



## Public Document Pack

North Devon Council  
Brynsworthy Environment Centre  
Barnstaple  
North Devon EX31 3NP

K. Miles  
Chief Executive.

### **SPECIAL POLICY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE**

A special meeting of the Policy Development Committee will be held in the G107, 1st Floor, South West Institute Development Building, Petroc, Barnstaple - Petroc College on **THURSDAY, 29TH FEBRUARY, 2024 at 6.30 pm.**

**(NOTE: A location plan for Petroc is attached to the agenda front pages. There are also limited spaces to attend the meeting in person. Please check the Council's website for the latest information regarding the arrangements that are in place and the requirement to book a place 2 working days prior to the meeting. Taking part in meetings (northdevon.gov.uk).**

Members of the Policy Development Councillor L. Spear (Chair) Committee.

Councillors Bishop, Bulled, Bushell, Clayton, Hunt, Jones, P Leaver, Patrinos, Turton, Wilson and Worden.

### **AGENDA**

1. Apologies.
2. Items brought forward which in the opinion of the Chair should be considered by the meeting as a matter of urgency.
3. Declarations of Interest.

Please telephone the Corporate and Community Services team to prepare a form for your signature before the meeting. Interests must be re-declared when the item is called. A declaration of interest under the Code of Conduct will be a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest, an Other Registrable Interest or a Non-Registrable Interest. If the item directly relates to your interest you must declare the interest and leave the room for the item, save in the case of Other Registrable Interests or Non-Registrable Interests where you may first speak on the item as a member of the public if provision has been made for the public to speak. If the matter does not directly relate to your interest but still affects it then you must consider whether you are affected to a greater extent than most people and whether a reasonable person would consider your judgement to be clouded, if you are then you must leave the room for the item (although you may speak as a member of the public if provision has been made for the public to speak) or, if you are not, then you can declare the interest but still take part).

4. To agree the agenda between Part 'A' and Part 'B' (Confidential Restricted Information).

## **PART 'A'**

### **INTERNAL ITEMS**

5. **Water Quality. To consider the impact of water quality within the North Devon area.**
- (a) The National Trust. Appendix A (attached). (Pages 7 - 8)
  - (b) Local Angling Journalist. Appendix B (attached). (Pages 9 - 12)
  - (c) Westcountry Rivers Trust. Appendix C (attached). (Pages 13 - 14)
  - (d) South West Water. Appendix D (attached). (Pages 15 - 22)
  - (e) North Devon Biosphere. Appendix E (to follow).
  - (f) The Environment Agency. Appendix F (attached). (Pages 23 - 28)
  - (g) Surfers Against Sewage. Appendix G (attached). (Pages 29 - 34)
6. **Proposed format of the meeting:**
- 6:30PM:** The Chair of the Committee will open the meeting, run through the housekeeping items and introduce the group lead.
  - 6:40PM:** Councillor Jones as Group Lead will then outline the purpose of the special meeting and briefly explain why the subject is being scrutinised together with how the session will work.
  - 6:50PM:** The Group Lead through the Chair will allow follow up questions from the Committee members.
  - 7:40 PM:** Chair to suspend Standing Orders to allow opportunity for further public questions in addition to those already submitted.
  - 8:20PM:** Actions/next steps to be agreed by the Committee.
  - 8:30 PM:** Chair will formally close the meeting.

## **PART 'B' (CONFIDENTIAL RESTRICTED INFORMATION)**

Nil.

**If you have any enquiries about this agenda, please contact Corporate and Community Services, telephone 01271 388253**

21.02.24



## **North Devon Council protocol on recording/filming at Council meetings**

The Council is committed to openness and transparency in its decision-making. Recording is permitted at Council meetings that are open to the public. Members of the public that attend meetings must be aware that these meetings are open to the public and so therefore both individuals and the Council itself have the right to record the meeting. The Council understands that some members of the public attending its meetings may not wish to be filmed. The Chair of the meeting will make sure any request not to be filmed is respected.

The rules that the Council will apply are:

1. The recording must be overt (clearly visible to anyone at the meeting) and must not disrupt proceedings. The Council will put signs up at any meeting where we know recording is taking place.
2. The Chair of the meeting has absolute discretion to stop or suspend recording if, in their opinion, continuing to do so would prejudice proceedings at the meeting or if the person recording is in breach of these rules.
3. We will ask for recording to stop if the meeting goes into 'part B' where the public is excluded for confidentiality reasons. In such a case, the person recording should leave the room ensuring all recording equipment is switched off.
4. Any member of the public has the right not to be filmed. We ensure that agendas for, and signage at, Council meetings make it clear that recording can take place – anyone not wishing to be filmed must advise the Chair at the earliest opportunity to allow them to be directed to an area in the room where they will not be caught on camera. Subject to paragraphs 1, 2 and 3 above, audio recordings shall be permitted at all times during public meetings.
5. The recording should not be edited in a way that could lead to misinterpretation or misrepresentation of the proceedings or in a way that ridicules or shows a lack of respect for those in the recording. The Council would expect any recording in breach of these rules to be removed from public view.

### **Notes for guidance:**

Please contact either our Corporate and Community Services team or our Communications team in advance of the meeting you wish to record at so we can make all the necessary arrangements for you on the day.

For more information contact the Corporate and Community Services team on **01271 388253** or email [memberservices@northdevon.gov.uk](mailto:memberservices@northdevon.gov.uk) or the Communications Team on **01271 388278**, email [communications@northdevon.gov.uk](mailto:communications@northdevon.gov.uk).

Room G107 is located on the first floor of the South West Institute Development building at Petroc, Old Sticklepath Hill, Barnstaple, Devon EX31 2BQ. A lift is available to the first floor.

The following page shows a location plan of Petroc.

G Block on the plan indicates the South West Institute Development building.

### **Parking**

Point 5 on the plan indicates the short stay car park which is located adjacent to the South West Institute Development building which is free to park after 5.00 p.m.

