



## E-NEWSLETTER

**No 4, Spring 2024**

***Claire's Roundup as of April / May 2024***

***We are in the eye of the shit storm and we need to surf the wave or wipe out!***

**Stop press!!!!** Election called for 4<sup>th</sup> of July



**Stop press!!!!** drinking water contaminated with Cryptosporidiosis in Devon.

Of course, I'm going to start with the shocking news that sewage dumping was up 50% over the country during this last year. I wasn't that shocked, it more confirmed my suspicions as there has been an indicative central plume of bubbles down the middle of the river pretty much every day from October until recently. I've been made aware of this clue to outfall operation by the

water testing crew, and it looks like the outfalls were operating for most of the winter.

Nearly all CSO's (combined sewer outfalls) are now monitored, as per recent legislation, so in addition to more sewage entering the river as a result of the excessive rainfall, it has been better monitored too which may account for some of the increase.

The shocking news of 'flow trimming' came next. Whistle blowers explained how water companies have been dumping sewage illegally - when no one could describe the weather conditions as extreme. Weather conditions are regularly extreme now with climate change. Climate change, an inadequate and poorly maintained sewage system under corrupt management is an explosive cocktail. Ed Davey is calling for a National Emergency and that is what this is.

Up sewage creek has been going for nearly 3 years now, and in terms of river health, nothing has changed, in fact things are considerably worse. Whilst Severn Trent talk of the urgency they feel the situation deserves they don't seem to be doing much on the ground. The river path was blocked by the weir in Shrewsbury for up to six weeks due to a collapsed CSO, nothing has changed on the pig trough (STW seem to have stopped responding to my requests for information) and the next 5 year plan doesn't start until 2025! Here and now, the rivers are completely and utterly over loaded with nutrients, toxins and harmful bacteria!

The more I think about it, and I think about it a lot, it seems to me that the way water companies behave shows them to be clearly about profit only. Had they ever intended to properly do what they are meant to do waste water wise, they would have been lobbying government to do something about the automatic right to connect, run off, farming, mis connections, wet wipes and other threats to water quality - and they haven't.

Instead of taking responsibility, Severn Trent Water say that they know they need to do better but then spoil it by saying but that they are already are doing better than anyone else! I saw this classic the other day



And on our recent reminder that we hadn't paid our bill, "Looking after our communities, our environment, our water" – My Arse! This rubbish that they spout doesn't help their cause if you ask me.

The sewage situation is a national scandal on a par with the post office and it's a massive election issue. If sewage were the only problem, it would be bad enough but it isn't – Ed Davey is right, it is a national emergency.

We are all complicit in the current sewage situation. If water companies are prepared to take responsibility and work together with highways, councils, planners, farmers and 'ordinary' people they would become part of the solution rather than the problem. We are only going to be able to sort it out by working together with a whole catchment approach. We need to feel 'in this together' and work together - I'm sure this is what the river would ask for.

**...we are in the eye of the shit storm – unless we surf it we'll wipe out...**

Severn Trent might not have improved but Up Sewage Creek, however, is better organised than ever with our regular meetings and 190 on the mailing list and going from strength to strength.

Claire X

### **Sewage Creek vacancies!**

We really need some more of you to step up!

Bacteria testing – we need a team to do fundraising. We need £3000 or so

Water testers - recruiting

Poometer- recruiting

Rights of river - recruiting

Dragon boat race 20<sup>th</sup>/21<sup>st</sup> July

World rivers day the 29<sup>th</sup> September

We also need to follow up on Shropshire Council's **Nature recovery strategy**:

<https://next.shropshire.gov.uk/environment/ecology-and-biodiversity/shropshire-and-telford-wrekin-local-nature-recovery-strategy/>  
[L.Parker@shropshire.gov.uk](mailto:L.Parker@shropshire.gov.uk)

Ecology and Biodiversity Team within Shropshire Council. They can be contacted by email [L.Parker@shropshire.gov.uk](mailto:L.Parker@shropshire.gov.uk)

Some of us wrote a while ago. Here's a stock letter:

I'm contacting you from up sewage creek upsewagecreek.com. We are a local pressure group campaigning for water quality. I believe you are Shropshire Council's contact for local nature recovery strategy LNRS as set out in the environment bill.

