

Strategic Planning Committee – 17 March 2025 – Public Questions

Annexe A – Public Questions	
Name of person submitting	Question
David Orr	<p>I asked in the February meeting for Salinity Solutions cost figures. The response was delayed until this meeting and still those costs remain hidden. As a reasonable citizen and council taxpayer, can I ask for these public interest costs to now be made available?</p> <p>The outcome of the Salinity Solutions trial was predicted by subject matter experts to suffer from fine filter problems exacerbating cost overheads. I was told last autumn that there was no target P credit cost regarded as breakeven to make the Salinity Solutions scheme economically sustainable, which I thought lacked credibility.</p> <p>Q1. How much has been paid in total to Salinity Solutions and, also, please list the sources of funds, with a sub-total cost for each source of funds?</p> <p>Q2. What is the current median cost of a P credit per kg? What are the estimated costs of a P credit per kg from the Salinity Solutions trial?</p> <p>Item 6 Appendix 3 has this Council’s response to a government consultation on future policy for Development and Nature Recovery (including nutrient neutrality). The Officers have taken it upon themselves to respond as “the Council” and this has already been submitted. The Officers’ response is at odds with the “can-do” letter from Executive Councillor Rigby, sent to the MHCLG Secretary of State, suggesting a catchment-wide approach to nutrient neutrality and counting water company P removal headroom.</p> <p>The draft response from this Council to the Government on this key planning policy consultation should have come before this Strategic Planning Committee for scrutiny, input and oversight. Why didn’t it? Was Councillor Rigby consulted before this response was submitted? Were Natural England consulted? Were Wessex Water consulted?</p> <p>From government: <i>“The current approach can also be burdensome, costly and uncertain. For example, in the case of nutrient neutrality, a high level of technical knowledge and bespoke calculations are needed, even for small developments, requiring each development to be linked to specific mitigation measures, with development being blocked where such measures are not readily available.”.....“Under the new approach, where development in a specific area is expected to impact a protected site (as is the case for nutrient neutrality), the Secretary of State may determine that a Delivery Plan for nutrient mitigation, operating at catchment scale, would be more effective”</i></p> <p>No substantive response from this Council...!</p> <p>This Council is awaiting legal advice with regard to counting Wessex Water substantial P removal (145 tonnes of P by 2025) towards new homes headroom for P mitigation (needing only 2.4 tonnes of P)? Why wasn’t that nutrient neutrality policy legal briefing put to government alongside Councillor Rigby’s salient points in his letter to MHCLG?</p>

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	<p>The nutrient neutrality status quo is failing Somerset. There is a missed opportunity, via this Committee, to inform and influence future government policy on nutrient neutrality.</p> <p><i>Is the mantra now “Officers decide, Members don’t even advise”?</i></p> <p>Response from Lead Officer: Head of Planning, Alison Blom-Cooper, Service Manager Plan Policy and Implementation, Kate Murdoch and Principal Planning Policy Officer, Paul Browning</p>
Andrew Clegg	<p>Unfortunately I am unable to attend this meeting in person and would like this statement to be read on my behalf. It refers to item 6 on the agenda.</p> <p>I live in Martock, where the River Parrett enters its artificial channel across the Somerset Moors to the sea. I have been measuring the phosphate flow in the Parrett catchment for three years. This evolved into two main studies. One is a seasonal study of the flow from South Perrott near the source, to West Sedgemoor, the largest Ramsar area on the Somerset Moors. It included Wetmoor, the Ramsar east of Langport.</p> <p>The second study is a weekly monitoring of the Parrett phosphate load at Chiselborough and Langport which uses Environment Agency flow data.</p> <p>The purpose of both has been to try and collect field data to shed light on the alarming decline in the ecological status of the Moors in recent decades.</p> <p>I would like to report three relevant outcomes</p> <p>1 For the first time—probably for decades—we observed a ‘good’ phosphate reading at Langport yesterday (10March). The good/moderate borderline on the Environment Agency scale is 0.094 ppm of phosphorus. This improvement follows the installation by Wessex Water, at the end of last year, of phosphate removal stages at five upstream sewage treatment plants. This programme was designed to remove around 70 tonnes from the river each year. We anticipate that the improvement we report will continue, but slowly. This because the considerable reduction in phosphate we have noted in individual sewage works outfalls is buffered in the main river by the large quantities of legacy phosphate tied up in the river sediment.</p> <p>2 The Wessex Water improvement we are now seeing will have little impact on the two Ramsar areas because the river flows past them and not through them. This was, and still is, the primary purpose of the artificial river channel begun six centuries ago.</p>

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Environment Agency flow data suggests, for example, that less than 0.1% of the phosphate in the Parrett enters West Sedgemoor.

3 We are observing a steady deterioration in phosphate contamination in the West Sedgemoor Drain. This originates on the Stoke St Gregory side of the Moor and pollutes the Main Drain which is itself an extension in the Moor of a small stream which flows (and brings some phosphate) from the Blackdowns. The phosphate is not due to water from The Parrett. In the same area of West Sedgemoor we have initial evidence that withy plantations appear to be very effective at removing phosphate from the rhynes.

It is not my intention to make any comment on the relevance of this work to the catchment mitigation scheme beyond noting that while mitigation measures will doubtless impact phosphate flow within the catchment **land area**, they cannot have more than a minimal impact on the health of the **waterways** within the Ramsar areas. Phosphate is very strongly bound to the clay and tends to stay there

This raises the important question we should all be taking note of as we consider biodiversity policy - if it is not Parrett catchment nutrient pollution that is the fundamental cause the ecological deterioration of the Levels and Moors, what is it?

Dr Andrew Clegg

Response from Lead Officer: Head of Planning, Alison Blom-Cooper, Service Manager Plan Policy and Implementation, Kate Murdoch and Principal Planning Policy Officer, Paul Browning