal and usage is indeed available. We were shown statistics in bar-code and copies of all statistics will be circulated.

2. *The effect of global warming may not be quantifiable, but a proper safety margin needs to be built into future planning.*

Ans. The consensus opinion of the speakers agreed with this.

3. *Full co-operation between the Kent area suppliers and waste-water processors must be assured.*

8 Ans. Such co-operation cannot be ensured between competing companies but could be enforced by OFWAT with its constitutional control over pricing and the Environment Agency with its control over licensing.

4. *A Kent-wide grid for water, with shared resources?*

Ans. A Kent-wide -- or even, idealistically, a national grid, is only for the very long future.

5. *Proper research into the re-use of water enabling a re-charging of the aquifers.*

Ans. Of the re-use of water : even Thames only re-cycles drinking water, not sewage water. Re-charging ground-water is probably not practicable in our catchment area.

6. *Research into the more efficient use of water in homes and factories?*

Ans. Fully agreed. Factories to re-cycle water whenever possible. Re-cycling in the home may come. It could become a planning requirement in new properties. (The plumbing is very expensive in older properties and sometimes impossible.)

7. *The costs of the alternative courses of action?*

Ans. Such costing is an ongoing process and is related to the price-control by OFWAT.

8. *In particular, how may the future of the Dour be assured?*

Ans. The future of the Dour cannot be guaranteed but there are alternative possible actions which are being examined and could be applied. An estimated further two years of research followed by two years of engineering work is required. At present in water-pricing no money is allotted for the river Dour. The Regulator always says that prices must *fall* so there is no spare balance for the river.

We could not hope to solve the problems in one and a half hours but we left assured that the problems were known and understood in detail and solutions were being sought.

Final Question: *What can we do, the Dover Society, the general public, paying consumers, who are also concerned about the environment?*

One possibility: At this time when OFWAT is proceeding towards fixing the charges for the next five years we can lobby OFWAT and other concerned authorities about how we want the new pricing money to be spent.

The Dover Society will certainly be lobbying to try to ensure that the budgeting includes funding for the conservation of the River Dour.

DEADLINE FOR CONTRIBUTIONS

It is necessary to bring forward the publication date for Issue No. 29 and the last date for the receipt of "copy" will be Monday 23rd June.

The Editor welcomes contributions and interesting drawings or photographs. "Paper copy" should be typed at double spacing - if it must be handwritten please write clearly and at wide line spacing. Accurate copy on computer discs is most welcome - almost all types can be handled - but a prior phone call to 01304 208008 would be helpful.

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