

Statement to Strategic Planning Committee 21st March 2024 by David Orr

After the “financial emergency”, held-up housing across large parts of Somerset due to nutrient neutrality, must be one of the single most pressing issues in Somerset. The economic and social impacts are profound.

Whilst this is a well-written paper, I am disappointed that so many P mitigation initiatives haven't progressed with more urgency and are now at or near the implementation stage

The paper hasn't covered the key strategic issue of a catchment-wide nutrient neutrality policy, nor has the promised relevant legal instruction and advice been disclosed. Why not?

Wessex Water are a key strategic partner. Why aren't they here today to both contribute to policy discussion as subject matter experts and also, to take relevant questions?

Q1. For ongoing member assurance, will the council carried out nutrient neutrality performance benchmarking (number of P credits, cost of P credits, number of houses built etc) against other councils e.g. Wiltshire, Cornwall, Norfolk etc?

Q2. Wessex Water can increase P removal by increasing existing dosing of ferrous sulphate or by installing at a small treatment works a Package Treatment Plant. Should the Council use those methods as a baseline, to compare P credit generation efficiency and net P credit costs to other new or technical solutions, like Reverse Osmosis? If newer technologies proved more expensive, can the bid funding be re-directed into these conventional but potentially less costly treatments?

Q3. How many of each of social and affordable houses are currently held up?

Q4. How many homes does this P mitigation strategy aim to get built between now and 2030? Why isn't that key information of estimates of houses that can be built, in which District area and when included? This is the primary outcome of this strategy.

Q5. Getting back to a 5-year housing supply is a key community benefit to restore the primacy of local plans and bring order to speculative development. There is a table of the number of held-up houses by each former District area. Can you say whether releasing all of those held-up homes (via P mitigation) would restore a 5-year housing supply in each District area, or, if not, how far it would contribute?

Q6. Reverse Osmosis is a well-established and longstanding technology used worldwide for desalination for drinking water. It is also used to extract lithium salts from old Cornish mines water. Salinity Solutions is an under-capitalised and risky start-up, who in a competitive bid process failed to secure a Cornish lithium extraction contract in 2023. Once the Reverse Osmosis 6-month trial completes, and presuming the P generation amounts and costs remain viable (they may not when transport and refining costs are taken into account), will the Council move to a competitive bid process for Somerset-wide implementation for Reverse Osmosis?