

Southern Water - Drainage and Wastewater Management Plans *DWMPs*

A new way to plan for future drainage, wastewater and environmental water quality

For many people, the prospect of yet another long online meeting and workshop, particularly on the subject of sewage, would not be one they relished. But given the impacts of wastewater on the habitats of the New Forest, the opportunity to meet with staff at Southern Water and help shape their long term plans for the future management of their resources in the area was one the New Forest Catchment Hosts couldn't resist.

On 23rd September, representatives of the New Forest catchment hosts (Freshwater Habitats Trust and National Park Authority) were invited to gather at a virtual meeting with various water experts including a

team from Southern Water, the Environment Agency, and planning policy officers from the New Forest District Council and National Park.

Well briefed and prepared, I had the benefit of a virtual pre-meet with experts at Freshwater Habitats Trust, and Southern Water had also provided briefing materials and a pre-webinar. I was up to speed with all the acronyms, DWMP¹, [RBCS](#)², [BRAVA](#)³ and how they might relate to the catchment partnerships own objectives for the New Forest outlined in the [Water Environment Improvement Plan](#). It was clear that for all those involved, sewage and drainage was not a matter to be taken lightly.



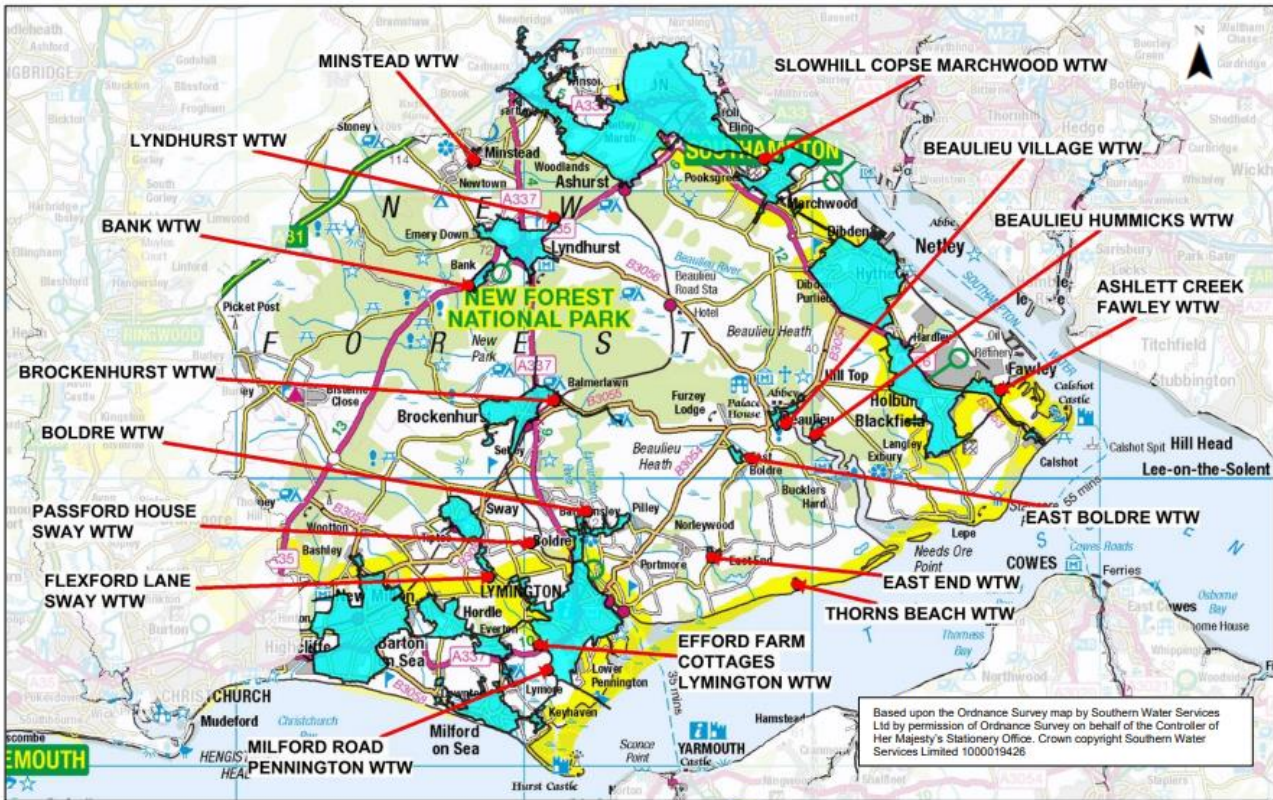
The new way for Southern Water to plan for the future, is to work locally with organisations that have interests and/or responsibilities relating to drainage, flooding and the protection of the environment.

