

Meeting between River Erme Town and Parish Councils Group and South Hams District Councillors Jan 30th 2024

Topic of meeting: Nutrient neutrality in the River Erme

Present: River Erme Councillors; Pat Hannam (Ermington) Suzannah Grant (Kingston) Tessa Lannin (Ivybridge) Ann Turner, Chair (Modbury) Charlotte Grezo WATER.

SHDCs Bernard Taylor (Vice Chair Planning) Mark Long (Chair Planning) John McKay (Environment Lead)

Context

The River Erme Town and Parish Councils Group was formed with the aim of working cooperatively to maintain and improve water quality within the Erme catchment area. Reports on water quality in the Erme, its tributaries and estuary, indicate that, currently, the main pollutants are from Sewage Treatment Works and agricultural runoff.

Regulation

Proposed government legislation aimed to relax requirements on developers to restrict contamination of water courses from nitrogen and phosphates in the course of building and subsequent run off. The potential addition of the consequences of relaxed regulation on development would compound the challenges to environmental and public health.

Although this has recently been shelved as primary legislation due to opposition from the House of Lords and from groups such as the combined Wildlife Trusts, there remains the possibility that this could be achieved through planning loopholes.

The River Erme Councils are looking to SHDC as the LPA to support measures to manage current sources of pollution and to proactively take a position on any attempts to relax regulations on developers by primary legislation or other means.

Action

SHDCs to draft a proposal opposing relaxation of these rules by whatever means and take it to full Council for approval.

Coordination and Decision making

There was agreement that responsibility and decision making around water quality remains complex and unclear. There is a need to map out the powers, responsibilities and decision making process for key organisations.

Community groups such as WATER are increasingly active in taking part in initiatives such as Citizen Science Investigations but need greater coordination to maximise effectiveness.

Action

SHDC will be hosting a meeting for key stakeholders as the starting point for developing a catchment management plan and will feed back and invite comment. **JMcK**

Planning at Strategic level

Updating local plans to take account of the Climate Emergency. Currently the Joint Local Plan and Supplementary Documents do not adequately reflect the increasing concern about climate related matters including water use and management. The JLP is due for review in 2025 and must include stronger and more specific policies on these issues. Neighbourhood Plans should also be updated where necessary to strengthen policies.

Action

SHDC, River Erme Councils

Permits

Permits issues to SWW for permitted discharges from Sewage Treatment Works have often been issued a number of years ago or are out of date. The reasons for the status of permits is often unclear. In some cases the population has increased significantly e.g. Ivybridge, while the STW has remained at the same capacity. Figures from the Rivers Trust show the number of discharges from each STW but reasons are not given for the frequency of discharges.

Action

SHDC to press the Environment Agency to clarify the specifications for permits and rationale for decisions to leave permits unchanged or to review.

Planning at local level

Drainage is now a key consideration in considering planning applications.

The Erme Group are in the process of developing a template for water related issues for councils to use as a reference when looking at applications.

It was agreed that this would be a useful tool to develop consistency of responses. It was important that the template should reference the relevant planning policies to make this a robust document.

Action

The Erme Group to produce an initial draft and **ML** to advise on links to existing policies.

Cllr Ann Turner

Chair, River Erme Councils Group

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