



Clearwater Court
Vastern Road
Reading, RG1 8DB

12 October, 2022

Scrutiny Meeting Follow-up

Dear Cllr Kay,

I want to again thank you for giving us the opportunity to speak at the Policy and Performance Scrutiny Committee last month. As agreed, I am writing to provide a written update on several issues which were discussed during the meeting.

Tollington Road burst

Our forensic investigation into the cause of the burst which occurred in August is complete. As we emphasised in the forum, it is almost impossible to reach 100% certainty on the root cause of a pipe failure – which is in part why such failures are not predictable. As we initially suspected, it is almost certain that shrinking of soil caused by the greatest soil moisture deficit on record led to movement at the pipe joint. Deflection of only a few degrees can be enough to stress a joint between lengths of pipe sufficiently to cause a catastrophic failure. The pipe itself was found to be in good condition, with little corrosion to the pipe walls found in our testing, but we were able to measure several degrees of movement at the joint between the failed pipe section and the remaining pipeline, which we believe is evidence of this failure mechanism. Unfortunately, these conditions have resulted in an increase in bursts, not just in the Thames Water region but across the south of England.

Pipe replacement

We have been working hard to boost resilience across our network and while progress in Islington over the last two years has not been the same as previously, the 34% of mains we have replaced remains among the highest in London. We continue to work across the borough on projects such as the Seven Sisters Road re-lining scheme which, while experiencing some delays, has received positive feedback from customers and businesses in the area at the public meetings and drop-in sessions. We are currently also replacing mains in Crouch Hill and a new multi-million-pound project on Pentonville Road is being drawn up.

All our work must be balanced against ensuring we target areas most at risk from bursts and are spending our customers' money in the most efficient way possible so we are not looking to replace every pipe. As we said in the meeting, this is being done against the backdrop of a very challenging financial settlement from our regulator, which is why our shareholders, who have not taken dividends since 2017, have recently committed to putting an extra £1.5 billion into the business so we can continue to invest in our water network.

Offord Road

As promised during the meeting, we have been looking into the Offord Road bursts and are working with our engineering team to develop a solution to the frequency of failures here. This is a complex issue and our initial view is that the network configuration here is placing substantial stress on the 12" main in Offord Rd, so we are seeking to address this also. We will be able to confirm our plans here over the coming three months, but at this stage, we're expecting to be replacing a substantial length of this main. In the meantime, we are looking at ways of re-routing supplies to reduce pressure on the existing pipe and the likelihood of future bursts.

During the meeting, we were asked about planting a memorial tree in the area and the possibility of installing a Sustainable Drainage Scheme (SuDS). Regarding the tree, this is certainly something we can do. While the SuDS scheme will need further investigation, this is something we are more than happy to look into as helping local authorities and communities manage surface water is a key priority for us. We will liaise with your officers on the best way forward.

Holloway Road

Following the meeting, we spoke with the Holloway Road residents and business owners who attended to understand the flooding issues they have experienced. Our engineers have also visited to start a full investigation. To determine the cause of the flooding, we firstly need to survey a large section of our sewers to ensure they are functioning as they should. We have discussed this with those on the street and explained this may take several weeks due to the scale of the work. If a clear problem is not identified, then we will need to carry out further work to explore where the water is entering the network and causing it to overload. Again, there may not be a quick answer to this problem as the solution may not lie solely in our hands but we are committed to doing everything we can to resolve this issue.

Insurance Claims

We were very sorry to hear about the poor experience some of our customers had when dealing with their claims. Although they are contractors, they are acting on behalf on Thames so we take full responsibility and have raised these issues with Aspect. While we are not able to discuss individual cases, they are receiving our full attention.

I hope this addresses your concerns and we are happy to attend the committee again in the new year when will be able to provide a further update on the work we are carrying out in Islington.

Kind regards,



Head of London Planning