### **Cycle Racks**

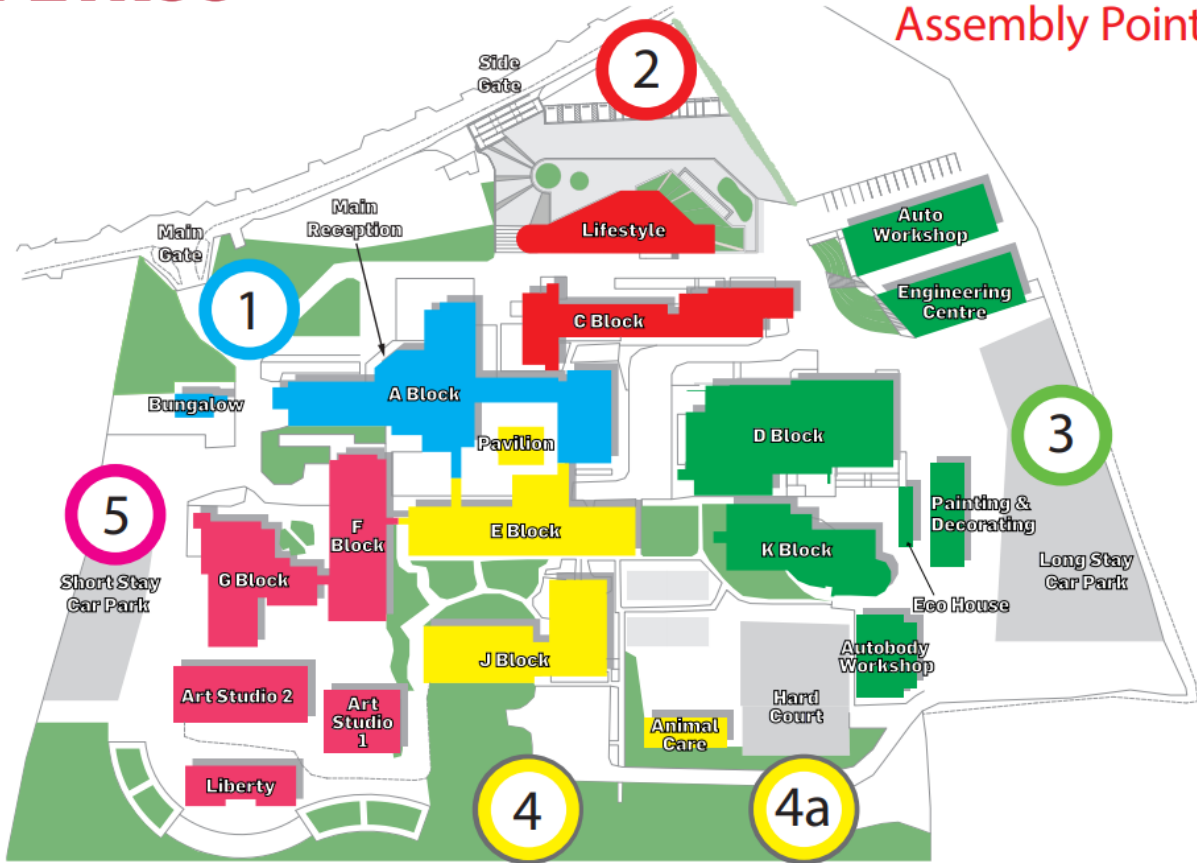
Covered cycle racks are located on the grassed area opposite Petroc's main reception, before the Lifestyle building.

### **Bus Routes**

Stops in **Sticklepath Hill** (East bound) bus service 310  
Wrey Arms (West bound) bus services 5B, 21, 21A, 21C, 62C, 322, 386, 646, 815, 821, 903, 921  
([Sticklepath, Barnstaple – Bus Times](#))

### **Fire evacuation procedures**

Fire evacuation procedures - Upon hearing a constant 2-tone alarm, please leave the building via your nearest marked fire exit and make your way to the nearest assembly point which is the short stay car park (Point 5 on the map). Lifts are not to be used. Please do not take time to pick up personal belongings and leave the building promptly.



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| The National Trust: James Thomas/Alex Palmer:  | Answers provided to questions from the Committee:  |
|--|--|
| <p>1. <b>In your opinion, how bad is the issue of water pollution in the rivers and on the beaches of North Devon and what are the causes?</b></p>   | <p>Across the National Trust landholding in the North Devon Portfolio, we have a range of diversity in land use. We notice in areas with intensive agriculture there seems to be the highest levels of pollution from diffuse run-off. However, pollution also enters our land from wider sources such as the road infrastructure network, urbanised areas, and surface water run-off. We only own limited stretches of the river network so it is difficult to pinpoint exactly where the pollution is entering the system. We are working within our land holding to reduce pollution and implementing sustainable practises and nature-based solutions to capture pollutants.</p> |
| <p>2. <b>The public receives a variety of different information on the water quality in their rivers and on their coast. Sometimes this information conflicts. Who is responsible for this confusion? And how should the public be informed?</b></p> | <p>The public should be informed by the Environment Agency who are the statutory body for water quality.</p>   |
| <p>3. <b>In order for planning authorities to properly determine planning applications, should water companies provide up to date appropriate information on the capacity of sewage disposal for the proposed development?</b></p>                   | <p>No comment.</p>   |

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <p><b>4. Individual organisations and groups currently undertake their own testing. How can we compare those results and use that data in the most effective way?</b></p> | <p>The rise in CSI spot testing and Riverfly surveying is providing a useful guide to flagging potential water quality issues. It raises awareness of the issue and generates proactive action on potential solutions from independent landowners. If a serious issue is flagged this should then be reported and followed up by the statutory body e.g. Environment Agency.</p> |
| <p><b>5. When will this situation be resolved and how? And what are the main impediments?</b></p>   | <p>The solution needs to be resolved ASAP, a wider catchment approach is required to understand the issues and mitigate against these.</p>   |



| Local Angling Journalist: Mr Wayne Thomas  | Answers provided to questions from the Committee:   |
|--|---|
| <p>1. <b>In your opinion, how bad is the issue of water pollution in the rivers and on the beaches of North Devon and what are the causes?</b></p> | <p>The rivers and watercourses across Devon are all impacted upon to some degree by pollution. The degree of pollution depends very much on where the area the water flows through on its route to the sea.</p> <p>The rivers that flow from the moors with limited agriculture and urbanisation tend to be good quality with abundant fish and aquatic life.</p> <p>The lower reaches of rivers tend to be more heavily polluted.</p> <p>The main causes of pollution are many:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Sewage effluent:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Agricultural runoff from farms, including phosphates, slurry, soil, insecticides.</li> <li>➤ Herbicides, anti-biotics for treating livestock, animal waste.</li> <li>➤ Road run off – Including oils, Petro-chemicals, road salt.</li> <li>➤ Domestic Pet treatments – Spot on etc used to kill ticks and flea kills aquatic insects.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |

