



7th April 2021

RAW SEWAGE IN ALL OUR RIVERS!!!! **Over 400,000 times in 2020^{1, 2} !!!**

Raw sewage was allowed to overflow into English rivers for more than 3 MILLION hours last year. And what's the Government's reaction?³ Its "making a plan by September 2022"⁴ This is more a cynical PR exercise, by the Conservative Party in the run up to the local elections, than a solution.

Here in West Oxfordshire, according to evidence presented to DEFRA⁵, we have some of the worst performing sewage works in all the 467 sites that Thames Water manage. West Oxon in fact has sewage works that have the accolade of coming in second and third worst out of all of 467 sites). Almost half of the West Oxon sites have sewage outflows into local rivers for more than 10% of the time they are operating, while Clanfield and South Leigh each reported over 3,000 hours of spillages in 2020. See attached graph⁶.

ENOUGH IS ENOUGH, we don't want any more sewage in our rivers. After a decade of pollution overseen by this Government, why isn't there already a plan being implemented? What we need right now is for the Environment Agency to be given the resources and freedom, by their paymasters, to prosecute. **ALL ENGLISH RIVERS FAILED** to meet quality tests for pollution last year due to sewage discharges and agricultural and industrial chemicals entering the water system. Data published in September last year revealed that 96% of English rivers are not "of good ecological standard"⁷ and this year it is likely to be even worse.

Witney Town Councillor Andrew Prosser observed that "*Government has significantly cut funding for the Environment Agency and encouraged them to take a light touch to regulation. In practice this means that they often turn a blind eye to wrongdoings and let water companies get away with regular pollution of rivers and watercourses.*"

"Weak regulation by Defra means that most illegal pollution goes unprosecuted. According to a recent ENDS report⁸, the Environment Agency has failed to prosecute or fine any violations of the Farming Rules For Water. There have been 243 documented breaches since 2018 - but experts say breaches are widespread and usually go undocumented."

"This is a cry for help from the underfunded and much weakened Environment Agency. Our rivers and environment deserve much better".

LET'S NOT BE FOOLED BY THE GOVERNMENT's announcements in January and at the end of March, about creating a "*Storm Overflows Taskforce*" (a Government experts and the Water Industry dominated quango) with the duty of producing a plan by 2022. The fact is that they already have the law to act NOW, but have let the water industry get away with polluting for profit. Under the present proposal they will continue to do so until a new plan is devised, by September 2022, then is accepted by Government and eventually starts to be implemented. The next general election will be on the horizon by the time they get round to actually doing anything!!!!

In the meantime progressively more housing developments will be built on green fields by property developers chasing profits. Every development adds new pressures on the already overloaded and poorly maintained sewerage and storm water systems and if the new houses are built in the wrong place they create even more flooding.

Climate change is here, we will have more and more flooding events, but as our Witney MP admitted “*water infrastructure has not kept pace with development growth*” - chasing after housing targets set by his own party.

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As a first, and tiny step, in addressing the issue Green Councillor Andrew suggested that “*Until failing infrastructure is sorted, there's no reason why Thames Water and the Environment Agency can't provide the public with real-time information on sewage overflows now. You need to know if it is the river safe for you, or your dog to swim in?*”

Even before becoming Town Councillor, Andrew Prosser was calling for action about the pollution in our rivers. At the end of 2019 following a motion proposed by Cllr. Prosser, Witney Town Council wrote to Thames Water and the Environment Agency pushing for a commitment to end this pollution. Since then he has continued to support groups, including Windrush Against Sewage Pollution (WASP) to protect our aquatic habitats, but the terrible record of Thames Water in West Oxfordshire in 2020 is testament to the failings of the present system.

Andrew stated that “*Wildlife struggles to survive in our polluted waters. The Government must get its act together and clean up our rivers NOW.*”

End

Notes to Editor

For more information about this Press Release and for more photographs please contact:

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About West Oxfordshire Green Party

The [West Oxfordshire Green Party](#) is a branch of the Oxfordshire Green Party and of The Green Party of England and Wales. We are addressing the issues of our time, taking local action to solve local, national and global issues.

The Branch supports and runs campaigns for Green Party candidates at parish, town, district and county council elections. The membership includes all Green Party members in the Witney parliamentary constituency (which covers the same area as the West Oxfordshire district).

Contact for enquiries or additional information about the Branch:

Further information is available on the West Oxfordshire Green Party website at www.westoxon-greens.uk

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¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/mar/31/water-firms-discharged-raw-sewage-into-english-waters-400000-times-last-year>

² <https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-56590219>

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/asures-to-reduce-harm-from-storm-overflows-to-be-made-law>

⁴ <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/mar/29/minister-pledges-new-laws-to-cut-dumping-of-raw-sewage-in-uk-rivers>

⁵ <https://environment.data.gov.uk/dataset/21e15f12-0df8-4bfc-b763-45226c16a8ac>

⁶ <https://www.westoxon-greens.uk/-/river-pollution.html>

⁷ <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/sep/17/rivers-in-england-fail-pollution-tests-due-to-sewage-and-chemicals>

⁸ <https://www.endsreport.com/article/1709097/why-farmers-environmental-groups-odds-pollution-rules>

⁹ <https://www.westoxon-greens.uk/-/river-pollution.html>