

Motions

The following motion has been submitted by Councillor Mike Stanton:

Phosphates Requirement by Natural England

This Council is deeply concerned about recent and continuing long delays in consideration of most residential planning applications as a result of Natural England's requirement on us to carry out greater scrutiny of the effects of plans or projects that are likely to increase discharge of nutrients and hence phosphate loads to unacceptable levels at internationally important sites, i.e. Ramsar Convention wetland sites within the Somerset Levels and Moors.

This is a problem not of our making and one which we cannot as a council resolve. We applaud the leaders of all four districts councils in Somerset, who have called on the Government for support following Natural England's advice, and demanded further action at government level.

The Sewage (Inland Waters) Bill introduced as a Private Members' Bill by Philip Dunne MP on 26th February 2020 is an important but too limited step in the right direction. We urge government to adopt, accelerate and amend this Bill, which has been awaiting its second reading in the House of Commons for a year, and to add a requirement for biological or nature-based phosphate removal treatments to be installed in all sizes of sewage works by water authorities as a matter of urgency, within months, not over a period of 10 years nor 'progressively installed where practicable' (current wording).

Wessex Water is in our view doing too little too late by relying on the inclusion of relevant measures in their already approved 10-year Strategic Plan which they are unwilling to accelerate.

We recognise the need to clean up our wetlands and to move quickly on environmental protection, as our Environment Strategy and actions show.

But we need action from others: at present we cannot do one of the main jobs we are elected to do; we are being forced to hold up housing development when more housing is desperately needed, just at the time when we have established a 5-year Housing Land Supply and can therefore make sensible decisions about proposed developments.

This Council therefore resolves to:

1. **Write to** Philip Dunne MP to express support for his bill, and ask him to add a requirement for biological or nature-based treatments to be installed by water authorities as a matter of urgency:



2. **Request** our local MPs in writing to support the bill, and press for its urgent advance to second reading, adoption as a government bill, and add the above treatment requirements:
 3. **Advise** the appropriate person at Defra of Somerset's phosphates issue as an indicator of the consequences of failing to take the necessary action to tackle the Climate and Ecological Emergency.
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Background

Natural England's letter of 20th August 2020 to Somerset planning authorities says: "Additional residential units within the catchment are likely add phosphate to the designated site via the waste water treatment effluent, thus contributing to the existing unfavourable condition and further preventing the site in achieving its conservation objectives. Natural England therefore advises that your authority carry out an appropriate assessment of planning applications that will result in a net increase in population served by a wastewater system."

So Natural England have advised Somerset local authorities that they should undertake a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) before determining planning applications that may give rise to additional phosphates in the Levels and Moors catchment.

The Ramsar Convention sites in Somerset include four within the SSDC area – see map on council website.

The Sewage (Inland Waters) Bill is a private member's bill for which the government has expressed support in principle, but for which it has delayed the second reading and hence possible amendment.

The bill is designed principally to stop the discharge of untreated sewage into waterways by controlling and eliminating Combine Sewer outflows (CSOs), although it only requires water companies to 'take reasonable steps' to do this.

It also requires biological or nature-based treatments to be 'progressively installed where practicable' by companies, and tasks the Secretary of State for the Environment (SoS) with creating measures to reduce the polluting content of sewage, including—

- (a) establishing a regulatory standard for flushable products;
- (b) prohibiting the use of plastics in sanitary products and wet wipes;
- (c) reducing the use of microplastics in flushable products; and 20
- (d) prohibiting the disposal of fats and oils into sewers by food service establishments.

But the Bill makes no specific reference to removal of nutrients & phosphates from household sewage; it requires water companies only to take 'reasonable steps' without



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specifying about what, and requires the SoS only to 'assist water companies in fulfilling this duty'.

This problem has been known about since 1974, when the Agriculture and Water Quality Conference determined that the vast majority of phosphorous pollution was produced by water treatment plants. However, only the big plants installed controls; Somerset has a lot of small ones.
