

Question for the Climate and Environment Scrutiny Committee

Every river in the Trent catchment is affected by sewage spills. In 2022 there were 30,638 spills lasting over 1555,000 hours. There were sewage spills throughout East Staffordshire Borough Council's boundaries. These can be viewed on the Rivers Trust sewage map and will show from Mayfield to Yoxall and many, many places between are affected.

Alongside agriculture, urban and industrial pollution sewage has contributed to a reduction in water quality and aquatic life and at times is a risk factor to human health.

The English water companies have promised to cut overflows by 140,000 a year by 2030 from the 301091 overflows in 2022. They have been told they must improve (not prevent) all storm water overflows into designated bathing water by 2035.

Much greater investment has been promised but the task of improvement is vast and with additional difficulties due to extreme weather events caused by climate change will probably take decades to solve.

Given the impossibility of a quick fix what will ESBC do to play its part in reducing the pressure on the sewage systems?

For example, reducing surface run off in current and new developments with sustainable drainage solutions and permeable surfaces or using wetland flood plains and trees in appropriate places. ESBC might help by informing the public on how to avoid blockages in the sewer system caused by un-flushables, discouraging the paving of front and rear gardens or encourage the fitting of water butts to downpipes.

The Environmental Agency has an extensive job in monitoring water quality and those that enjoy the rivers for example anglers or canoeists could perhaps be encouraged in a citizen science project to assist with monitoring.

Response from Cllr Hawins:

The Borough Council Local Plan contains a policy titled **Climate Change, Water Body Management and Flooding** which requires amongst other things new developments to incorporate SuDS. This policy is supplemented by the Climate Change and Sustainable Development SPD which offers guidance to applicants and links to best practice. Staffordshire County Council as the Local Lead Flood authority are consulted on applications for major developments and offer advice on local flood risk management and require applicants to provide sufficient detail on drainage in accordance with their SuDS handbook. Severn Trent Water are also consulted on some applications however details of drainage connections are dealt with by building regulations rather than the planning process.

Nationally there is to be a new legal duty on water companies in England to upgrade wastewater treatment works by 2030 in 'nutrient neutrality' areas to the highest achievable technological levels. A new Nutrient Mitigation Scheme established by Natural England, helping wildlife and boosting access to nature by investing in projects like new and expanded wetlands and woodlands.

In October 2019, an independent review of the arrangements for determining responsibility for surface water and drainage assets was commissioned. The review has now been complete and the Government has published its response. The review was asked to identify the benefits and impacts of making sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) mandatory for new development. Previously in England the government addressed increasing the use of SuDS through planning policy from April 2015. Current planning policy requires that SuDS are included in all new major developments (developments over 10 homes), unless there is clear evidence that this would be inappropriate. This is in addition to requirements that SuDS should be given priority in new developments in flood risk areas (surface and river). The review concluded that the planning-led approach alone is not working recommending that non-statutory technical standards for sustainable drainage systems should be made statutory. The review recommended that the government must act and implement Schedule 3 to the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 as written. Schedule 3 provides a framework for the approval and adoption of drainage systems, a sustainable drainage system approving body within unitary and county councils, and national standards on the design, construction, operation, and maintenance of sustainable drainage systems for the lifetime of the development. It also makes the right to connect surface water runoff to public sewers conditional upon the drainage system being approved before any construction work can start.

This will ensure a consistent and more effective approach in using SuDS to help address the impacts of climate change, urbanisation and increasing population while achieving multiple benefits such as reducing surface water flood risk, improving water quality, and harvesting rainwater to meet current and future needs. However, these benefits can only be realised if SuDS are designed, constructed, adopted, and maintained to national standards for the lifetime of the development - implementing Schedule 3 will guarantee this is achieved. There is no timescale for implementing Schedule 3 yet as it will require amendments to legislation.