Please could you give me details of what you are planning to do about water quality in particular.

Thank you very much!

## **Updates on sewage creek on going interests**

**Rights of the river:** Now I know what's going on, and how bad things are, I'm finding I'm liking the simplicity of 'rights of the river'. One of the things that came up at the most recent (excellent but depressing) rivers conference at the wildlife trust in March, were the difficulties of carrying through policy across borders such as the Welsh/English border. River rights makes no such distinction. I'm also liking that pursuing rights of the river is something positive we can strive for rather than something negative to fight against.

We thought it fitting to choose a stretch of the Severn around Shrewsbury where the river turns south as a starting point for change. The chosen stretch is from Montford Bridge to Atcham, which is roughly a tenth of the total length of the Severn. There are three tributaries on this stretch, the River Perry, the Rad Brook (a stream), and the Rea Brook (with its tributaries the Weston, Worthen and Workhouse Brooks). We held a ceremony at Imbolc to celebrate the rights of the Severn and her tributaries, mixing water collected from Montford Bridge, Frankwell and Atcham, along with ground water from the tap. These waters represent the river's need for clean water life. A bottle of the waters is present to represent the river at meetings.

Under the 'guardianship' model for river rights, people connected with the river and knowledgeable about healthy rivers and about the threats to healthy rivers act as legal guardians represent the river. Understanding the river is how we will be able to represent her when we achieve legal rights for nature. Citizen science is crucial.

***I feel that I understand our river well enough to say that she would say, as a first past the post, strengthen existing legislation and enforce it.***

We are currently working on a page for the website.  
Once this is up and running we will be actively looking for:

- peoples stories about the Severn

**Citizen science:** We already have our vibrant, growing, effective and controversial water testing group and we would now like to branch out into bacterial testing. Dave Jones is organising a meeting for all local testers to coordinate and be more effective later on in May. We had some guys from Oswestry rural council come to a couple of recent meetings, they are testing for bacteria and e coli and other pathogens outside Oswestry. Their results are coming up off the scale. We need to fund raise for this for which we will require volunteers if you have any knowledge or experience of fundraising – or simple enthusiasm will do! The bathing waters folk have been bacterial testing and I believe they still are currently, Alison Biddulph says they have no information to share. We need to await the outcome of the application they submitted to defra towards the end of last year.

**Julia Buckley Labour parliamentary candidate:** we really appreciated Julia volunteering to come to our very well attended meeting in March to talk to us

about Labour's pledge for river health. I don't doubt Julia's commitment to river health, she has been directly affected, falling ill after interacting with the river and Julia has been with us on our marches and attended some of our meetings already. Julia informed us of Labour's welcome pledge to overhaul and strengthen the enforcement agencies. She emphasised that Labour isn't keen to nationalise water companies any time soon, stating that they want to ensure that share holders don't get away with what they have been doing and to avoid tax payers shelling out.

**Public ownership:** It seems to me that government (of whatever persuasion) will have to take water companies back into public ownership because once they step up to their statutory duties, they won't be able to raise the money needed for the investment and they will be bankrupt and their shares will be worth zero – just look at Thames water!

Thames water investors are running away at the point they realise that there isn't much 'profit' left. Investors pulled £500 million of investment as Ofwat has failed to approve 40% bill increases .

Meanwhile, Liv Garfield gets a massive pay rise which she justifies it by explaining that STW aren't in the same boat as Thames because STW creditors have pledged £1billion so they say they have the money. However, STW are equally dependent on Ofwat clearing the proposed bill increases for 2025 and 2030. Draft proposals set to be announced on 12 June. How much of this £1billion would go to infra structure and how much to servicing existing debt one wonders?

In its five-year plan submitted to Ofwat, Severn Trent wants to invest £12.9bn and increase customer bills by 35.7%.

£150/year increases on 2020-2025 average bill going up to about £550/year if business plan is accepted by Ofwat.