|  |  |
|--|--|
|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Industrial waste products.</li> <li>➤ Plastics and micro plastics.</li> <li>➤ Sun-screen from bathers.</li> <li>➤ It's is to be remembered that during periods of low flow there is less dilution resulting in higher concentrations of pollution.</li> <li>➤ Water temperature is also harmful to many fish species, particularly salmonoids.</li> <li>➤ Low oxygen levels resulting from algae growth.</li> </ul>   |
| <p><b>2. The public receives a variety of different information on the water quality in their rivers and on their coast. Sometimes this information conflicts. Who is responsible for this confusion? And how should the public be informed?</b></p> | <p>The Environment Agency has suffered from extensive cuts in funding over recent decades and is no longer able to adequately monitor the rivers and coastal water quality. Citizen Science has to some extent stepped into the breach with organisations such as the West Country Rivers Trust investing in widespread testing all be it at a rather fundamental level. There needs to be more joined up efforts to compile data. There also needs to be a political will to put the environment much higher on the agenda.</p> <p>Data whilst vital is always open to interpretation and is frequently manipulated according to political and financial convenience.</p> |

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <p><b>3. In order for planning authorities to properly determine planning applications, should water companies provide up to date appropriate information on the capacity of sewage disposal for the proposed development?</b></p> | <p>It is widely accepted that water companies operate waste water Treatment plants that cannot cope with the present level of development. Before planning permission is granted an adequate infrastructure needs to be in place. It is easy to blame water companies for inadequate funding and payments to shareholders but it has to be acknowledged that it is the population that produces the effluent; a population that has more than doubled in the past fifty years.</p> <p>Whilst it seems wrong to have privatised water and waste water treatment it was a failing industry before this happened.</p>  |
| <p><b>4. Individual organisations and groups currently undertake their own testing. How can we compare those results and use that data in the most effective way?</b></p>  | <p>A National and regional network of data gathered from individuals and organisations would be beneficial.</p>   |
| <p><b>5. When will this situation be resolved and how? And what are the main impediments?</b></p>  | <p>An adequately funded Environment Agency is of course the answer but our political system ensures that this will not happen for historically the environment is not a vote winner. An ever increasing population results in increasing competition for funding with the NHS, Housing, Transport, Education, Defence and the economy trumping the natural world every time.</p> <p>There appears to be a growing awareness of the vulnerability of the natural world and its value to us as a species. In the present world we need to put a value on the natural world and to some extent move away from the present obsession with GDP the main measure of wealth.</p> |

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| Westcountry Rivers Trust: Chief Executive Officer<br>Laurence Couldrick:   | Answers provided to questions from the Committee:  |
|--|--|
| <p><b>1. In your opinion, how bad is the issue of water pollution in the rivers and on the beaches of North Devon and what are the causes?</b></p>   | <p>Water pollution has been an ongoing issue over the last 30 years and is the main reason why the Westcountry Rivers Trust formed. The problems are complex and multifaceted but the main pressures stem from agricultural sectors and the sewage sector (both CSO's Treated Effluent and Septic tanks). The Trust have been monitoring some the rivers of North Devon and this reinforces the Environment Agency data that few of our rivers (bar those draining Exmoor and Dartmoor) meet the ecological status with failures driven by to phosphate pollution, sediment loss and physical modification.</p> <p>These issues are documented in South West River Basin Plan (with data on <a href="#">Catchment Data Explorer</a>) and the Catchment Partnership's <a href="#">North Devon Catchment Evidence Review</a></p> |
| <p><b>2. The public receives a variety of different information on the water quality in their rivers and on their coast. Sometimes this information conflicts. Who is responsible for this confusion? And how should the public be informed?</b></p> | <p>There are no organisations in charge of making sense of the myriad of different sources of data available and understanding if and why there is conflict. Data is collected through the Environment Agency, South West Water, Westcountry Rivers Trust, our Citizen Science Investigation volunteers, Surfers Against Sewage, North Devon Biosphere Reserve, Devon Wildlife Trust, University and Academic groups, and so on.</p>   |

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <p><b>3. In order for planning authorities to properly determine planning applications, should water companies provide up to date appropriate information on the capacity of sewage disposal for the proposed development?</b></p> | <p>Yes, and this should be publicly available including data of the capacity based on surface water infiltration as well.</p>   |
| <p><b>4. Individual organisations and groups currently undertake their own testing. How can we compare those results and use that data in the most effective way?</b></p>  | <p>We do have an Horizon project looking at how to collate and communicate this information and are working with all parties but this is challenging as different groups are collating data for different reasons and have different tolerances over data standards.</p>  |
| <p><b>5. When will this situation be resolved and how? And what are the main impediments?</b></p>  | <p>As a society we will have to resolve water pollution as it is integral to other water management issues such as drought, flooding and aquatic habitat and species loss. Climate change and the ecological emergency is forcing us to look for joined up nature based solutions and in many places this can run alongside our need for food but there will be spaces where we will need to decide what we need most from any parcel and a national Food Security Statement and Strategic Land Use Framework is needed. Work is underway to provide this but it needs leadership at the highest levels within Government.</p> <p><a href="https://issuu.com/westcountryrivertrust/docs/north_devon_evidence_review_1-0">https://issuu.com/westcountryrivertrust/docs/north_devon_evidence_review_1-0</a></p> |