What brought all these practitioners together? Southern Water, like other water companies, has a programme underway to produce Drainage and Wastewater Management Plans, or DWMPs, for their areas of responsibility. These are a new long-term way to plan for future drainage, wastewater and environmental water quality. The purpose of the plans is to ensure the sustainability of drainage infrastructure and systems so they meet the needs of customers and the environment both now and into the future. This presentation gives a good overview of the DWMPs - [Working together to improve drainage and environmental water quality](#).

As well as seeking to ensure business delivery is robust and resilient to future pressures such as climate change and population/housing growth, the plans also provide the basis for more collaborative working and integrated long-term planning with partners and stakeholders to improve water quality and drainage systems. In tandem, opportunities are also being sought to ensure decisions to reduce flooding and pollution for the benefit of individuals, communities, businesses, the public, the environment and wildlife.

The workshop was the first opportunity for key partners in the New Forest catchment to collectively get to grips with what the plan might mean for the local area, and provide initial feedback on the work to date by Southern Water.

Despite the barriers of the new virtual world, Southern Water facilitated an engaging and useful workshop packed with information, for example the New Forest catchment has 16 treatment works, 111 pumping stations and 1,142Km of sewers, servicing 92% of the area’s population, covering 11% of the land area.



This map shows all 16 wastewater treatment works across the New Forest Catchment. The largest, Slowhill in Marchwood, servicing a population of 74,000; the second largest at Pennington servicing a population of 51,000 and the smallest, Passford House, serving 5 people.

Southern Water outlined their process for assessing current and future risks and participants were given opportunity to contribute information and views. The vast majority of the waste water treatment works have been screened, and will be taken forward to more detailed assessment and consideration. From the Partnership’s point of view this is welcomed and perhaps not unexpected, given the special nature conservation designations in the area, discharges and storm overflows which have been the subject of much public concern over the years, preponderance of blockages and even sewer collapse in the sewer network in certain areas and concerns regarding nutrients related to housing growth.

Alongside the other participants we were in a good position to raise a range of local issues with Southern Water such as:

- Concern for biodiversity impacts from wastewater and storm discharges, both now and in a future impacted by climate change.
- The poor ecological status of some waterbodies and how this may be linked with wastewater.
- The potential opportunity to grow the Forest’s ‘natural capital’ and unrivalled freshwater biodiversity resources, contributing to the nature recovery network regionally.

- Barriers caused to practitioners working with landowners on the ground to deliver water and wildlife improvements, if local communities perceive harmful discharges are arising from water infrastructure which they feel aren't being addressed.

Southern Water were open to contributions and seem committed to future collaborations with catchment partnerships. We've been conscious that their interaction locally has been more limited in recent years and so this potential increase in partnership is to be welcomed.

Their work to date on the Plan appears to have appropriately identified priorities for further work and areas of concern, particularly when considered within the national DWMP framework. There may be potential to share relevant evidence and data the Partnerships has collected to help fill gaps in those areas of the network that are not subject to statutory monitoring, particularly if we feel it will assist prioritisation and delivery of improvements to the right places.

Southern Water will now be working further on the screening work following local input, and producing a Baseline Risk and Vulnerability Assessment (BRAVA) – intended to identify risks now and how they could get worse in the future which will be submitted to [Water UK](#)⁴ in December 2020.

Subsequent stages will involve identification of options for a range of solutions, and work with national and local stakeholders and partners to identify those that represent best value to water customer and communities. These will then form the draft catchment level Drainage and Wastewater Management Plan which will be the subject of customers consultation in autumn next year.

In the interim, we expect there will be future online events and opportunities to engage with the work. If Southern Water can maintain their engaging presentation style, and commitment to working with partners to achieve results that improve the local environment and health of the water network, we'll be there – and if others are interested and have the opportunity, we'd certainly recommend getting engaged with the process.

The New Forest catchment has its own dedicated space on Southern Water's DWMP pages. Click here to read the developing New Forest [Drainage and Wastewater Management Plan](#)



By Ian Barker, New Forest National Park Authority - Catchment Partnership Host– September 2020

⁴Water UK - engages with companies and regulators to ensure customers receive high quality tap water at reasonable price and the our environment is protected and improved.