

Councillor Alan Hall Bellingham
London Borough of Lewisham
CllrAlan.Hall@lewisham.gov.uk

Our reference: CE12319

Date: 28 September 2021

Dear Councillor Hall

Re: River Pool Contamination

Thank you for your email of 13 September 2021 to our Chief Executive, Sir James Bevan. James has read your email and asked me to respond on his behalf. He will also receive a copy of this response. Thank you for enquiry and the concerns you raised over pollution in the River Pool.

On the 12 and 13 of September, we received multiple reports of dead fish and pollution in the river. We were notified of a discolouration or a 'blue coloured' pollution entering the watercourse via an outfall in Cator Park. Members of the public described high numbers of dead fish along the riverbanks, with initial sightings reported at Cator Park, and extending downstream towards Ladywell Park.

Environment Officers, and Fisheries Officers, attended site to substantiate the reports and assess the impacts of the pollution. Our monitoring demonstrated an impact to water quality and there was visible evidence of discolouration and pollution within the watercourse. Dead and distressed fish were recorded from the outfall at Cator Park, to the confluence with the Ravensbourne, which is estimated to be just over 2 miles in length. Thankfully, no dead fish were observed downstream of the confluence, including Ladywell Park where good fish populations are known to exist. From our monitoring we are satisfied that the impact to the fish populations did not extend beyond the Ravensbourne confluence.

Alongside our officers, Thames Water, the local sewerage undertaker, also attended to assist in mitigating impacts; by preventing further contamination entering the watercourse and to trace the source of the pollution. They were able to stop further polluting matter entering the watercourse by over-pumping the contamination directly from the surface water sewer into the foul sewer. We can confirm the pollution was not caused by any issues within their network.

Our officers continued to monitor the situation over the next couple of days to assess for further pollution or impacts to water quality and biodiversity. This included undertaking more water quality monitoring and ecological surveys. We observed a marked improvement in water quality, and no further impacts to wildlife.

Our initial assessment indicates that the fish population was severely depleted in the length impacted. All life stages were affected including at least 40 large eels, plus specimens of Chub, Dace and Perch. We plan to undertake a further survey of the impacted stretch to assess the remaining population and from this will determine the need for restocking. If the initial assessment is proved to be correct, then it is likely that stocking of silver fish will take place. These fish will come from the Environment Agency fish farm which was established for such incidents. However, these fish will be 2 years old and will not be a direct replacement for the mature fish lost.

A few members of the public also raised their concerns about the health impacts caused by the pollution, as it is a very public area, with many school children in the vicinity. Our remit focuses mainly on protecting water quality, however, to allay any concerns we ensured regular contact with Lewisham Council, notifying them of the pollution and providing ongoing updates during our response to the incident.

Due to the serious nature of the incident and the detrimental impact to the eel and fish population, we are continuing to investigate the circumstances of this incident, to establish the cause and ascertain who was responsible with a view to considering potential enforcement action.

If you or your constituents wish to report to pollution incidents, then please use our 24-hour incident number 0800 807060 or by emailing:

Incident_Communication_Service@environment-agency.gov.uk

If you would like to discuss these matters further please do not hesitate to contact my area team on 0208 474 6848.

Yours sincerely



Matthew Higginson
Deputy Area Director – Kent, South London and East Sussex