# Presentation to Torridge and North Devon District Councils

**Richard Price – Group Chief Engineering Director**  
**Ian Lake - Head of Developer Services**

**22<sup>nd</sup> January 2024**



Agenda Item 5d

# SWW approach to support development growth across the region

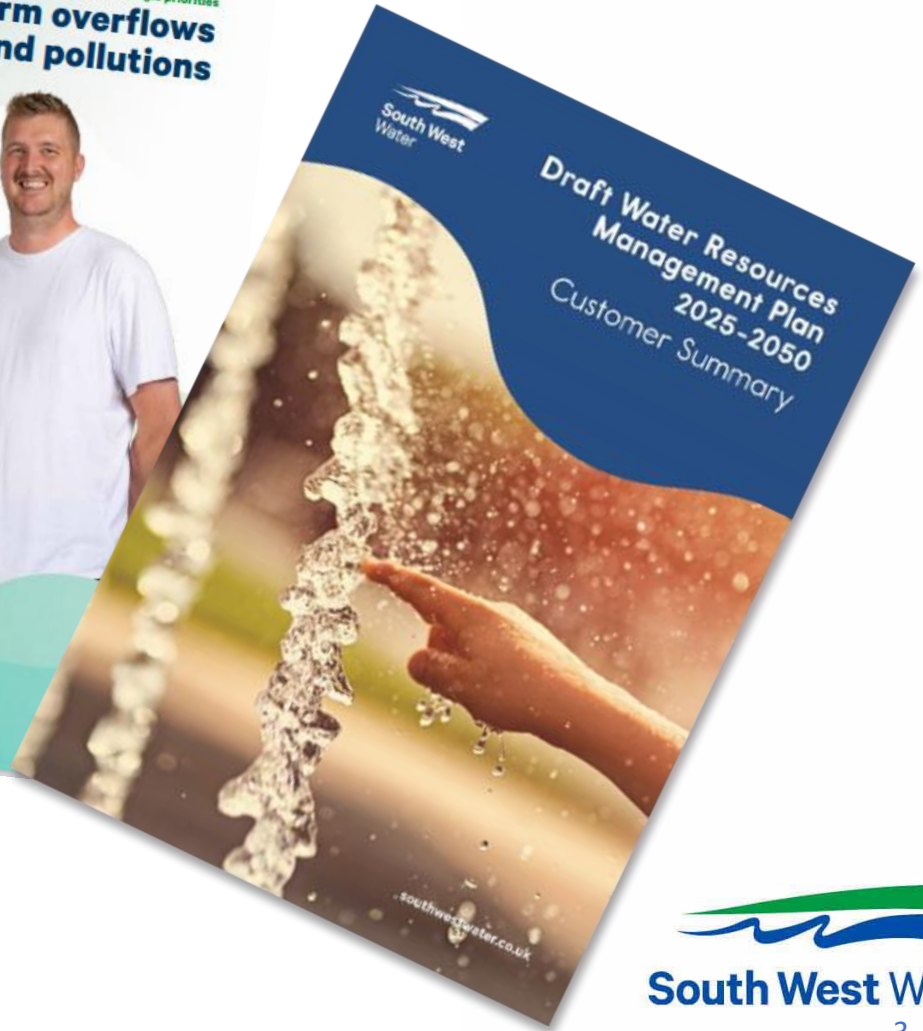
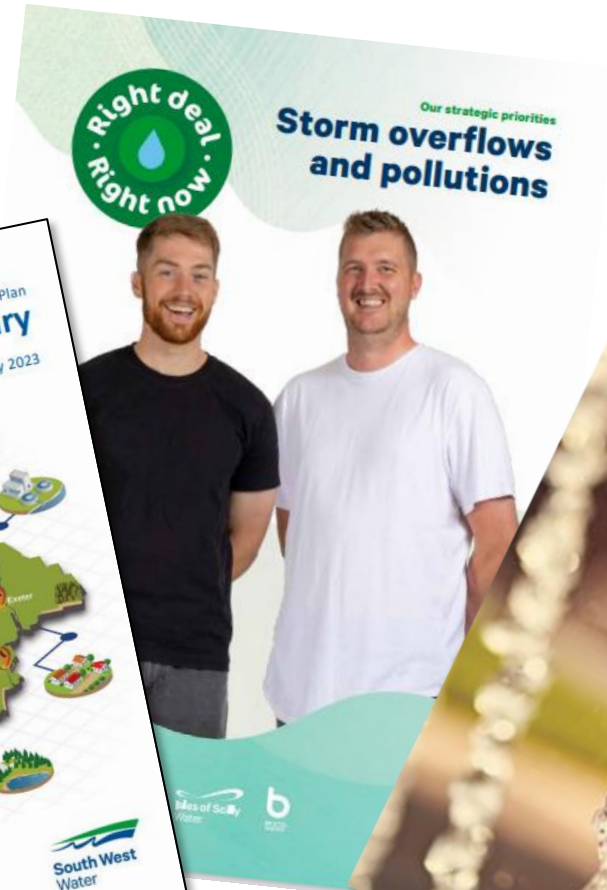
1. South West Water, whilst not a Statutory Consultee, proactively reviews 30,000+ planning applications per annum across Devon, Cornwall and Bournemouth. The purpose of these reviews are to assess whether:
  - Our networks have the capacity to support the new development
  - Our future investment plans continue to focus upon the increased demand from new development
  - We can continue to protect the environment in respect of flooding, pollution and the availability of water resources
  - The new development will be located near, or over, our infrastructure which might cause damage during construction or restrict future access for maintenance.
2. Following recent feedback, we have reviewed how we can improve the way we respond to planning applications and build stronger relationships with Planning Authorities.
3. We previously held a workshop in November 2023 with the Planning Officers from Torridge and North Devon to share our approach and improve engagement. We hope to maintain this relationship.
4. The Company will target providing responses to all applications that will impact the capacity within our clean and wastewater networks. We have standard requirements relating to water consumption and the discharge of surface water into our sewerage networks





# Strategic Planning Engagement

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Agenda Item 5d

# Strategic Priorities

## Wastewater

- WaterFit investment of £330m reducing average spills per location to **20 per year by 2025**.
- £900m up to 2030 to radically improve storm overflow performance
- Further investment reducing average spills per location to no more than **10 per year by 2040 (10 years ahead of Defra target of 2050)**
- Accelerated delivery investment to start by 2025

## Water Resources

- **Secure supply of water to customers, while also protecting and enhancing the environment**
- **Forecasts water supply and demand out to 2050** and identifies any risks to supplies
- Identifies the 'best value' programme of action to maintain reliable and resilient water supply
- Water Resource Management Plan is a statutory requirement set out in legislation - we must **review and update it every 5 years**



# SWW approach to Planning Applications

1. Under current rules, developers have a right to connect to the nearest public sewer or water main providing it is equal to or above the diameter of the connection. South West Water, as a Statutory Undertaker, has an obligation to facilitate growth.
2. It is the responsibility of the developer to present the drainage strategy for their proposed site to demonstrate that it won't have a detrimental impact on the environment. Often, SWW will have already engaged with the developer through our strategic relationships.
3. It is then up to the Water Company to make sure any network improvements are made in a timely manner. This is funded through an Infrastructure Charge from developers paid at the time of connection.
4. We receive planning lists from some Planning Authorities and proactively review the planning portal for Council areas where we do not.
5. We review the impact of new development growth using our tactical supply and demand tool which will identify whether growth can be supported or highlight the need for a more detailed evaluation.
6. Where required, we utilise our inhouse hydraulic modelling teams and external consultants to assess whether public wastewater infrastructure can support the new development growth whilst continuing to protect the environment from pollution and flooding.