Ofwat recently reformed by vote in house of commons (to which labour abstained) but the gist was that Ofwat mustn't be anti growth. Does this mean keep pumping s\*\*t into the rivers?

My research (see sources below) tells me that it shouldn't cost much, if anything, to take water companies back into the commons. If water companies go bust (and they are bust), the shares are worth nothing and the debt goes with the shareholders. At this point, the government issues government bonds (which are a form of debt security only government can offer and make investment safer) in exchange for the assets and hey

presto, water companies are back in public hands. As far as I can find out, this won't cost anything apart from periodic interest payments on the bonds – of course this would cost more the higher the interest rate is. There are then millions of households paying around £500 a year which comes in regular as clockwork to invest in the infra structure. There has been much mis information, ICRG, WASP, WildFish, Save, Windermere, SOS Whitstable (effectively the umbrella group of organisations in the sewage struggle) cite regularly recycled mis information found in a study paid for by the water industry saying that re-nationalising would cost £90 Billion!

Here are some useful sources for information on this tricky subject:

ICRG, WASP, WildFish, Save, Windermere, SOS Whitstable Briefing on the Key Issues we Face Nationally in Securing Clean Rivers (and Lakes and Seas) issued in January 2024

'we own it' <https://www.taxresearch.org.uk/Blog/2024/05/03/we-need-the-water-companies-of-england-to-be-nationalised/>

Richard Murphy Professor of economics and tax and consultant on the green new deal, says in his podcast

<https://www.taxresearch.org.uk/Blog/2024/05/03/we-need-the-water-companies-of-england-to-be-nationalised/>

Another argument used against taking water back into the commons is a perceived threat to pensions. This has been ramped up as a problem by 'water uk' the mouth piece of the water industry who want to keep water companies paying shareholders. Over 90% of the English water companies are owned by international investors, private equity funds, and banks. Only 8.5% of shareholders in the water sector are UK pension funds (<https://weownit.org.uk/public-ownership/water>).

My feeling is that having the management of our water and waste water in the commons is our birthright. 'Natural' monopolies in no way, under no circumstances should ever be privatised but ultimately, whether in private or public hands, the water 'industry' will need tight regulation and enforcement to ensure healthy rivers.

**The cost of upgrading the system:** the truth is, no one knows what will cost, including the water industry and Government. Of one thing I am sure, it won't cost anywhere near as much as the alarmist figures put about by people such as our very own Danny K (our MP quoted £650 billion if I remember

correctly) who would rather do nothing and keep paying shareholders. Dave Jones and I had the opportunity to speak to a Severn Trent engineer, Rebecca, when we met head ranger Gareth Meads back in January. She informed us that STW are looking at maps and looking at the data produced by sensors monitoring flow etc and working out what they **can do**. I was heartened that they were being pragmatic and looking at installing strategically placed storage tanks. Where this is possible, I can see how this would reduce the incidences of CSO activation and be cheaper and less disruptive than overhauling all the CSO's.

There are clearly many ways in which water companies can reduce their negative impact. CSO's currently do 11% of the damage to rivers whereas, the water companies are responsible for 50% of the damage to rivers. Much of this extra damage is by phosphates. Upgrades at sewage works so they are not working beyond their capacity would make a massive difference. Phosphates removal desperately needs more investment.

The 'rare earth' programme (how do we get our healthy rivers back) on bbc sounds showcased exciting new developments such as water invertebrates daphnia digesting phosphates. This shows there's clearly everything to play for.

## **Pig Trough**

As covered 8<sup>th</sup> February meeting (details in meeting notes), STW say they have found some budget in advance of the next 5 year plan. Apparently this 'transitional spend' needed to be cleared by ofwat.

The plan is to find somewhere (and they were in negotiations with the Berwick Estate about their land adjacent to the Berwick road) where they can send road and roof runoff (as in 'waste' water that doesn't contain sewage) temporarily. If runoff is separated, then there should be sufficient capacity for the CSO to get the shit to the river. Not ideal but better than the footpath!

