



... UP SEWAGE CREEK ...

E-NEWSLETTER

No 1, SPRING 2023



Pig Trough, Shrewsbury, March 2023

Up Sewage Creek Update as of March 2023

Well, what an intense month! Whilst it's been exciting and I hope productive, I've found it a little overwhelming. Our issue really is the issue of the moment – the zeitgeist. Most of my update is reporting on the press reporting on us!

I think most of us have watched Paul Whitehouse's brilliant documentary *Our Troubled Rivers* about the state of our rivers, shown two Sundays in a row in March on BBC2. We welcome comedians and pop lyricists getting involved with our movement (no pun intended). They seem to be particularly articulate and eloquent.

After our national TV debut, Melissa and Alison made it onto Gogglebox! Apparently, these days in the UK this means you've 'made it' in terms of profile. One of the Goggleboxers asked, 'Are they martyrs? Are they sacrificing themselves for us?' which I thought was fascinating.

To coincide with XR's second wave of the national Dirty Water Campaign, our XR arm went to Severn Trent HQ in Coventry for a brilliant sewer-rat action. This was part of actions taking place all over

the country. Unfortunately I couldn't go as I was on holiday. Again, this action was widely covered in the press, especially our wonderfully supportive *Shropshire Star*, pretty much everyday

We are on fire, and not just a methane flare!

On 22 March the House of Lords published their damning report 'Sewage Pollution in England's Waters':
<https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/sewage-pollution-in-englands-waters/> .
The Lords want better monitoring and better transparency, and demand that guilty water-company bosses be banned from working in the sector. Lord Cromwell even said, 'We are up sewage creek [!] and it's going to take a lot of paddling and be very expensive to get out.' Go, Lord Cromwell, go! In response, this time it was national ITV filming in Shrewsbury. They filmed Phil Callaghan (who's training our water testers) and Andy Jones, a friend of Up Sewage Creek who runs the Shrewsbury Town Fisheries. Feargal Sharkey was interviewed in the studio after the piece in Shrewsbury.

Bear in mind the £261 million before-tax Severn Trent profits (2022) – well, they ain't getting my money!

The February Shropshire Town Council public meeting was followed on 27 March by the Council unanimously passing a motion (no pun intended) to protect our rivers. Jane Asterley-Berry and some other Up Sewage Creek worthies were in attendance. Again, many thanks to Cllr Kate Halliday for putting this forward; see the full text below. This was closely followed on 30 March by the same resolution being passed (with a few amendments by Conservative councillors) by Shropshire Council. Thank you to Julian Dean for proposing this motion (again, no pun intended).

The rivers' problem and ours: an average £223 million paid to shareholders every year since 2010

... and then!! Thérèse Coffey (a famous turnip-head) visited her friend Daniel Kawczynski MP for a spot of dinner in Shrewsbury only to be met by – you guessed it! Up Sewage Creek! And yet again we were in the papers. Coffey was keeping a low profile, and it seemed touch-and-go whether she would arrive at all when we received a hot tip and there she was. Jamie Russell (pictured) said, ‘She came walking down the hill beside the Beaconsfield Club. No security, totally on her own. I asked, ‘Secretary of State, please can you tell me why my river is full of sewage?’ Then Daniel Kawczynski appeared to escort her inside and Jamie said, ‘It's your failure, Secretary of State, and yours, Mr Kawczynski.’ Jamie was holding the ‘LED BY TURNIPS’ sign at the time!



... **AND THEN** ... Our beloved Government announced they were going to finally deal with sewage dumping and give powers for unlimited fines for water companies ...

Which prompted Jane Asterley-Berry to say something along the lines of: It was a cheap and easy announcement to ‘get them off the hook NOW’ and that action is what counts.

Without adequate funding for the EA, it won't make any difference as they investigate so few instances and prosecute even less. We need to see the EA, DEFRA, OFWAT etc taking the issue seriously. Better still, we'd see the beginnings of an environmental recovery in and beside our rivers and brooks.

If Government continues to allow water companies to report their own sewage dumping, this announcement is laughable! If not properly addressed, Government will continue to allow the cynical use of our waterways as open sewers by private water companies.

Bearing in mind that local elections are coming up, the Government's announcement is pure ... electioneering!

A few days ago I heard that wet wipes are to be banned. This would be a welcome move, but – when? This is the third time the Government have announced banning wet wipes in recent years, but they haven't actually done it!