# What are our Standard Requirements?

1. Environmental protection is at the forefront of South West Water's focus and therefore it is essential that the public sewerage networks are used for the purpose that they were intended.
2. Whilst we currently have sewers which are defined as being "combined", which means they receive both foul and surface water flows, we insist that surface water is kept separate on new development sites.
3. This is because most of the environmental challenges we face are due to the impact of surface water which takes up capacity within our networks and can result in overflows operating, particularly during periods of wet weather.

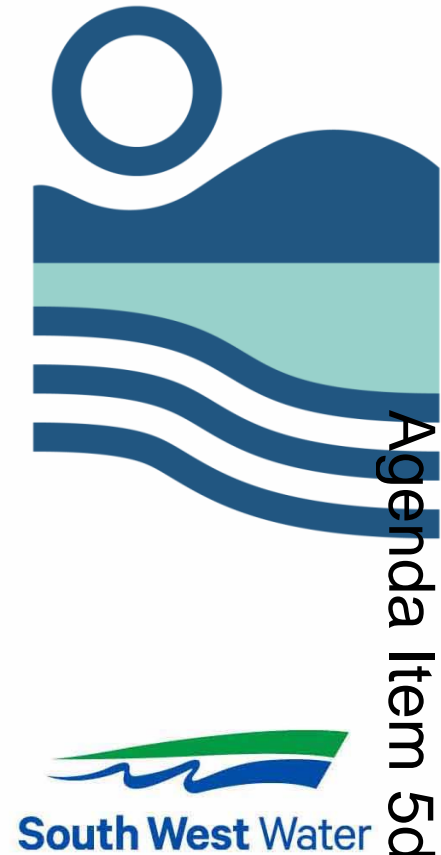
We insist that surface water from roofs and driveways from new developments is connected in accordance with the priorities as set out in the surface water hierarchy encouraging the customer to connect as high up the hierarchy as possible.

5. These considerations are:-
  - Into the ground (infiltration)
  - Controlled discharge to a surface water body.
  - Controlled discharge to a surface water sewer or another surface water drainage system.
  - As a very last resort – a controlled discharge to the combined sewer.



# How we will continue to develop our approach

1. Following recent feedback, we have already held an internal workshop to review our processes.
2. We have also written to all Planning Authorities to strengthen our engagement arrangements and will continue to support the planning process.
3. We will target to make responses to all planning applications that impact our networks. We will ensure that standard conditions relating to surface water and water efficiency are understood by all stakeholders.  
As our duty is only to receive surface water run-off from roofs and driveways, we will continue to work with developers to help them to design drainage systems that support the surface water hierarchy.
5. Whilst we do not have a responsibility to take highway water, we will continue to work closely with other stakeholders to deliver multi-agency solutions to separate surface water flows and help manage them in a better way.
6. We also have a programme called Downstream Thinking which looks at innovative ways of removing surface water from existing combined networks to restore capacity and improve environmental performance.



## Next Steps

1. We have previously engaged with the Planning Officers and held a constructive workshop in November 2023 to agree how our organisations could work together more effectively. We have a further workshop planned on 7 February.
2. We have agreed that a more detailed presentation will be given to the planning committee at a future meeting which will cover:
  - Our Business Plan 2025 – 2030
  - Drainage and Wastewater Management Plans (DWMP)
  - Our network, including Combined Sewer Overflows (CSO's)
  - Drivers and SWW plans for spill reduction
  - Our WaterFit programme and near real time data sharing
  - Water Resource Management Plans (WRMP)
3. South West Water will continue to review existing processes and improve engagement with Planning Authorities to ensure we are as effective as possible to support development growth across the region whilst continuing to protect the environment.



Our Ref: 20148

Your Ref: N/A

Date: 20 February 2024

Via email: [Kelly.Stanley@northdevon.gov.uk](mailto:Kelly.Stanley@northdevon.gov.uk)

Dear Kelly,

Thank you for your email dated 14/02/2024 regarding the special meeting of the Policy Development Committee. Please see our responses to each question below.

**In your opinion, how bad is the issue of water pollution in the rivers and on the beaches of North Devon and what are the causes?**

|                                     | 2023       | 2022      | 2021       | 2019      | 2018      |
|-------------------------------------|------------|-----------|------------|-----------|-----------|
| Combe Martin                        | Good       | Good      | Sufficient | Poor      | Poor      |
| <b>Combesgate Beach, Woolacombe</b> | Excellent  | Excellent | Excellent  | Excellent | Excellent |
| <b>Croyde Bay</b>                   | Excellent  | Excellent | Good       | Good      | Excellent |
| <b>Hartland Quay</b>                | Excellent  | Excellent | Excellent  | Excellent | Excellent |
| <b>Ilfacombe Hele</b>               | Sufficient | Good      | Good       | Good      | Good      |
| <b>Ilfacombe Tunnels Beach</b>      | Excellent  | Excellent | Excellent  | Excellent | Excellent |
| <b>Lynmouth</b>                     | Excellent  | Excellent | Excellent  | Excellent | Excellent |
| <b>Putsborough</b>                  | Excellent  | Excellent | Excellent  | Excellent | Excellent |
| <b>Saunton Sands</b>                | Excellent  | Excellent | Excellent  | Excellent | Excellent |
| <b>Westward Ho!</b>                 | Excellent  | Excellent | Excellent  | Excellent | Excellent |
| <b>Woolacombe Village</b>           | Excellent  | Excellent | Excellent  | Excellent | Excellent |

|                   | 2023 | 2022 | 2021 | 2019 | 2018 |
|-------------------|------|------|------|------|------|
| <b>Excellent</b>  | 82%  | 88%  | 72%  | 72%  | 82%  |
| <b>Good</b>       | 9%   | 18%  | 19%  | 19%  | 0%   |
| <b>Sufficient</b> | 9%   | 0%   | 9%   | 0%   | 9%   |
| <b>Poor</b>       | 0%   | 0%   | 0%   | 9%   | 9%   |

**WOOLACOMBE**

Classified Excellent. Most results <10 for E.coli and Int.ent. There was a slightly raised result on 19/09/2023 of E.coli 82 and Int.ent 55. There were elevated bacteria levels in the stream that day and rainfall that day and earlier in that week.