I have recently asked for an update on this but Gareth has failed to reply to my last two emails. I suppose we are further forward than when Liv Garfield assured me that STW would answer my questions within seven days nearly a year ago, in that we know what STW are thinking of doing to reduce the incidences of s\*\*t on the footpath but nothings has happened yet and they



have stopped talking to us. I'm looking forward to doing bacteria testing on the pig trough!

**Legal challenges to the water industry:** Nationally, legal challenges against the water industry are on going. Leigh Day are pursuing a class action about unreported sewage dumping against 6 water companies. Leigh day are also fighting a case against Avara who own most of the chicken farms in the Wye valley. Stop press Leigh Day have just taken the case to Alvar's parent company, Cargill. There is other stuff going on too in Windemere and elsewhere. Not least STW's recent successful Environment Agency prosecution and £2 000 000 fine - here in Shrewsbury!

I learned at the latest rivers conference, there are as many chicken farms in the Severn catchment as the Wye and the effect on water quality up the tributaries has been well recorded by our water testing crew

**Non-payment – Pete Griffiths:** I have refused to pay the part of my water bill concerned with Waste Water disposal since 2022. I have been threatened with Court Action for these unpaid water service charges. However, I have written to STW Customer Care and their CEO Liv Garfield explaining that I have lodged a formal complaint and that my account should be put on hold whilst my complaint is still outstanding. I have also informed Boycott Water Bills that I have taken this action.

My complaint concerns STW's grievous dereliction of duty, and of their legal and moral responsibility not to pollute our precious rivers and oceans. I cannot continue paying for a service which is simply not being provided - that is, the responsible disposal of the wastewater from my property. Furthermore, my paying this section of my water bill supports the harmful and repeated practice of sewage dumping.

Data published in the Daily Mirror 16 Feb 2023 records that the River Severn was the most polluted river in England, and had seen 28,741 hours of sewage pumped into it on 2,656 occasions by STW. A report by the Daily Telegraph (25 March 2022) cites STW as one of the worst offenders for using storm overflows and The Times (24 Feb 2023) states that STW declined a Freedom of Information Request and withheld data.

Liv Garfield in an interview with the Daily Telegraph (25 March 2022) said that spending more money on reducing sewage overflows into rivers would not have been good business because it had not been on the public's radar

until recently. In other words STW's responsibility for the environmental health of the River Severn was not considered a good spend of money: there was no corporate responsibility to prevent polluting the River Severn. It is only now being considered by STW due to public awareness and pressure.

For those considering joining the growing band who are boycotting paying for waste water disposal there are useful resources here

<https://www.boycottwaterbills.com/resources>.

and here

<https://www.ccw.org.uk/news/introducing-our-new-complaint-letter-tool/>

**Severn Rivers Trust** open day at URC Coleham Head. 20/04/24 – Warren Hastings

A good worthwhile project. A day's showcase specifically on Rea Brook. The personnel there were all volunteers. They have excellent lead ecologists. They have some funding from **Severn Valley Water Management Scheme**. There are so many schemes. It would be less confusing if the main statutory bodies that are supposed to be responsible would just honour their responsibilities and it would not be necessary for this fragmentation and dilution.

I enjoyed a great demonstration of river dynamics in a large tray with three densities/colours of sand. It worked really well, and the straights and meanders and deposition zones and influence of trees worked amazingly visually well in accelerated time. The phrase I take away from this is '**Fish grow on Trees**'. Tree roots in the water protect banks and young fish. When the roots rot they leave tubular safe spaces for fish to hide and the tree canopies of course support immense insect larders.

So the **Severn Rivers Trust** collect data, mainly on macro-invertebrates, and **have data for the last 3 years**. They **sample ReaBrook in 6 places** and send data to **WildFish**.

WildFish have been implimentary as you know in putting pressure on. This division of activity means those I had conversations with including Cecilia Young - Catchment Officer, were all about the **ecological methods and data**. They use the BMWP **British Monitoring Working Party index** to classify 1-10 with 10 being excellent River Health. I believe they put Rea Brook at 5

category. These categories are decided by population of sets of key indicator species.

