

Scrutiny Climate and Place committee – Public Question Time

Monday 23rd September 2024

Statement from Mr David Orr:

"Dorset has a nutrient neutrality Get Out of Jail card, while Somerset is stuck in the slow lane?"

I recently made an Environmental Information request on Natural England which revealed an email where Natural England and Dorset Council were planning how to word a letter to the Defra Secretary of State to be let off all further Phosphorus (P) mitigation. The email speaks of "skeletons in the cupboard" with the P figures. I quote *"The point here is that using Natural England's advised long-term Nitrogen (N) target there is much more flexibility around the Phosphorus (P) target and uncertainty around whether Sewage Treatment Works alone achieve the required P reduction for the harbour to avoid P nutrient neutrality is pretty well avoided. We need to avoid protracted discussion with Environment Agency seeking to agree the reductions to be achieved by the Sewage Treatment Works to avoid P neutrality."*

Dorset has in 2024 been allowed to count as certain just 6 small wastewater treatment works, saving just 1.5 tonnes of P a year, despite an admission in the colluding email with Natural England (to agree on the approach for a joint letter to the Defra Sec of State) that the agricultural P exceeds that small 1.5 tonnes per year annual P saving.

The 6 small wastewater treatment works in Dorset are for a population equivalent 1,000 to 2,000 and won't be completed until 2031 (past the AMP8/LURA 2025-30 period). Dorset has managed, via the Environment Agency and Defra, to get for small villages extra wastewater treatment works investments from Wessex Water; lift all P restrictions NOW by avoiding agricultural P loads AND by making the 1.5 tonnes only of annual P removal from the 6 very small wastewater treatment works count as certain 7 years early and before the Wessex Water AMP8/LURA improvements occur.

Can we employ the Dorset Council, Strategic Planning Officer here in Somerset?

By comparison, Somerset Council has not persuaded via the Environment Agency and Defra, Wessex Water to invest in small village wastewater treatment works (for the population equivalent 1,000-2,000); is insisting that all agricultural legacy and current P is fully counted and making everyone wait until 2030 before counting 2025-30 Wessex Water AMP8/LURA improvements to lower P calculator costs.

Ironically, the Natural England Officer who is keeping Somerset "to the rules for the following of", is a trustee and director of the Dorset Wildlife Trust, where not a peep was heard when all P mitigation was lifted for Dorset this year.

Somerset water bill payers will be subsidising Dorset water bill payers, while we enable Dorset to get a real economic and social/affordable housing advantage over us.

A tale of two villages, both wanting to build starter and social housing to keep young people in the village and make the local primary school viable:

The village in Dorset can do that now without impediments, delays or extra costs. They control where development occurs as they now have a 5-year housing land supply.

The village in Somerset has planning delays, upfront costs, complex P mitigation bureaucratic requirements and an extra £22K per home mitigation cost. Control of where development goes is in the hands of speculative developers as there is no 5-year housing land supply.

Dorset can Go for Growth, while Somerset is stuck in the NoCanDo "rules for the following of" slow lane.....

I pay £2,900 a year in Council Tax and I hope that the large portion for Somerset Council goes towards defending and promoting Somerset's economic and social interests. On nutrient neutrality, it doesn't.