The BBC also announced over the last few weeks that Severn Trent have fitted monitors to their CSOs. This is what they have been required to do because of their gross (no pun intended) failings. It's not the altruistic move the BBC made it out to be!

The Pig Trough: Severn Trent said they'd update me on what was going on at the Pig Trough. Last I heard, they were fitting monitors (indeed I saw them doing it). Then they said it would take a while, but the new information would allow them to make a plan and then they'd be able to look at reducing the spillages of s**t into the heart of our community. However, they haven't ever got in touch with me about it; all the new information I have gained has come when I've asked them. Case in point: A couple of weeks ago, I was walking by the river in Castlefields and came across three blokes looking in the sewer. 'Environmental Monitoring Service', or EMS, I believe they work for. Anyway, they said they subcontract for Severn Trent. They were checking the monitors either side of the CSO there. I asked them about Coton Hill. It turns out it was them that fitted the extra monitors after we started making a big fuss. They went on to say the monitors have been in for nearly a year and ST should understand what the problem is by now. In fact the guys themselves knew: the problem is rainfall rather than the river. So, if they have now learned what they put the monitors in for, why haven't they told us? To be fair, I could have told them that the s**t appears after heavy rain; in fact, I'm pretty sure I have done.

Tim Kirby of Up Sewage Creek (coincidentally my husband and an engineer) has had (yet another) great idea: CSO watershed solutions. If each outfall were looked at individually, 'soakaways' could be put in. Also, reservoirs and slow-release valves could be used to help manage water flow in wet weather and reduce CSO activation.

Essentially, we at Up Sewage Creek could easily advise ST and Government as to what they need to do:

- Upgrade sewage works
- Plant trees along rivers (or allow them to regenerate naturally to create buffer zones)
- Get people to sort out their misconnections.

Stormwater Shepherds: Meanwhile, I was contacted by Fyn from a company called SPEL who are based on the industrial estate at Battlefield. They work with technologies such as rain gardens, floating reedbeds, oil separators and 'suds' products. These are all used to clean

water from road runoff dealing with heavy metals and hydrocarbons. Because they care, they have set up a charity to help clean water called Stormwater Shepherds -- <https://www.stormwatershepherds.org.uk/up> -- in Lancashire and Australia. I look forward to hearing more from them.

River Pollution Facts: When presenting your arguments to anyone, get your ducks in a row by checking out <https://www.zerohour.uk/river> . They have very kindly collated useful facts for people like us.

Legal Personhood and River Rights: These guys --

<https://www.democracywithoutborders.org/26589/experts-call-for-a-world-parliament-of-rivers/> -- would like to assign rights not just to individual rivers but to all rivers, seas and watercourses worldwide. Maybe ambitious, but what the world needs now ...

Claire Kirby



Meeting of Shrewsbury Town Council, Thursday, 30 March 2023 (Item 16a): Resolution

This Council notes:

Residents are deeply concerned about water quality and the impact of regular wastewater discharge, which includes untreated sewage, into our rivers, and the impact this has on wildlife and on human health.

Releasing sewage into rivers is no longer an emergency-only situation occurring as a result of severe storms, but a regular occurrence even in 'normal' rainfall, and that we are in a situation of cumulative overload on the sewage and wastewater system.

Whilst there are long term commitments, there are no plans in place which will address the immediate unacceptable situation either locally by Severn Trent Water or Wales Water or by national government.

Both the emerging Local Plan and national planning policy requires a robust approach to both water quality and pollution and a recent legal opinion from the Environmental Law Firm confirms the need to consider cumulative impact. To date, it has not been the practice of council planners to ask water companies to report on cumulative impact i.e., whether or not development may lead to any potential increase in 'emergency' discharge into rivers and seas. The Shropshire Water Cycle Study 2020 identified relevant issues.