**SAUNTON**

Classified Excellent. Some concerns about run off from the car park which will be followed up in 2024.

## **CROYDE**

Classified Excellent. Following deterioration in 2019 classification to Good an extensive catchment walkover, extra freshwater sampling and DNA analysis of the source of faecal bacteria were carried out. Areas of poaching and poorly located livestock drinkers were rectified, plus some farm visits to improve slurry storage and keep sources of pollution away from the stream.

## **ILFRACOMBE HELE**

Multiple additional freshwater sample sites were added when a decline on water quality in the stream and BW was noticed. This helped pinpoint a specific 200m stretch of the Hele stream that has a spike in bacteria levels.

A and R have carried out walkovers of the upper parts of the Hele stream and the affected area of high bacteria, looking at Ammonia, Invertebrates present and sewage fungus.

We have also dyed the foul lines and toilets at the Hele Mill café (which were clear).

We have dyed manholes and foul lines where they cross the stream in this section (which at the time were clear). This may need repeating.

We also installed a continuous water quality sonde, which did not show any trends. This may be due to a seasonal issue having stopped by the time the sonde was installed.

We have put forward several freshwater samples for MST analysis which showed both ruminant and human sources, and have shared other MST prepared sample details with SWW in order to secure funding for future analysis.

There is some occasional increase in bacteria from the main road to beach section culverted stream which may be linked to a misconnection in Beach Road. SWW are helping with our investigation in this location.

South West Water have also agreed to look at the integrity of the storm overflow pipe from the Pumping Station, and may help look at misconnections that may be present in the Hele Bay holiday flats.

EM visited a farm in the upper part of the stream which identified several issues which must be rectified before next BW season.

A and R/EM are planning to visit two business near the top of the catchment before next bathing season.

A and R are hoping to carry out a Citizen Science project in the area with possibly the local swim group involved and using cutting edge rapid bacteria testing equipment and Ammonia testing.

## **COMBE MARTIN**

Classified Good. Extensive improvements to the sewer storage, groundwater infiltration and rebalancing the foul system has been undertaken. Numerous misconnections have been rectified.

Local businesses that may affect the water quality have had improvements recommended. We will visit them before the 2024 BW season.

Extensive farm improvements have been carried out, including fencing and increased slurry storage, relocating manure heaps and livestock drinking areas.

An extensive dog publicity event and Yellow Fish campaign has been carried out, plus water quality monitors and a Citizen Science campaign looking at Tryptophan levels.

A and R met with local businesses and local Waterwatch group in Autumn last year to keep improving water quality and addressing local issues.



Natural Flood Management schemes and tree planting has been undertaken with North Devon Biosphere and South West Water and this continues. There has also been a computer learning model project (SMART) undertaken with North Devon Biosphere which we had input on. This involved numerous small water quality, soil and rain monitors being placed in the catchment.

## **LYNMOUTH**

Classified Excellent. Two high bacteria results in 2023: 02/08/2023 E.coli 1300 Int.ent 2400 following rainfall and a small spill of 30 minutes from Basketshop CSO on 30/07/2023. 18/09/2023 E.coli 160 and Int.ent 130 after days of moderate rainfall. Some concerns about safe access to the sampling point. Detailed spill data will be reviewed for this BW.

## **WESTWARD HO!**

Classified Excellent. One high result on 20/09/2023 of E.coli 770 Int.ent 340. This was rainfall related as there was heavy rainfall 19/09/2023 and on the day of testing 20/09/2023.

## **HARTLAND QUAY**

Classified Excellent, most results <10 for E.coli and Int.ent.

## **PUTTSBOROUGH**

Classified Excellent. No bacteria results over 45 in 2023, most <10.

## **COMBESGATE**

Classified Excellent. Most results <10 for E.coli and Int.ent.

