Sewer flooding in Orleton…

and why Severn Trent may never be willing to fix it…

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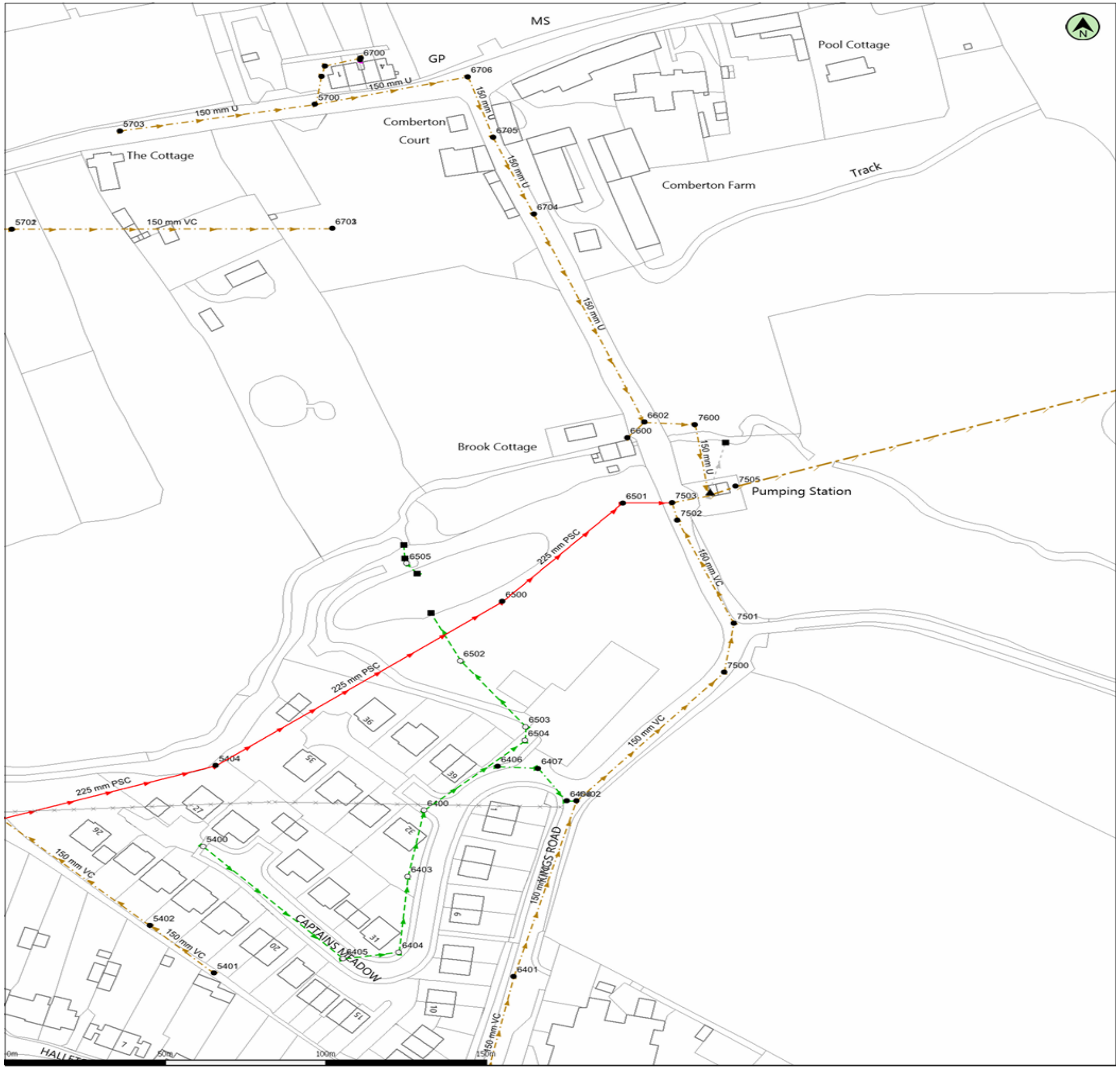
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GP
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6706
150 mm U
5700
5703
Comberton Court
The Cottage
6705
Comberton Farm
Track
6704
5702
150 mm VC
6703
Brook Cottage
6602
6600
7600
7505
Pumping Station
6501
7503
7502
225 mm PSC
6505
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150 mm VC
6503
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6406
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KINGS ROAD
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CAPTAINS MEADOW
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100m
150m

What is happening?

- Surface water is entering the foul-only system – infiltration, misconnection and direct surface water drainage connections
- When rainfall exceeds 21mm in 24hrs the pumping station cannot cope with storm flows and sewage surcharges onto the highway
- Severn Trent has reported 6 spills into Brimfield Brook to the Environment Agency in the last 12 months

Why is it happening?

- System designed in 1960s – since then Dry Weather Flow demand load has increased by more than 20% - 12% of which was added by Captain's Meadow development as recently as 2024.

- Some storm water storage was introduced to the system in the 1980s and some of the network is now a combined foul and surface water system.

- Pumping capacity remains based on a foul-only model – 16 lts p/s. Dry weather flow demand is currently 6-9 ltrs p/s. Storm flows will multiply the load leading to surcharging.

