Visit to Wroughton Reservoir 29 January 2026

Present:

Cllrs. Holly Woodward and Mark Trigg

Saffron and Neil, who attend the Flood Working Party but who work in the Foul Water Division

Kevin Hillioake (?), who is? But who has many years of knowledge relating to the reservoir.

This was an extremely useful visit and one that came wholly as a result of the Flood Working Party, and Thames Water's willingness to engage because of this. All 3 TW people were very willing to answer anything we asked and were keen to cooperate. The meeting moved on our understanding of the situation regarding flooding and the reservoir enormously. Notes below.

<u>Upper covered reservoirs</u>

The old reservoir is a holding tank for Swindon water supply, which comes from Farmoor in Oxfordshire, via Blunsden. It is supposed to be maintained every 10 years, but this has not been done for decades because there was nowhere to remove the water to without causing flooding downstream. Thus the new reservoir has been built. Water from the old one will be stored mostly in the new one so that the old one can be maintained and returned to service. (Should happen this year). The only connection between them and the open reservoir is an old overflow channel for maintenance which has not been used for decades. Ironically none of the 3 reservoirs is providing water directly to Wroughton any longer.

<u>Lower open reservoir</u>

This used to supply drinking water to Wroughton/South Swindon, via an associated water treatment plant in the car park on the land. It was all closed down about 15 years ago, and the whole area is not in use any more. The reservoir fills entirely from spring, stream and groundwater, which enters the via a large number of pipes and springs located around the edge. We were informed that the covered buildings such as the one shown below (1) have shafts within them going down 30m , and connecting to a series of walkable tunnels extending up to ½

mile away to where water entry points are located (presumably mostly springs).There are also at least 2 open drains from the airfield (see below). Overall, the water is coming from the catchment area above, which includes the airfield, and the farmland going up to Barbury Castle.

1.

2.

The water level remains fairly static year round, varying only by 6" max. The exit point from the reservoir (lake) is a solid weir at the NW end. There is no way to manage water levels from this, and any sudden changes have most probably been related to clearing the grill in front of the weir. They are aware that this has caused problems over time lower down and are apparently clearing it 3x a week now, meaning the water level change is minimal.

Points to be aware of:

- Thames Water has very limited control as to what flows into the reservoir. The can shut off the pipework with baffles but if done for any length of time it causes problems further up the line. Thus the effect of heavy rainfall on water levels cannot readily be mitigated.
- The reservoir is sparkly clean water, and so the brown water flowing down The Pitchens stream must be coming from somewhere else below that. Potential candidates would be the stables at the back of Snapps Close, the stables off Greens Lane or water from cleaning operations coming down from the airfield's rented hanger sites.
- Although TW are happy to come out and test the water when it happens if they can, it is really a problem for the Environment Agency.
- Maintenance work was undertaken a couple of years ago to stabilise the banks and update the exit area, but it didn't change anything about how the lake fills or empties.
- The land at the back of the lake area belongs to TW for about 200 m and then becomes the responsibility for Overtown Farm for the gully and top section.
- Although planning permission has been given for houses in the car park below the reservoir, there has been no interest because of the difficulty in insuring the land.
- The whole site is mothballed and therefore it is highly unlikely that TW would be willing to undertake any more work to e.g. enable water level management.

- TW would dearly like to get rid of the site so they didn't have to be responsible for it any more, but they are unwilling to undertake any work to enable this to happen, e.g. providing facilities so the lake could be used for recreation.
- Question – has the increase in concrete standing and the new buildings on the airfield site increased runoff into the reservoir over the years?
- Does the Earthline lorry cleaning activity or that from the first hanger up by Thorney Park enter the pipes that drain into the reservoir area?
- Why is the stream coming from the reservoir so dead when the stream above it and the reservoir itself is so clean?
- Is there value in trying to establish from the Science Museum how the water drainage system up there works? What area overall drains into the reservoir?

Stream going into reservoir from above.

Finally, TW say that the gully cleaning operations by SBC are not sufficient to properly clear the drains. TW did the ones in the lower Pitchens recently and flow has improved as a result.