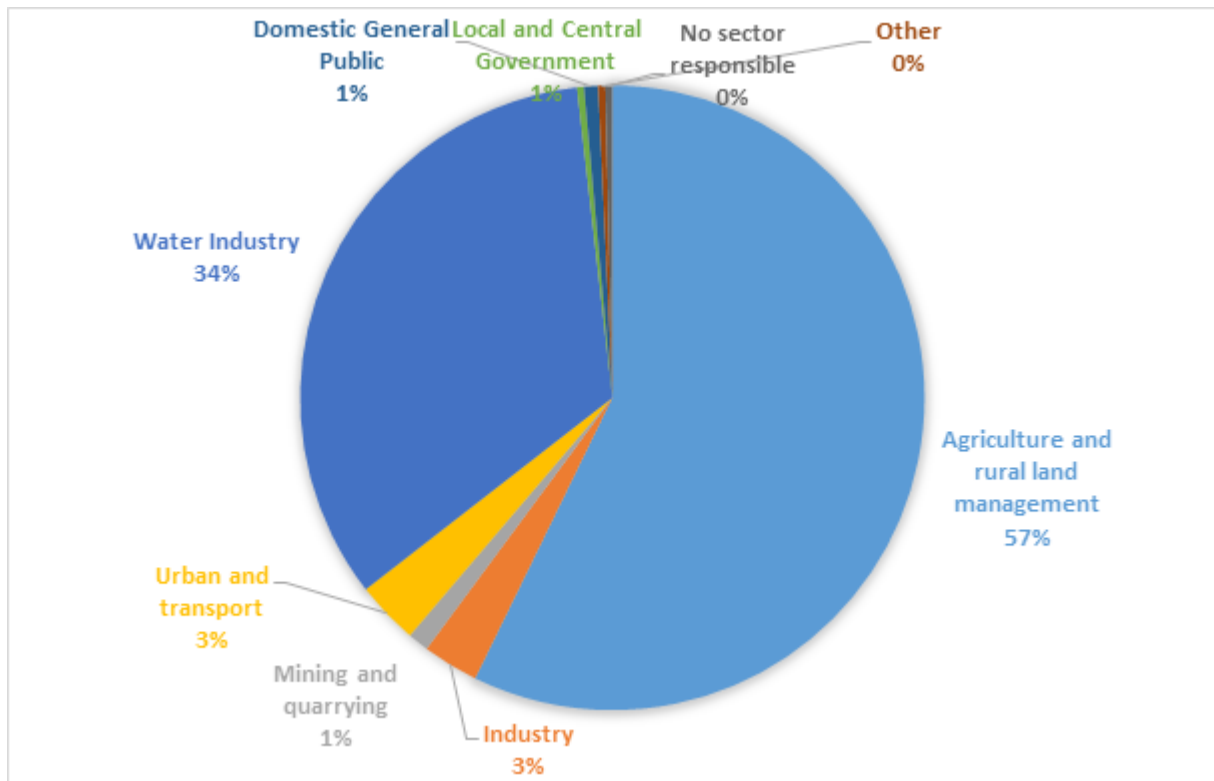
## **ILFRACOMBE TUNNELS**

Classified Excellent. No results over 100 for E.coli or Int.ent in 2023.

Also EA data is publicly available on our website [Defra Data services platform - App gallery](#)

| Water Body Categories                     | No. WB     | Ecological Status or Potential |           |           |           |          |
|---|------------|--------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|----------|
|   |            | H                              | G         | M         | P         | B        |
| River, canals and surface water transfers | 92         | 0                              | 13        | 63        | 15        | 1        |
| Lake                                      | 6          | 0                              | 0         | 3         | 1         | 0        |
| TraC                                      | 4          | 0                              | 0         | 3         | 0         | 0        |
| <b>Total</b>                              | <b>102</b> | <b>0</b>                       | <b>13</b> | <b>69</b> | <b>16</b> | <b>1</b> |

## Reasons for not achieving good in North Devon



**The public receives a variety of different information on the water quality in their rivers and on their coast. Sometimes this information conflicts. Who is responsible for this confusion? And how should the public be informed?**

The Environment Agency's online tool Swimfo provides information on all our designated bathing waters. Throughout the bathing water season (May to September), the Environment Agency issues warnings of any forecasted pollution risk on Swimfo. The Environment Agency works with local authorities to ensure signs are posted at these swimming locations to inform bathers about any possible dips in water quality.

The Environment Agency does not warn and inform the public when permitted spills are happening. However, the local water company, SWW, does (here). Surfers Against Sewage (SAS) uses the same data to do the same (here) - The SAS app keeps spills live for much longer than SWW. In most cases on large beaches, sewage discharges will dissipate within 2 tidal cycles – 12.5 hours after the pollution has stopped, which is reflected on Swimfo & the SWW app.

**In order for planning authorities to properly determine planning applications, should water companies provide up to date appropriate information on the capacity of sewage disposal for the proposed development?**

There is nothing to say sewerage undertakers **should** do anything at planning application stage. They are not statutory consultees for any type of planning application under the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (paragraph 80, part e.) does say that development should not cause or be affected by unacceptable levels of pollution (including of water).

The Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) (Ref. ID 34-020-20140306) is clear that connection to the mains sewer is the 'first presumption' for new development and that this should be done in consultation with the sewerage company when the plans are being drawn up. The onus here appears to be on developers to do this. The PPG (Ref. ID 34-016-20140306) says that water quality can be a concern for planning where a proposal would indirectly affect waterbodies through (among other things) lack of adequate infrastructure to deal with wastewater. The PPG also says (Ref. ID 34-020-20140306) that timescales do not always fit with development needs and that Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) should consider how new development can be phased so that it is not occupied until any necessary improvements to the public sewer system have been carried out.

Whilst this suggests that it is appropriate for lack of adequate wastewater infrastructure to be addressed at planning application stage, as there is no statutory consultation role for sewerage undertakers (and a limited statutory consultation role for the Environment Agency) at this stage, **consideration of the impacts of new development of sewerage infrastructure and water quality are best addressed at the strategic planning level.**

Under the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 water companies/sewerage undertakers, along with the Environment Agency are 'specific consultation bodies' which must be consulted by LPAs. **The PPG (Ref. ID 34-020-20140306) confirms that plan preparation should be the focus for ensuring investment plans of sewerage undertakers align with development needs.**

Information on sewage disposal capacity should be front loaded into the strategic planning system to inform the selection process after the call for sites. The evidence (from both South West Water and the Environment Agency) on sewage capacity and water quality issues related to discharges from wastewater infrastructure must be built into a strategy for dealing with foul water, setting out alternative approaches and timelines for capacity to be built in to support the proposed housing projection.

**Individual organisations and groups currently undertake their own testing. How can we compare those results and use that data in the most effective way?**

There is a national project lead by the Rivers Trusts called CaSTCo which is looking to 'enable a national framework to standardise and share integrated data and build the much-needed evidence base for improved decision-making about our water environments'. The EA is

involved and the Tamar is one of the pilot catchments. Further info can be found on their website.

[CaSTCo – Catchment Systems Thinking Cooperative | The Rivers Trust](#)

- The Environment Agency welcomes the valuable contribution of citizen science to help understand, and raise awareness, of water quality in our rivers and streams; to inform the most effective actions that can be taken to improve it.
- The Environment Agency only has the resources to undertake broadscale water quality monitoring that supports river classifications for the Water Framework Directive. A link to our data for North Devon is provided here [Open WIMS data](#)
- The increase in both density and frequency of citizen science monitoring can help understand and manage local water quality impacts.
- Citizen science is most effectively coordinated through local partnerships rather than the Environment Agency
- The Environment Agency must focus its resources on our core funded roles and does not have capacity for an officer to attend this meeting. We can of course respond to any specific requests for information to our customer enquiries team at [DCISEnquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:DCISEnquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk)

## **When will this situation be resolved and how? And what are the main impediments?**


To be advised at meeting.

If you would like to discuss this further, please contact our Customers and Engagement Team, who will be happy to help you. You can contact the team at [DCISEnquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:DCISEnquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk).

