

## Sustainability Committee Report December 2022

### Water Quality

Members of the group attended the South Devon Catchments Partnerships meeting (AT), the Holbeton Parish Council meeting on Erme Estuary sewage discharges (AT) (HN) and the virtual meeting of the River Yealm water quality working group (AT) (HN). A member of the group (HN), carried out a walk around Brownston to look at the sewage problems around the local area.

The objective of attending these meetings was:

- To get a picture of the work being done in a wider context at the South Devon Catchments Partnership meeting. Topics raised included: development of a Mitigation and Adaptation Planning Statement being developed by SHDC to include regulation on water structure for new developments, a Construction Environmental Management Plan to apply to all new developments and construction work within catchments, South Devon Area of Outstanding Beauty(AONB), Yealm Estuary to Moor (YEM) community group working with Devon Wildlife Trust (DWT) to create wildflower meadows and wildlife corridors working with local landowners to create buffer zones along the river.
- To be aware of the concerns about sewage discharge into the Erme and the respective roles of South West Water and the Environment Agency. There was considerable debate about how SWW currently measures volumes of discharge into the Erme and about the ability of the EA to issue prompt notice of potential pollution incidents and the decreased level of staffing the EA, particularly in the face of increasing concerns about pollution. Sir Gary Streeter MP, attended the meeting and talked about the national perspective on water quality and his support for any measures to improve the situation including increased fines for water companies which did not meet targets on pollution reduction.
- To learn from other groups who are already working on this issue locally. The River Yealm Water Quality working Group have been meeting since 2020 and currently have 30 volunteers trained in Citizen Science to take water quality samples for analysis. Points raised

included capacity planning from SWW for new housing developments, the number of discharges from treatment works even in dry weather and the difficulty in obtaining flow data from SWW on the basis of their being in the process of ongoing investigations. Given that sewage discharge may not be the only source of high phosphate levels in the water, it is important to distinguish whether measures are taken above or below outflows. A member of the group has offered an informal meeting to talk over some of the specifics of their work which may be helpful to us.

**Action: AT and HN to arrange a meeting.**

To document water quality issues within the wider parish area. Brownston has a significant problem with poor maintenance of sewage systems. Even on dry days sewage is being discharged constantly into the stream. Apparently, the membrane on the septic tank is broken so solids are being allowed through into the reed bed. The smell is noticeable up to half a mile away.

**Action: To invite members of adjoining councils to meet with us to work in partnership. Sustainability Committee to arrange.**

### **Biodiversity**

To look at developing a local biodiversity plan modelled on the work on the Avon Valley and Yealm Moor to Sea projects. Informal talks have been held with a local landowner and Lynne Kenerdine from the Devon Wildlife Trust has agreed to come and talk with Mod WAG as a starting point. This could be opened up to a wider audience. This would be a long term project which would need to be developed in manageable stages in partnership with interested organisations and members of the community.

### **Energy Use**

In the light of increasing energy costs, South Dartmoor Community Energy are holding a drop in advice session at the parish office on Friday December 9<sup>th</sup> from 10.00 to 12.00. They are a not for profit organisation and, in addition to drop in sessions, can provide home visits by their energy advisers by arrangement. Information has been circulated around the town and on social media.