- The design of foul-only sewers limits their size.

What Severn Trent propose…

- Scour the 4” rising main to Woofferton to increase capacity
- Increase storage capacity at Woofferton
- Possible merger of wet wells at Orleton Terminal Pumping Station ‘TPS’
- Installation of multiple flow monitors to isolate areas of the sewer network responsible for large scale storm response
- Investigation of misconnections or cross-connections to highway drainage.
- Water butts for misconnected property

Why not upgrade the network?

- Capital costs of upgrading rural networks.

- The repeal of s.151 of the Water Industry Act 1991.

Why not remove misconnections?

- Misconnection and surface water drainage charges – preventing loss of revenue from Orleton – circa £10k.

- The costs of enforcing the separation of foul and surface water.

Pollution and Regulatory Risk

Severn Trent permitted to discharge only in the case of electrical or mechanical failure at the pumping station. So why has no action been taken after 6 spills in 12 months?

s.94 of Water Industry Act 1991 – duty 'to cleanse maintain and effectually drain their area':

- Ofwat - 10 cases in 5 years under s.94 WIA 1991, all related to treatment works.
- No current investigation of sewer flooding.
- In 2009-10 Ofwat was investigating 86 cases.
- Only one breach of duty for sewer flooding resulting in enforcement order since 1991 (United Utilities (Penketh) in 2010).
- The EA – 6 reports in 12 months without action.

The implications of failing to upgrade the sewer network in Orleton

- No significant reduction in environmental risks from sewer flooding.
- No capacity to meet planned housing targets.
- No significant expansion in economic activity or population growth.
- Progressive deterioration of the network.
- Increased long term sewage pollution risk due to climate change

The ‘public interest’ in the 19th Century

- In 1831-2 there were 32,000 deaths from Cholera due to insanitary conditions in England.
- Further outbreaks of Cholera in 1848-9 and 1853-4 and 1866 resulted in the Public Health Act 1875, which placed a duty on Local Authorities to supply clean water and proper drainage and sewage provision.
- This allowed for improvements in the health and wellbeing of citizens and the development of infrastructure and industry.
- There are now 500,000km of sewers in the UK.

The ‘public interest’ at Privatisation 1989-91

By the 1980s a lack of investment by successive governments and new environmental standards imposed by the EU exposed a requirement for £24-30 billion of investment to meet river and bathing waters standards.

To meet this challenge the Thatcher government decided to privatise subject to:

- Green dowery of £1.5 billion paid to the newly privatised companies.
- Debts of £5 billion owed to the government being written-off
- The state receiving £7.6 billion from the 10 privatised companies

Since then, £85.2 billion has been withdrawn by investors (University of Greenwich) or £52 billion according to OFWAT and £200 billion invested.

Expansion and planning – the way forward

- Privatisation effectively removed a strategic asset from government control.
- The water industry is no longer there to serve the economic, social and environmental interests of the state, or the drive for housing and industrial growth.
- A significant part of the rural network has no economic viability at all and revenue does not meet running costs. There is therefore no 'return on capital' to justify investment.
- Arguably **planning authorities must therefore consider the economics of water infrastructure as a precondition of development** and not as an adjunct.

The bigger picture…

- The river Wye at Moccas (Welsh Water): 115 sewage spills lasting 2,074 hours;
- Cradley Brook at Colwall (Severn Trent Water): 143 spills, 1,946 hours;
- The Wye at Eardisley (Welsh Water): 108 spills, 1,765 hours;
- The Worm Brook at Much Dewchurch (Welsh Water): 87 spills, 1,424 hours;
- The river Frome at Tarrington (Welsh Water): 120 spills, 1,405 hours
- The Wye at Eign treatment works, Hereford (Welsh Water): 121 spills, 1,283 hours;
- Pinsley Brook at Shobdon (Welsh Water): 166 spills, 1,169 hours;
- The river Lugg at New Court sewage pumping station near Lugwardine (Welsh Water): 89 spills, 1,080 hours.

A last word from the bankers…and public

- February 2025, Sir John Cunliffe was asked to carry out a review to ‘ensure we have a sufficiently robust and stable regulatory framework to attract the investment needed to clean up our waterways, speed up infrastructure delivery and restore public confidence in the sector’.

- During the 10 years that Australian investment firm Macquarie was Thames Water’s biggest shareholder from 2007 to 2017, debt rose from £2bn to £11bn, during which time Macquarie and the other investors did not inject any new cash or equity of their own. In five years out of the 10, investors took out more money in dividends than the company made in profit and made up the shortfall by borrowing heavily while letting debt levels soar. Ofwat did not intervene.

- The water industry now has combined debts of £69.5 billion (Moody’s) and says it needs £100 billion to meet investment needs over the next 5 years and £290 billion over the next 25 years.

- Of 16 water companies, 3 are in ‘cash lock-up’ due to poor credit ratings and require OFWAT’s permission to make certain payments. In total, OFWAT has concerns about the financial resilience of 10 of the 16 companies.

- In 2017 a poll found that 83% of the public favoured the renationalisation of the water industry. Steve Reed SoS for the Environment has ruled this out.


OUR BROOK IS NOT A SEWER!
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