This Council resolves to:

1. Recognise this Council's obligation to protect its rivers and watercourses, including from the cumulative impacts of pollution, in line with the existing and emerging Local Plan and the National Planning Policy Framework.
2. Recognise that deterioration of water quality occurs due to cumulative impact of multiple sewage discharge events, or 'sewage overload'.
3. Ensure that an evidence base is compiled that assesses the cumulative impact of sewage discharge so that this is factored into decisions made in new iterations of the local plan, including the overall level of future development.
4. Seek to better understand the cumulative impact of wastewater discharge including untreated sewage on our local rivers, wildlife and the health of our residents, with regular overview and scrutiny by Shropshire Council.
5. Continue to take a lead on addressing this issue, working constructively with other agencies. In particular, we request the relevant Overview and Scrutiny committee to review and challenge Severn Trent Water on its investment plans as laid out in their Drainage and Waste Water Management Plan.
6. Ask Severn Trent Water, from this date onwards, in its planning consultation responses for major development, to clarify which treatment works will be managing the sewage; whether it has the information available to assess the impact on the number or duration of sewage discharges into local rivers, and if it does have this information to share it (noting that this can only be requested not required), and to consider requiring as a condition for support that Grampian conditions are applied to allow time for upgrades in waste water systems to be completed where appropriate.
7. Require planning officer reports relating to major development to include specific sections on the impact on watercourses, including the potential for the development to affect sewage outflow into watercourses (i.e. cumulative impact), or to flag if this information is not fully available so that this information (or the lack of it) is clearly and transparently set out.
8. In pursuit of existing and emerging planning policies, in particular DP19 in the draft Shropshire Local Plan, to make use of Grampian Conditions which can delay completion or occupation of new developments until specified infrastructure -- in this case; appropriate upgrades to the sewage management system -- are completed.



Water Quality Update as of 4/23

There is no dramatic news to report, but Water Testing is expanding across the area and we have most reaches within the Town Loop covered. My own test location (Cricket Field wharfage close to the old

ferry point) gave moderate readings on Saturday, 1 April. I was surprised given the high water level (over the slipway).

Temp 11.3 Celsius; Electrical conductivity 152; Phosphate 0 (this does not necessarily mean nothing as there is a margin of sensitivity of the device); Nitrate 2 (within ST tolerance as 2-3 is 'normal', but it should be lower to be healthy); Nitrite 0; Ammonia 0.

It seems to me this location being on the inside of the river's bend gives atypically low and 'healthier' readings than other locations in the Loop. From here I observe on each testing occasion clusters of foam on the opposite side of the flow. I believe it is a sign of detergent, and it would be an idea to locate car-wash facilities and their associated drain courses. On 1 April the foam was originating from an unknown source upstream of the Gateway Centre. This is an almost daily appearance on the water.

During the same week there were reports of high levels of Nitrate and Phosphate, particularly at the Quarry Park, with levels of 369 for Electrical Conductivity, 5 for Nitrate and 0.36 for Phosphate. Those are harmful levels.

I had been curious about our drinking water and previously tested my own domestic supply on 24 March. I was disconcerted to find Nitrate 2-3, Nitrite 0.3, Phosphate 2.27. Ammonia was reading 0, but so it should. This is not good. As we continue with testing there will be more learning about the parameters and the effects of substances. As well as testing at our own appointed locations, Dave and I will be exploring more places of interest to build up as much knowledge as we can.

Good to see bumblebees feeding on early nectar source from willow catkins though anxious about them flying over the water.

Warren Hastings





Social-media maven Tina Tiaru showing us how to pun!



Some National Developments in the Campaign to Clean Up the Sewage from Our Rivers and Coastlines

1. In the last few months, campaigners from across the country who are working to clean up the sewage from our rivers and coastlines have collaborated to issue a Public Declaration demanding protection for our waterways.

Amongst them are Surfers Against Sewage, Windrush Against Sewage Pollution, Ilkley Clean River Group, River Action UK, WildFish, Whitstable SOS, Save Windermere and others.

I've made a very modest contribution to the Public Declaration document, having spoken to one of its initiators, Prof Becky Malby.

For more details check out

<https://www.ilkeleycleanriver.uk/wpcontent/uploads/2023> .

2. On 14 February 2023, the charity WildFish were granted permission to apply for a judicial review on the Government's 'Storm Overflows Discharge Reduction Plan', part of the Government's Environment Act 2021. NB: The term 'storm overflows' in this instance seems to be the Government's preferred term for Combined Sewer Overflows. Presumably, when it was drafted the mention of 'sewers' would have been too much of a red light for the public and campaigners!

