

Buckden District Councillors Report – March 2025

Dear Residents and Parish Councillors,

This month I am focussing on Diddington Brook sewage discharges and their environmental impact. My report follows a meeting that I chaired between Anglian Water, the Environment Agency, the Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) and the Parish Council on the 10th March 2025.

The frequent sewage discharges into Diddington Brook and the broader Huntingdon area highlight the urgent need for improved monitoring and infrastructure upgrades. The Environment Agency's (EA) commitment to enhancing monitoring efforts is a positive step, however challenges remain due to limited personnel, but there may be an opportunity to address this via Citizen Science project where we monitor our own rivers, lakes and streams via our local flood group and feed data to the EA.

Anglian Water's indication that no upgrades are planned for the treatment centre within the next budget period raises concerns, especially with the planned development of approximately 300 additional houses in Buckden.

In addition, many older properties in the village do not separate rainwater from foul water. This lack of separation is a significant factor contributing to the infiltration problem, as it allows rainwater to enter the sewer system, potentially overwhelming it and causing various issues. Encouraging residents to install water butts can play a crucial role in mitigating the impact of rainwater on the sewer system, reducing the risk of flooding and sewer backups.

Addressing these issues collaboratively will be essential to ensuring the health and sustainability of our local environment.

Background Summary

Diddington Brook was polluted by sewage 120 times in 2023 from the Buckden Water Recycling Centre on Leadens Lane, amounting to 2,054 hours. This makes it the worst offender in our constituency, with discharges occurring approximately once every three days. Although data for 2024 is not yet available, there have been three discharges in the week prior to the writing of this report. The data relied upon is not directly provided by Anglian Water, so corrections and up-to-date information are welcomed.

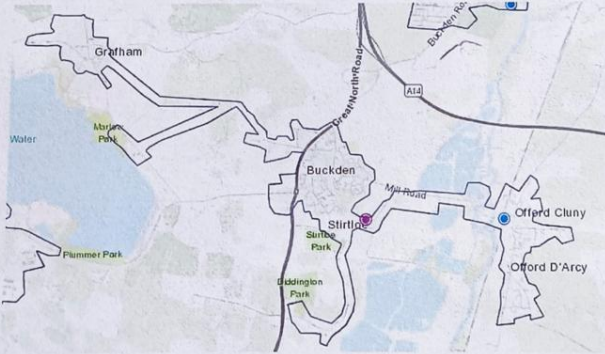
These recurring sewage discharges suggest that Buckden's current sewage system may not be up to standard. This is especially alarming given the planning permission for approximately 300 additional houses to be built in the area. Without the necessary upgrades to the sewage infrastructure, the new development could exacerbate the existing issues.

Our Sewage System

Catchment area

The site receives incoming flow from two foul gravity sewers from Buckden Village (east) and a pumped foul sewer and a pumped foul rising main from Offord Cluny Village (west).

This catchment has an area of 11.2 km² and serves a population equivalent of 5,358.



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Permit for Buckden Sewage Treatment Works to Discharge Under Normal Operation:

Buckden Sewage Treatment Works has a permit to discharge treated sewage into Diddington Brook under normal operational conditions. Under normal operating conditions excess water in the system should be held storm tanks, treated later and then discharged into the brook.

Event Discharge - Storm Overflow and/or Ground Water Infiltration:

During storm events, excess water in the system is passed through the Treatment Centre storm tanks and then released into the environment without treatment, but it is in, what was reported to be, 'a highly diluted form' – a lack of monitoring/reporting makes it difficult to substantiate this. Currently Anglian Water discharges sewage into Diddington Brook approximately 120 times per year based on currently available data from 2022-23. The EA indicated that discharges become more concerning during dry conditions because it suggests undiluted sewage may be released into the river system or problems wider system problems.

Monitoring Efforts and Water Quality

The Environment Agency (EA) has acknowledged the need to enhance their monitoring efforts to ensure better water quality in the area. Despite their commitment to increasing these efforts, they are facing challenges due to limited personnel, which means their resources are stretched thin.

The EA has agreed to provide detailed information about the water quality in the region. This includes identifying any factors that are preventing the water from achieving a "good status," which is a benchmark for clean and healthy water.

However, there is currently no monitoring being conducted on Diddington Brook. This lack of monitoring has raised concerns among the community about the potential negative impact on the local environment. Without regular monitoring, it's difficult to assess the health of the brook and understand how it might be affecting the surrounding ecosystem.

Anglian Water agreed to provide a 'test kit' to the community along with associated training. They explained that there was a long waiting list to receive such kits. The EA discussed connecting the community with the Citizen Science Project that encourages communities to monitor local water quality. Initial investigations suggest that test kits cost circa £160 so it's possible that Buckden's Flood Group could fund their own kit via the Parish Council.

Inspection of Treatment Centre

The treatment centre was last inspected in 2022. The next inspection is expected to be scheduled soon, although these inspections are not announced in advance to the water companies.

Planned Upgrades and Infiltration Issues

Anglian Water has indicated that there are no planned upgrades to the treatment centre within the next budget period. During discussions, the issue of infiltration was highlighted. It was noted that many older properties in the catchment area do not separate rainwater from foul water. This lack of separation is a significant factor contributing to the infiltration problem, as it allows rainwater to enter the sewer system, potentially overwhelming it and causing various issues.

Benefits of Installing Water Butts

Encouraging residents to install water butts to store rainwater offers several benefits:

1. Environmental Benefits:

- **Water Conservation:** Reduces demand on local water supplies.
- **Reducing Runoff and Flooding:** Helps protect the environment and maintain cleaner waterways.

2. Economic Benefits:

- **Cost Savings:** Lowers water bills.

- **Reduced Infrastructure Strain:** Decreases the volume of water entering the sewer system.

3. Gardening Benefits:

- **Healthier Plants:** Rainwater is free from chemicals found in tap water.
- **Watering Flexibility:** Allows watering during hosepipe bans or dry spells.

4. Community and Personal Benefits:

- **Community Resilience:** Enhances resilience to droughts and water shortages.
- **Easy Installation and Maintenance:** Accessible option for most homeowners.

5. Connection to Sewer System Overwhelm:

- Installing water butts to store rainwater can significantly help in preventing the sewer system from becoming overwhelmed. Here's how it relates and what can be done:
 1. **Reduced Rainwater Infiltration:** Collecting rainwater in water butts prevents excess rainwater from entering the sewer system, especially in areas where older properties don't separate rainwater from foul water. This helps minimise the risk of the sewer system becoming overwhelmed during heavy rainfall.
 2. **Preventing Flooding:** Excess rainwater can lead to flooding, which overwhelms the sewer system and causes backups. Water butts help manage this by capturing rainwater before it can contribute to flooding.

Residents can report any discharges or other concerns via the Environment Agency (EA) hotline (0800 80 70 60) and/or the Anglian Water hotline (03457 145 145)