Wildfish are then recipients of invertebrate population data supplied by Severn Rivers Trust and engage with issues raised by the data. Good to look down powerful microscopes at alcohol preserved specimens. Yep, we all get like that in this activity maybe, but important in making the fine distinctions in species identification which are crucial in discerning water quality.

They also had 5 white trays full of many diverse mayfly larvae. Most impressive. The captured species all came from the River Morlas the same morning, not the Rea Brook. I believe this was a convenience for the living/travel arrangements of staff. I was assured by staff that kick-samples on Rea Brook often capture similar numbers of mayfly larvae.

Another visitor commented on farm slurry in the brook due to excessive spreading to get rid of the stuff rather than what would be necessary. It is noted there are serious pollution issues in the Rea Brook.

The overall value of thorough invertebrate surveys is to know generally what the river health is, as opposed to our chemistry tests which are very much a spot check. However I was uncertain on hearing the ecologists suggesting that after pollution events the invertebrate populations generally recover quickly. We are becoming used to a regular flow of pollution and fewer identifiable events. They were slow to acknowledge the feeding requirements of different species of mayfly larvae. It would appear that *Gammarus pulex* shrimp has a very low population near Minsterley. A large population can be a sign of pollution including sewage but an absence often indicates chemicals. Their conclusion is that chemicals are still leaching from Snailbeach, but there are other factors in the vicinity.

They were not looking for more volunteers but simply showcasing their work. Their data capture relies on accessing the Brook at good access points where prolific samples can apparently be gathered. The Rea Brook has many accessible riffles where this should be possible, though Rob Park seems disappointed by low species counts on the Rea Brook.

It would have been good to have made our own special study of the Rea Brook but events are showing us a different way forward. There is plenty else to do.

## Summary No 12 : Investigation of Severn tributaries on 1st April '24

Water Testers Warren Hastings and David Jones

**Purpose** : To obtain water quality and other environmental information on the **River Tern**.  
An important tributary of the Severn.

### **Chosen catchment areas** :

Two locations :

1. **Old aqueduct** over Tern at Longdon - on-Tern, **upstream of the major sewage works** at Rushmoor.
2. **Allscott Mill** (**downstream** of the Rushmoor **sewage works**.)

### **Method** :

Test kit for Temp., Electrical Conductivity, Nitrate, Nitrite, Phosphate, Ammonia.  
Observation of land usage, map information, wildlife flora and fauna inc.invertebrates.

### **Conditions** :

A bright, if overcast sky. High water levels after floods. Waterlogged fields.

### **Locations and Basic Test Results** :

- 1 . Our **first selected location**, Aqueduct over Tern

Grid Ref. **617516** Ordnance Survey 1 :25,000 Explorer 242 mapsheet.

Temp	10.4 'C
EC	603
Nitrate	5
Nitrite	0
Phosphate	0.37
Ammonia	0

2. Our **second location**, bridge over Tern at Allscott Mill

Grid Ref. **612132** on same mapsheet 242

Temp	11.1 'C
EC	626
Nitrate	5
Nitrite	0
Phosphate	0.65
Ammonia	0

**Invertebrates : It was not possible to collect invertebrates at either location due to dangerous bankside conditions.**

**General description of test sites :**

The water was fast running and turbid, with deposits of blackened nettles on the steep margins. No aquatic vegetation and clear phosphate bubbles along the entire visible course of the river. The local agricultural practice is mainly intensive barn raised livestock, with maize and beet fields exhibiting the high colouration of spraying off.

**Comments on findings :**

Our data shows greater phosphate, nitrate and higher Electrical Conductivity at the downstream site. This is not unexpected, considering the influence of the sewage works and agricultural inputs.

It would be reasonable to consider that the flooded fields have not had heavy agricultural activity with respect to large volumes of fertilizers, and there was little immediate evidence of soil poaching caused by wheel churning. Fields that had apparently been sprayed were well away from the water. A local farmer had reported to the mill owner that his cattle on the opposite riverside to the sewage works always did better than those nearest.

An initial comparison of our results would appear to suggest the sewage works at Rushmoor is having an effect on readings, with more pollutants appearing downstream of it, especially comparing with similar indications from previous results in Summary Number 6, whilst acknowledging other factors.