



**RIVER  
POLLUTION  
FORUM**

**PRESS RELEASE FROM  
THE NEWLY-FORMED  
PAN PARISH RIVER POLLUTION FORUM,  
TEST VALLEY, HAMPSHIRE**

- **Parishes along the River Test come together seeking action to stop pollution of this river, one of the world's most precious chalk streams.**
- **Numerous incidents of pollution by Southern Water are damaging the river's ecology and are a danger to fish, insects, wildlife, and human health.**
- **The River Test is under threat as never before.**
- **Parishes demand greater transparency, and call on Southern Water, the Environment Agency, Test Valley Borough Council, government and elected officials and representatives at all levels to take all action necessary to stop further pollution, to enforce and comply with all relevant regulations, and to improve the necessary infrastructure as a matter of urgency.**

In response to an alarming increase in the frequency of discharges of **untreated wastewater** by Southern Water into the River Test and the serious damage this is doing to the river's ecology, several parishes in the Test Valley have set up a **Pan Parish River Pollution Forum** to raise awareness of what is happening and to campaign to prevent further pollution. The parishes include Houghton, Barton Stacey, Chilbolton, King's Somborne, Longstock, North Baddesley, Nursling & Rownhams, Shipton Bellinger, and Stockbridge

The iconic River Test is one of the world's finest chalk streams. It is now under threat as never before. The levels of pollution are a danger to fish, wildlife, insect life and to public health. The Pan Parish River Pollution Forum aims to share information about the extent of the pollution and to alert parishes when there are major discharges into the river in order, where possible, to facilitate the mitigation of damage, and to warn people to keep pets and children out of the water to avoid falling ill. It will also campaign to stop further river pollution incidents and is calling on the Environment Agency and other relevant bodies to enforce existing regulations and bring Southern Water to account.

Houghton Parish Council is buying a water monitoring unit to be placed permanently in the river in Houghton to constantly monitor the water quality and send alerts when pollutants exceed safe levels. The water monitor is being bought with funding from the Houghton Community Benefit Fund and contributions from the Houghton Fishing Club and the Houghton Lodge Estate. It will provide hard data. Currently, the monitoring of water quality is too sporadic, and data is shared by the Environment Agency retrospectively. There is a decided lack of consistency and transparency. Houghton intends to share information from the watering monitoring unit with the Pan Parish Forum and other interested parties.

The Forum held its first meeting on Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> February at Houghton Village Hall. It was attended by representatives from various parishes along the River Test and by river keepers, estate managers and ecologists.

Houghton Lodge River Keeper, Seth Crosswaite, told the meeting that there had been major incidents of the spillage of untreated sewage from the water treatment plant at Fullerton in recent days. He produced a glass jar of filthy water, which included solid matter, taken from the river the previous Friday which demonstrated how polluted the water was when the sample was taken. A water sample tested the previous week found Ammonia levels of 3.12 micrograms per litre (Ammonia is harmful to fish at 2mpl) and Phosphate levels of 7 parts per million (4ppm is a dangerous level). This is going down the river and taking out oxygen levels.

Seth Crosswaite states:

*The world-renowned River Test has a complex biodiverse ecosystem with plants, insects and fish striking a balance in nature to give us this truly magical chalk stream. As river keepers, we are custodians of this rare and precious environment.*

*Pollution can be disastrous to the river in many ways. We are seeing increasingly less fly life and declining species such as the blue winged olive. This tiny fly lays its eggs in a protective bag which is dissolved by rising levels of phosphates. Also, algal blooms feeding on sewage can deoxygenate the water causing damage to the river for miles downstream of the original contamination point.*

*The changes to the river will not only affect the fishing but the complete environment it holds within its banks.*

Other river keepers present shared horror stories of contamination in the river and concerns about frequency of damaging discharges into the river by Southern Water, with some commenting that they have had dogs made ill after drinking from or going into the river water.

The meeting was told that there are frequent spillages from Fullerton and Chilbolton and the level of such spillages in recent weeks is the worst it has been in over 20 years. There are concerns about poor maintenance records at Fullerton Waste Water Treatment Works and that the machinery is not being properly maintained. There also appears to be a lack of adequate investment in the infrastructure needed to deal with excess water and untreated sewage. Simply pumping it into the River Test is clearly not the answer and is causing untold damage to the life of the river.

The Pan Parish River Pollution Forum wants local parishes to speak with a united voice and to campaign for action to protect the River Test from further pollution. It wants Southern Water and the Environment Agency to engage with them and to be more transparent and proactive in preventing further incidents of river pollution.

The next meeting of the Pan Parish River Pollution Forum will be held on Tuesday 9 April.