WildFish are arguing that the plan is confusing and contradictory and fails to deal with the use of Combined Sewage Overflows. It approves unlawful conduct by England's privatised water companies. The 1994 regulations only allow water companies to release untreated sewage via Combined Sewage Overflows during extreme weather conditions; however, the plan allows water companies to continue dumping sewage regardless of weather conditions. It's noted that even the Conservative member for Sherwood, Mark Spencer, mentioned during a debate in the House of Commons on 17 March 2023 that 'there are exemptions for water companies to make releases in extreme weather, but I think some of them, frankly, are abusing some of those loop-holes.'

For further information on WildFish's Judicial Review, check out the News section of <https://www.wildfish.org> .

3. In February 2023, Cllr Matthew Bird (Green Party), proposed a motion to Lewes District Council that marked the first stage towards creating a Rights of the River Ouse Charter with partner organisations. The motion was carried with only two Councillors voting against. Prior to the presentation of the motion, the ideas behind it had already been incubated for almost a year. Interested organisations and Cllr Bird had worked together to build local engagement and consensus on the issue of the fundamental 'Rights of Nature' with a particular emphasis on the Ouse and its tributaries. During that time, they organised a river festival with workshops on related issues and a screening of the film *Invisible Hand*.

The charter, the first of its kind in England, ushers in two years of work with local communities and Councils, related agencies, catchment partnerships, water companies and NGOs. During that time, they intend to establish baseline data in order to measure the future progress of the declaration, e.g. via citizen-science river-water testing and community and aerial mapping along the length of the 36-mile River Ouse and its catchment. So, in the next two years, Lewes District Council will debate these issues with a view to drafting a declaration and appointing a representative who will be able to speak for the River Ouse and its tributaries in its own right, for example at Planning meetings.

I've spoken with Cllr Bird, and we have agreed to keep in touch with a view to exchanging ideas for development. For more information, you

can visit the document below, written by Cllr Bird:
<https://www.localgov.co.uk/Granting-rivers-rights/5> . Where relevant, USC supporters could choose to discuss and/or debate any of the above initiatives when we meet as a group.

Jane Asterley Berry



Shropshire Swimmers Applying for Bathing Water Status

In Shropshire and the surrounding counties, groups of swimmers are applying to have stretches of their local rivers designated as Bathing Water.

Bathing Water Designation creates blue spaces where water quality is officially monitored for harmful bacteria and viruses, with legal obligations placed on landowners and industry to stop sewage and agricultural pollution. This provides a powerful indicator of the state of our water and drives real change.

The UK has more than 600 designated Bathing Waters – sites that are popular for swimming and paddling and have been designated under the Bathing Water Regulations 2013. They have been put in place thanks to the EU Bathing Waters Directive, first introduced in 1976. UK designated Bathing Waters are mostly coastal, with (until recently) only 16 lakes and no rivers.

With the appalling situation of only 14% of our rivers being considered ecologically healthy, Bathing Water Status has become the main tool for driving change in water quality. In 2021 Ilkley led the charge in obtaining Bathing Water Status in the River Wharfe, and since then Port Meadow in Oxford has become the second river location to be successful. Many other campaign groups have put in applications; the majority have sadly been rejected, and it's still hard to understand precisely why, as DEFRA's guidelines are vague.

Undeterred by the rejections, in Shropshire we are applying for Bathing Water Status in various locations in the rivers Severn and Teme. We stand a strong chance of success as we have great facilities in Shrewsbury, a beautiful river enjoyed by lots of different groups and a Council who are extremely supportive, especially Cllr Kate Halliday and Town Clerk Helen Ball.

Bathing season, according to DEFRA, starts on 15 May. This is when we will start monitoring river use, surveying local residents, consulting with local businesses and social groups, and working with the Canoe Club and business, wildlife groups, anglers, fisheries and Severn Trent to showcase the bathing opportunities of our river and making it as safe as possible for people and wildlife. By October we will be ready to submit our application to DEFRA for consideration and a final decision by spring 2024.

We're looking forward to celebrating, cleaning up and caring for our rivers over the coming year. If you'd like to find out more, help out and be part of it – or just come for a swim! -- please join our Facebook group -- Shropshire Bathing Waters -- or visit our website at <https://www.Shropshirebathingwaters.co.uk> .

Alison Biddulph



Next meeting: 18 May 2023, 7.00-9.00p.m., at the Friends' Meeting House, Corporation Lane, Shrewsbury



STOP PRESS! Our very own Claire Kirby has just received a Mayor's Award in recognition of her 'achievements in protecting and enhancing the local environment'! Or, to quote Claire, her 'services to sewage'...



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