

Statement from Langham Parish Council regarding sewerage infrastructure

Langham Parish Council have worked tirelessly since last week's shock announcement, to wade through the huge documented evidence base for the new Local Plan. Among many areas of concern, the local sewerage network perhaps looms largest.

The stage 3 IADP report, published last week, definitively states (para 5.6.21):

"Langham WRC currently has **no** headroom available for future growth and there are **no** medium or long term plans for providing capacity for future population growth". (*Long term means out to 2050*)

In contrast, the Interim Water Cycle Study report, published the same day, makes the vague assertion that:

"Anglian Water have identified improvement plans for the WRC in the AMP8 investment period (2025-2030), hence the level of growth is likely to be achievable in the longer term."

These contradictory statements have presumably both been supplied to your contractor AECOM by Anglian Water. Sadly this fits into a well documented 10 year pattern of Anglian Water speaking with forked tongue to Langham Parish Council and Colchester City Council about their investment plans.

The current Local Plan includes planning policies that require joint sign off of sewerage capacity by Anglian Water and the Environment Agency. The 80 planned homes for Langham have been stalled at 23 homes for over two years now, with the EA unwilling to provide signoff. We also know from FOI requests that the EA have complained formally to CCC in the strongest possible terms about Anglian Water's "misrepresentation and omission of important information, whilst promoting development where there is insufficient capacity at the receiving WRC."

With all this known history, Langham Parish Council is appalled to discover that rather than strengthening its sewerage infrastructure policy in response to this, CCC's policy wording in the proposed new Local Plan has been **weakened** so as to explicitly exclude the EA from the signoff process.

Langham's WRC has exceeded its environmental permit in 4 of the last 5 years. None of the 23 homes that have been built under the current Local Plan should, in retrospect, have been approved. Sewage overflows into streets, gardens and homes are happening more and more frequently. One resident has had their garden flooded with sewage 6 times in the last 3 years. Several houses have been flooded with sewage, and one unfortunate resident has had their house inundated with sewage in 2016 and again in 2024. Each time it has taken 12 months to fully repair, redecorate and refurnish. And still Anglian Water have made zero infrastructure investment throughout this period, despite a string of promises to do so.

Just over a year ago, the EA shared detailed 10 year's worth of Langham WRC daily flow records with Langham Parish Council, which finally forced Anglian Water to admit that Langham's sewerage catchment is the leakiest in their entire network, barring a couple of catchments in the wetlands of the Norfolk Broads. But this is of no apparent concern to Anglian Water because, to quote them directly, "**when it doesn't rain the sewerage network operates as it should**".

Our MP has kindly attended three public meetings with Anglian Water in Langham since early 2022, He wrote in strong terms to AW's CEO demanding urgent action following our last meeting in early 2024, but still to no avail.

The building of 900 new homes in Langham will inevitably cause a **catastrophic rise** in sewage overflows whenever it rains, **unless** Anglian Water can somehow be forced not just to upgrade the current WRC, but also to dig up and completely replace the existing 70 year old sewerage network of 6 inch diameter piping, with new larger diameter properly sealed pipework. However, the current regulatory framework provides no levers to force sewerage undertakers to maintain, repair and upgrade their sewerage pipework, other than criminal prosecution by the EA for individual sewage spillage incidents. Such prosecutions are extremely rare, with the EA's limited resources currently being directed almost entirely towards river pollution rather than pollution incidents on land.

So, Council Committee Members need to decide whether to protect their residents from a coming environmental disaster, or align themselves with Anglian Water's current policy that **"when it doesn't rain, the sewerage network operates as it should."**

Langham will be the first major victim, but many other areas of Colchester will soon follow suit over the coming years if CCC doesn't reform and significantly toughen up its sewerage infrastructure planning policies.