

Chair Mark Edgerley. Notes Sandra Smith

Present: J Adams, F Akerman, S Bannerman, M Blake, J & R Brambley, V Brice, M Cooper, J Critchley, G Darby, C Dewis-Hall, M Fowler, J Gee, D Hall, L Holloway, S Lees, J Mason, V Messenger, T Oliver, J Parker, F Pilkington, J Russell, S Southern, F Stokes, C & J Tilley, I Tripp, E Vamplew, J Walker,

1. Apologies were received from M Arney, D Chillingworth, J Jones, D Kingston, D Metters, C Nixon, R Prescott, R & M Robinson, S Schilling
2. Minutes of the Romsey Forum of 23 March were agreed as a true record.
3. Hampshire Water Transfer and Water Recycling Project. Presentation by Sam Underwood and Christopher Janes: Stakeholder Officers, Southern Water.
The pdf of this presentation will be sent separately.

The speakers began by recognising that Hampshire has 85% of the world's chalk streams and the Test and the Itchen are two of the best.

They then made a presentation about the huge long term water recycling project. DEFRA considers this a nationally important project. The next consultation will be in 2024.

Currently Southern water's 700,000 customers are supplied mostly from groundwater. There would be 192 million litres a day deficit without extraction from streams. Environment groups want extraction rates reduced and Southern water hopes to reduce demand to 100 litres per person per day. The planned project is to find alternative sources of supply by treating wastewater at a much higher level, purifying it, putting it into the new Havant Thicket reservoir, the first to be built since the 19th century, from whence it will eventually go into the water supply. Current approval is for the reservoir to fill from springs and rainfall. New permission will be needed for the fill from treated water. Water recycling is now an accepted method for supplying drinking water.

There was a pilot project at Budd's farm in Havant for a year. The treated water was so pure minerals had to be put back in. The speakers passed around a bottle of very clear water processed by reverse osmosis.

There were questions.

Q. You are a private company so what is the value of consultation? Infrastructure impacts local communities e.g. routes for pipelines. A. There could possibly be community benefits e/g/ cycle paths over pipelines.

Q. London is used to recycled water. This is a very high-tech solution. Why not a more sustainable one? A. The need is so huge, 192 million litres a day, Sustainable solutions are encouraged but some, e.g. rainwater harvesting for households, can risk contaminating their supply and retrofitting is costly.

Q. Where is the money coming from for this huge project. £800 million? A. From customers spread over generations.

Q. When you repair leaks do you replace the old pipes with modern ones? A. Not always, as required.

Q. Will you re-mineralise the water? A. Yes, but not to the same level of hardness. The taste of water differs already in different areas. The data will be shared. It was noted that beer and wine are already brewed with recycled water.

Q. In Romsey water comes from the river Test. How will the project affect this? A. This will supplement that so not so much water will need to be extracted. This will be especially helpful in times of drought.

Q. We need about 100 liters per person per day. What proportion of projected need will this project represent? When it is in place will you be able to reduce extraction? A. Since privatization Southern water is taking one third less water from the system because of leakage reduction and increased efficiency. However, a growing population and climate change mean increased demand so the new reservoir is vital. There is a need to reduce demand and reduce leakage by 50%.

Q. What impact will it have on extraction from rivers? A. The key thing is to reduce not take more from the rivers and aquifers. They will still take some.

Q. When will it go live? A. Around 2035. The planning and construction of pipelines takes time.

4. Romsey Business Survey 2023 – the findings. Julian Gee, Vice President, Romsey and District Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

There are 75 members in the area, mostly independent businesses but including Bradbeers and Waitrose. On being asked to talk about the state of business in Romsey Julian prepared a short questionnaire for members in the Romsey Mutual Business Group breakfast network. Responses are from 18 businesses. 50% are B2c, businesses that sell to customers, 45% are B2b, businesses that sell to business and 5% are both.

Q1 How is performance now compared to 12 months ago?

Better 78%, worse 5%, about the same 17%

Q2 Describe the prospects for the next 12 months.

89% were optimistic, 5% pessimistic, 5% unsure.

Q3 Is the business environment in the Romsey area healthier than 12 months ago?

44% Yes, 22% No, 34% Can't say.

Q4 What is one major concern for you in the coming year? This produced a variety of answers including recruitment, costs, supply of product, footfall, and lack of office space in the centre of Romsey.

Q5 Has the cost-of-living crisis affected your business?

67% yes, 28% no, 5% difficult to say.

Q6 Any major concerns about doing business in Romsey?

Yes 22% No 78%

This produced lots of answers including congestion, recruitment, loss of shops, footfall.

There was some concern about commercial property changing to residential use. The Chamber is starting to campaign about this. On the whole business people remain positive and optimistic.

Questions

Q Has footfall declined? ME responded that there used to be a footfall monitor about midway down The Hundred, but this was a long time ago and no figures are produced now.

Q. Is there concern about vacant shops? Nationally Romsey is not too bad but when a large store like M&Co closes it affects footfall. However, cafes and pubs increase footfall.

Q Parking is a problem. The parking occupancy rate was 85%

Q. What was the profile of the 18 respondents – town centre of industrial estates? They tended to be retailers, small traders, professional services and small businesses. ME noted that some businesses on the trading estates would like bigger premises.

5. Short Updates

John Parker: the Boundary Commission final report is in. Romsey and Southampton North Constituency will extend further north in Test Valley, will lose Valley Park to Eastleigh but will keep the Bassett and Swaythling wards of Southampton.

MC The town boundary will extend to include the former Romsey Extra. This will increase the town's revenue streams. The County Council will have to find £132 million in savings so very few projects will be undertaken unless there is other funding e.g. Government resilience grants or money from developers. The town could use its increased revenue to fund small projects.

The HCC Consultation on its budget is open for you to comment on until 23 July.

6. Any Other Business

LH It is good to have signs put up for events but who takes them down when the event is over?

ME Romsey and District Society are looking at this.

Is there any truth in the rumour that we will not be able to pay with cash in the local car parks?

ME & MC: No. Not in Test Valley. The Council has invested in new machines which can take all methods of payment.

ME: Romsey Festival launches tomorrow. The programme is online and will be in the Romsey Advertiser

Next Romsey Forum meetings will be on 21st September and 30th November.