

## **Situation at the Leisure Centre and Playing Fields: Oct 2020**

### **Drainage Issue and Closing of Car Park & Surrounding Area**

Towards the end of August (21/08/20), the Clerk was informed by the Council's groundsman that an effluent spillage had run throughout the car park around the Leisure Centre and into the playing fields and lower cottage. The Clerk informed Nazeing Youth Football Club (NYFC) immediately in writing that they would not be able to use the facility until the problem was resolved as a duty of care to the club and public.

On inspection by the Clerk and in agreement with the Chairman, the Clerk contacted Thames Water. Thames Water attended site and carried out a localised inspection. They reported to the Chairman that the drainage system was not part of their infrastructure and the Council would have to call in a private contractor. On the above work not being carried out by Thames Water i.e. the inspection removing any blockage or effluent clean up, the Council had no choice but to leave the site closed due to health and safety requirements, insurer requirements and all relevant authorities were contacted.

On Saturday 05/09/20, NYFC returned to the Bumbles Green playing competitive football and were using the car park. Their reasoning behind this "we could not smell sewage". They were then informed again that the site was closed.

On Sunday 06/09/20, three Councillors attended the site to get an overview of the problem and again NYFC were on site. They were informed that the site was closed. The NYFC manager /coach informed the Councillors he had not been advised of the closure and he had travelled a long way for the match. The Councillors informed him that he could not use the car park, but he could use the lower road section and grass area behind the cottage, which he agreed to. The entrance was coned off at the tree line to stop parking in the main car park. This closure was ignored by NYFC supporters and they removed the cones. They drove into the main car park, parked then filmed and comments to Councillors were not particularly pleasant.

The Clerk applied warning signage throughout the grounds to keep the public away from the area which in some cases was removed by persons unknown. The Clerk then provided more signage and the area was hazarded taped off. This was taken down again by persons unknown. Barriers were also erected to keep the public safe.

NYFC goalposts and nets have remained on the playing fields, despite the request that they should be removed while the Club is unable to use Bumbles Green. Unfortunately, youths have used these goalposts & nets, which lead to further

complaints from NYFC management via Facebook postings asking why youths were playing there but the Club cannot.

Various options were suggested to NYFC for alternative venues, including the local school. To date the school has not advised if they can help the Club or not.

### **Inspections**

On carrying out an overview inspection, it was found that two drainage manhole lids are broken and sewage had run out and around the Leisure Centre, onto the car park and into the adjacent field. On internal inspection of the Leisure Centre, effluent had also entered via the toilet pans. It became clear at this point that the floor within the Leisure Centre has broken its back and there are severe cracks in the walls and trees roots entering the building. On further inspection to the side of the building it is plain to see that rear of the build is subsiding and leaning into the drainage area. Safety of the public is always the main issue and must be addressed above anything else in situations such as this where the public can gain access.

As Thames water would not get involved as they considered it not part of their infrastructure, there was no alternative but to arrange tests to the drainage system to see if it could be ascertained where the problem was. A company (Tate Solutions Ltd) was instructed to test and report on the cause of the effluent spillage. The report is on the website.

Further to this, the Clerk contacted EFDC drainage department, who visited the site on 06/10/20 and carried out an additional inspection on the Leisure Centre drainage and the farm drainage system which is connected via the Leisure Centre system. On inspection of the drainage layout of the Leisure Centre system, it became clear that at some point the drainage system had been diverted into a newer plastic chamber. This chamber is set to the right and at a very acute angle with a new underground soil run which goes directly to the cottage (refer to inspection report and diagram).

Soil waste and large amounts of groundwater due to the heavy rain came down into the system by the Leisure Centre from the farm, hitting a blockage at the new acute section of soil pipe work. (When testing, it was the slowest run point). The pressure of water coming down the hill combined with the blockage, pushed the effluent out lifting the manhole lids allowing it to surge into the car park and ingress into the Leisure Centre building via toilet pans.

EFDC Drainage Dept and Tate Solutions Ltd confirmed that there is nothing to stop this happening again unless changes are made to the existing drainage run. In meeting with EFDC's Drainage Dept personnel & discussing the problem on site and having established that the system is connected with the farm, it is in their

view that it is wholly the responsibility of Thames Water. Since 2011 regulation, if two properties or more connect before hitting Thames Water system, Thames Water are responsible. EFDC duly rang Thames Water with regard the problem and the Council is waiting for Thames Water to connect them. EFDC's Drainage Dept have issued a report regarding their site visit. The report is on the website.

## **In Conclusion**

### **Drainage**

Having been misled by Thames water, who denied responsibility when they first attended on site when the incident occurred, this has led to a considerable loss of time, including wasted councillors time, trying to resolve the issue that is not the Council's problem. The Council has incurred costs assessing the problem due to Thames Water informing the Council that the drainage was not part of their infrastructure.

The concern is now that Thames Water may still try to negate responsibility, so the resolution could take some time. Additionally, it means that the Council cannot carry out any works on the drainage system as it not their infrastructure or responsibility.

Following the visit by EFDC's drainage department, they advised that effluent does dissipate over time. The Council will power wash the car park, remove effluent which has hardened and the contaminated Football Clubs rubbish left beside the Leisure Centre. The Council have agreed to construct a bund wall, with the intention to retain any future overflow.

### **Leisure Centre**

The drainage problem has highlighted the poor condition of the Leisure Centre. Incessant rainwater in conjunction with the tree roots undermining the building and the cracking at the rear walls and corner where the Council's drainage run is. The Council has agreed to protect the public from this building and Heras fencing will be erected as soon as possible.