Yours sincerely,



**Mark Rice**  
**Area Director – Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly**

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| Surfers Against Sewage:  | Answers provided to questions from the Committee:  |
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| <p>1. <b>In your opinion, how bad is the issue of water pollution in the rivers and on the beaches of North Devon and what are the causes?</b></p>   | <p>In the North Devon Management Catchment, there are a total of 98 individual water bodies in the river basin district. Most recent assessments of Ecological Status indicate that 0 are Bad, 17 are Poor, 66 are Moderate, 15 are Good, and 0 are High. All fail Chemical Status assessments.</p> <p>In water bodies which failed to achieve Good Ecological Status, the issues cited as contributing to this include many incidents of pollution from rural areas due to agriculture and rural land management, as well as pollution from wastewater on account of water industry activity.</p> <p>The North Devon constituency was ranked at number 28 out of 543 total entries, with 1,983 sewage discharges in total lasting a duration of 18,363 hours in 2022.</p> |
| <p>2. <b>The public receives a variety of different information on the water quality in their rivers and on their coast. Sometimes this information conflicts. Who is responsible for this confusion? And how should the public be informed?</b></p> | <p>At present, there are various sources of information on both water quality and sewage spills in UK waterways. This differs based on nation (i.e. the devolved regulator), water company, and information type. An important source of water quality information is storm overflow discharge data, which is provided directly from water companies.</p> <p>There is, however, a lack of nationalised standards in the way in which this data is reported from water companies, meaning that much of this data is not comparable across UK regions.</p> <p>At Surfers Against Sewage, we strive to provide water users with vital information regarding water quality, however the lack of standardised framework for data processing and format means</p>                |

that of the dozen data feeds we receive, not all are directly comparable. This information can indeed be confusing to water users and make data interpretation difficult.

The soon to be published map, led by Water UK, will feature live discharge data from all storm overflows in the UK. SAS believes that this is an opportunity, and responsibility, for water companies to develop an easy to use interface with simple and clear messaging to inform water users of risks associated with accessing water, with a data framework which provides continuity between datasets.

Other data sources relating to water quality in England include the Environment Agency Swimfo website, which publishes data from water quality testing, and associated bathing water classifications, at designated bathing sites throughout the UK.

This is also where pollution risk forecasts (PRFs) are issued, advising against bathing. Due to a lack of nationalised standard for alerts, however, real-time storm overflow alerts are not considered for PRFs, which instead use a modelling approach.

As an independent charity, we at SAS strive to communicate water quality data and information in a clear and accessible format. It is, however, the responsibility of water companies, the regulator and the government to ensure that there are required frameworks for publishing, displaying and communicating water quality information and the associated risks to water users in an accessible and understandable format.

Furthermore, the limitations to some of these data (e.g testing frequency, reliability of models etc) should be communicated so

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|   | the public can make informed decisions with the information that is available.   |
| <b>3. In order for planning authorities to properly determine planning applications, should water companies provide up to date appropriate information on the capacity of sewage disposal for the proposed development?</b> | Yes, we believe that there should be transparent information on sewage disposal capacity available to developers and planning authorities to ensure capacity does not become overloaded. |

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| <p><b>4. Individual organisations and groups currently undertake their own testing. How can we compare those results and use that data in the most effective way?</b></p> | <p>Many organisations either undertake their own testing or support citizen scientist in collecting data for their waterways. In order for this to be most effective, communication and clarity between these organisations is key. This should include consistency with methodologies to ensure comparable data, consistency in data reporting platforms with open access to data to both other organisations and the public, and consistent messaging to volunteers and the public on how to interpret water quality data and best utilise it as part of a local campaign, to engage stakeholders, or to inform communities. As a part of this, a key element will be transparency with signposting any member of the public who is interested in water quality data to the appropriate organisation for their need or interest.</p> <p>At SAS, we are gathering and mobilising various organisations as part of our End Sewage Pollution Coalition, of which citizen science will be a sub-group.</p> <p>In addition, it is also the responsibility of the regulator to consider citizen-collected data generated through volunteer-led programmes in official assessments of waterways. This will aid in the development of a centralised location to store data and consistency with the messaging about water quality data across</p> |
| <p><b>5. When will this situation be resolved and how? And what are the main impediments?</b></p>   | <p>The main impediment to talking the current state of WQ in the UK is the failure of the Government to enforce existing law. The water industry in England is governed by the 1991 Water Industry Act and the 1994 Urban Waste Water Treatment Regulations. This legislation requires water companies to treat water 'effectively' and only permit sewage discharges from storm overflows in 'exceptional circumstances'. However, the government has admitted sewage overflows "are being used <a href="#">significantly beyond their original purpose</a>". Since the last</p>   |



UK general election, water companies discharged sewage into waterways over 1 million times. Surfers Against Sewage's 2022 Water Quality Report uncovered 143 'dry spills' pouring raw sewage into our most popular surf and swim spots between 1st October 2021 and 30th September 2022.

<https://www.sas.org.uk/waterquality2022/dry-spills/dumping-sewage-when-its-dry/>

These dry spills on top of the systemic use of overflows during normal weather events has also led the Office of the Environment Protection to conclude that the Government as well the Environment Agency and OFWAT may have failed to comply with environmental law when dealing with untreated sewage discharges and permitting discharges outside exceptional circumstances. To try and set out the policies needed to End Sewage Pollution, SAS has come together with ENGOs, Community Groups and Water User Governing bodies to create the End Sewage Pollution Manifesto. The Manifesto sets out the ambitious policies water users want to see the next government adopt to End Sewage Pollution to restore thriving coastlines and inland waterways:

1. **Enforce the Law:** Government and Regulators have let water companies get away with dumping untreated sewage even in dry weather. Government can stop this by enforcing current law and funding regulators
2. **Stop Pollution for Profit:** Water companies have been rewarding shareholders and executives with huge bonus and dividends whilst the companies continue to pollute. Companies and individuals should only be rewarded

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|  | <p>when they are complaint with the law and environmental performance is improving.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>3. <b>Prioritise High Risk Pollution:</b> We need to protect the massive number of people using the water as well and nature from the harm and damage caused by sewage pollution. We want to End Sewage Pollution into bathing waters and protected natures sites by 2030.</li><li>4. <b>Empower a Nature-led Approach:</b> We want government and regulators to incentivise and support the adoption of effective Nature Based Solutions to end sewage pollution, increase biodiversity &amp; tackle climate change.</li><li>5. <b>Reveal the Truth:</b> We want to see a clear picture of the state of sewage pollution around the UK. England and Wales have made massive steps forward but in Scotland and NI there is very little information about what's going into our water and when.</li></ol> |
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