

Councillor Channon' Report

Christine is still pushing for the Drain Clearance in our Area

Information on AONB

Dear Partners

Please see below the response from the Corporate Affairs Director of Pennon Group (South West Water) to our letter sent earlier this month.

Having discussed this response with Alistair Handyside, we suggest I liaise with the Community Engagement Team lead, Vicky Gardner, over an opportunity for them to attend a meeting or arrange a special meeting (perhaps a summer field visit to a SWW treatment site) and update the Partnership (and others) on their activity. We would also like to be kept informed about their new 'real time' water quality information system developments.

Regards

Chris

Chris Woodruff AONB Manager

From: Rowney, Bev J <browney@pennon-group.co.uk>

Sent: 20 October 2022 18:03

To: Info <Info@eastdevonaonb.org.uk>

Subject: East Devon AONB Partnership

Dear Mr Handyside,

Thank you for your letter, to our CEO Susan Davy, regarding the East Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and your concerns about protecting water quality along the Jurassic Coast World Heritage Site.

I have discussed this in detail with Susan and I wanted to reply to you and offer ongoing communication with both yourself and the Partnership.

I want to reassure you that we are very much focused on improving our environmental performance and making the changes we all want to see, to protect and improve water quality in East Devon, and across the South West.

Over the last 30 years we have invested c.£11bn making improvements to our services, listening to and responding to the feedback of our customers, local communities and our many stakeholders. In 2022 we were pleased to achieve 100% coastal bathing water quality, as measured by the Environment Agency (EA), for the first time.

As needs and expectations have changed, we have rightly shifted our focus to accelerate the changes we need to make to improve our environmental performance, in particular investments to reduce storm discharges across our networks and at our treatment works. We have invested £200m in our waste water network over the last two years, and £330m will be spent in the next three years, to make further improvements.

This investment means that we are already delivering reductions year-on-year in our pollution performance. Overall spills are reduced by one third compared to last year and are now at the lowest they have been for 10 years. Achieving 4-star status remains a strategic priority for South West Water (SWW) and we are targeting this for the end of 2024.

In March this year, we completed a project to reduce spill frequency at Meadow Road storm overflow in Budleigh Salterton, to two spills per bathing season. This involved building an additional storage tank in the upstream catchment, as well as optimising the existing storm tank under Meadow Road. For Budleigh Salterton, based on the influence of freshwater on bathing water quality, it will take a partnership approach to make further improvements in this area with land owners, councils, developers and us, working together.

The Environment Agency are currently undertaking the Lower Otter Restoration Project, which involves opening the Lower Otter estuary to reduce flood risk. As part of this, the Lime Kilns pumping station storm overflow pipe is being replaced to provide resilience, as the existing pipe could be at risk due to erosion from the likely changing mouth of the Otter. South West Water are contributing c£900k to this project.

At Sandy Bay, the treated effluent outfall pipe from the sewage treatment works to the sea is being increased in capacity via some work within the holiday park and further work to drill a new pipe out to sea, to protect the East Devon bathing waters.

In April this year, we launched WaterFit our largest environmental investment programme in 15 years, with more than £1.4bn of improvements being made between 2020-25, ensuring that we go further, faster to protect and improve water quality in the South West.

Through WaterFit we will dramatically reduce our use of storm overflows, improve monitoring and data sharing, maintain our region's excellent bathing water quality standards all year round and reduce and then remove our impact on river water quality by 2030.

I know across East Devon over the summer, there have been many alerts by the Environment Agency (EA) who, throughout the bathing season issue Pollution Risk Forecasts. These forecasts are based on many factors such as impending rain or inclement weather, which could cause a pollution risk to the bathing water. This can be agricultural pollution, surface water run-off and a trigger of a storm overflow.

We are working closely with the EA to improve this process for next summer, so that we can provide real-time water quality information, not predicted pollution risk forecasts, giving beach lovers and bathers more confidence about the water quality, every day of the year.

To play our part, we are working on a new water quality information system, which will share timely information on our website. We estimate that this will be ready by early next year, in good time for the 2023 summer season.

We will also continue working with Surfers Against Sewage (SAS), and beach managers, who we have shared our information with for many years. In December, to continue our partnership with these local groups and ensure a joined-up approach, we will be holding our Beachwise Forum.

I'm sure you are already aware of our award-winning Upstream Thinking programme, which we launched in 2010. Through our partners, Westcountry Rivers Trust and Devon Wildlife Trust this programme helps protect water quality and reduce the risk of pollutants, especially chemicals that enter our rivers. Since 2015 we have worked with over 80 farmers in the River Otter catchment area providing grants of c.£100,000 to help farms improve their impact on water quality. We have early plans to extend this work to other areas of the East

Devon AONB, which I look forward to sharing with you shortly, to continue this innovative work.

I would like to extend the offer of a meeting with our Community Engagement Team, who are working with local community groups, town and parish councils and other organisations interested in learning more and working with us in the future. If this is of interest, please let me know or contact Vicky Garner, our Community & Partnerships Manager who can arrange this with you. Her email address is vgarner@pennon-group.co.uk

I do hope the information I have provided reassures you that we have detailed investment plans, in our WaterFit programme, to improve our environmental performance and reduce the use of storm overflows, whilst looking at new ways of protecting and improving water quality in the East Devon AONB, and across the South West region.

Regards

Bev

Bev Rowney Corporate Affairs Director

