

Scrutiny Climate and Place 6th June 2024 – Public Questions

Annexe A – Public Questions	
Name of person submitting	Question
David Orr	<p>We elect Councillors to make Somerset the best place it can be. You are in charge of policy, Officers advise. The current nutrient neutrality policy is, I feel, an act of unnecessary self-harm which is damaging Somerset. The KC draft opinion was received by this Council. A verbal and undocumented meeting took place, when the KC was instructed that all Wessex Water headroom at their works had been used up by previous planning permissions. The draft opinion and the meeting notes are withheld.</p> <p>In my opinion, the officers attending the verbal briefing of the KC were not senior enough. Nor was Wessex Water, as a strategic partner, allowed to participate as subject matter experts. Planning Officers are not qualified water industry engineers. The Council's view that all the headroom at Taunton's wastewater works has been used up, makes no sense. The District Council planned for 17,000 new homes by 2028. Of the 18,000 held-up homes across Somerset, 10,000 lie within Taunton Deane. I regard the KC opinion made after the confidential verbal briefing as unsound.</p> <p>I recommend that this Council work collaboratively with Wessex Water to transparently document the headroom across the catchment area. Then instruct the KC to re-assess his advice following a new written instruction based on that documented and verified work.</p> <p>The Habitats Regulation requires a precautionary approach but doesn't give a number. In 2024, despite improvements, there is still an assumption that 100% of phosphates from new homes gets on to the Moors and Levels daily, then another 20% is added. Since 2018, Wessex Water has removed a huge amount of phosphates from their daily discharges. In Taunton, the level of phosphates entering the river Tone is just 7% of what it was 6 years ago.</p> <p>The Council owns the phosphate mitigation calculator. Amending the precautionary factor in the spreadsheet from 1.2 to 1.0 is a very quick task, retains a precautionary approach and reduces the cost of phosphate credits. Your recommendation is sound. The Officer briefing to the Executive, I feel, doesn't accord enough courtesy and respect to Dr Clegg's voluntary and unpaid work these past 4 years, when no-one else was measuring phosphates out in the real world.</p>

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	Somerset has a unique, man-made river system which will allow a confident Council to set pragmatic nutrient neutrality policy that respects our unique place.
	Lead officer verbal response to be given at the meeting. Full written response to be distributed within 5 working days of the meeting