## **CONTACT**

**For further information, please contact Alistair Dougall: [cllr.alistairdougall@gmail.com](mailto:cllr.alistairdougall@gmail.com) (mobile: 07879 630066)**

## **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

The day after the meeting (Wednesday 28<sup>th</sup> February), Test Valley Borough Council's Environmental Health Manager, Mark Lee, was forced to issue a notification stating: "we currently have elevated levels of dilute untreated sewage effluent entering the River Test from the Fullerton Waste Water Treatment Works." The notification went on: "We are concerned that this is a potential risk to human health." This prompted the local MP, Caroline Nokes, to speak in the House of Commons the next day: "After two weeks of obfuscation, reassurance and denial by the company [Southern Water] that there had been any pollution incident at Fullerton Waste Water Works in my constituency, we heard yesterday from the Environment Agency that there had been a significant pollution incident of a level that would be hazardous to human health." She asked for a debate on whether Southern Water remains a fit and proper company to be managing water resources in our region.

In her reply, the Leader of the House, Penny Mordaunt, questioned the current quality of the monitoring of pollution in the river and said that she understood that, in her discussions with Southern Water, Caroline Nokes had been "given assurances about what was happening [at Fullerton] and the type of water that was being expelled into the river which turn out now to be not the case ... there are questions for Southern Water and there are questions for the Environment Agency." This echoes the experiences of many who attended the Pan Parish River Pollution Forum who have found the Environment Agency reluctant or unable to act and have been frustrated by a lack of transparency on the parts of both the EA and Southern Water.

Several members of the Pan Parish Forum attended a meeting of Test Valley Borough Council held at Andover Guildhall on 29<sup>th</sup> February and spoke in support of a motion to strongly oppose Southern Water pumping wastewater into the River Test or its tributaries and calling on Southern Water to “fix the problem by improving its infrastructure more widely and at greater speed, and work with OFWAT and the Environment Agency to enable the required investment funding to be released.” The motion further stated that “water quality must be monitored, and transparency must be maintained by publishing all testing data promptly.”

Paul Vignaux from the Test & Itchen Association told the meeting that the vast majority of riparian owners, river keepers, volunteers and fishermen “who want to see these rare and fragile chalk streams thrive for the benefit of all and for the local economy ... are angry and dismayed.” He pointed out that chalk streams rely heavily on the invertebrates commonly known as river flies and that the decline in these has been dramatic:

*Since 2004, 65% of all flying insects have disappeared and there are no signs of significant recovery. Indeed, between 2015 and 2021 there has been a 41% decline in mayflies and 47% increase in chemical stress. There are many reasons for this, but we know that over abstraction, poor water quality – that is pollution – and sedimentation to be major causes.*

He pointed out that the River Test, a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), now sits low in the River Stress Index League. He further stated:

*Our chalk stream Salmon are now classified as Endangered. Sea Trout are not far behind them. There are no Salmon Redds above Fullerton. And those South of Fullerton are being irreparably damaged by SW actions and the livelihoods of our members are being put in jeopardy.*

Howard Taylor owner of Upstreamdryfly Fishing Ltd and estate manager at Freelands Estate spoke to councillors about how the actions of Southern Water were endangering the local economy and how concerned many local businesses were that Southern Water seemed to be making money at the expense of businesses dependant on the health of the river. He pointed out that it was not just businesses directly connected to fishing that were being jeopardized but that properties along the river carried a premium and many pubs, restaurants, shops and other businesses also depended on tourists and visitors coming into the Test Valley. He called on councillors to commission an economic study to assess the economic value of the river both to the local community and local businesses of all kinds so that people could understand more clearly the value and importance of preserving and protecting the River Test.

Houghton Parish Councillor, Dr Alistair Dougall, also addressed the meeting and answered questions from councillors about the establishing of the Pan Parish Forum and the plans to site a permanent water probe in the Test at Houghton. He told the meeting that:

*There is increasing alarm at Southern Water over pumping into the Test and, also, about incidents of so-called “dry spills” when, as happened for example, on 14th June last year, untreated sewage was discharged into the river even when there had been a prolonged dry spell ... The threat is not just to fish, insect and other wildlife, it is also a threat to businesses and livelihoods and to public health ... We already know of many incidents when dogs have become ill having swum in or drunk from the river and, in the warmer months, children also often play or swim in parts of the river.*

In the following debate, several councillors encouraged other parishes to monitor the water quality in their stretches of the river and stated that councillors could make funds available to help with the purchase and maintenance of such monitors. Councillors spoke of their dismay and anger at the lack of proper investment in improving the necessary infrastructure and at the lack of transparency on the part of both Southern Water and the Environment Agency. There were also calls for government to give local authorities more powers in holding water companies to account. The motion was passed unanimously.

## **CONTACT**

**For further information, please contact Alistair Dougall: [cllr.alistairdougall@gmail.com](mailto:cllr.alistairdougall@gmail.com) (mobile: 07879 630066)**