

Raw Sewage in Rivers

East Herts District Council notes that, despite repeated calls to put a stop to the dumping of raw sewage into our precious rivers and chalk streams, the latest annual assessment (published this July) by the Environment Agency showed “totally unacceptable” performance on pollution for most of England’s water and sewage companies. Thames Water was given just 2 stars for performance for 2022, meaning that they require significant improvement.

The Environment Agency reported that in 2022 there were 169 discharges of raw sewage into our rivers in East Hertfordshire. East Herts is home to seven of only 210 rare chalk streams in the world. 169 discharges for a combined 1,799 hours equate to nearly 75 days of discharging.

The Council also notes that the Office for Environmental Protection has recently stated that the Government, the Environment Agency and Ofwat may be allowing raw sewage discharges more frequently than the law permits because there are differing interpretations of the law. It also notes that many of the annual audits of the operations of the Water Companies have not been carried out during the last 6-8 years.

The Council further notes that the Environment Agency has called on Thames Water and all the other Water Companies together to invest £56Billion to upgrade their sewage treatment plants and storm overflows, but it is allowing them 25 years in which to do this.

Therefore, East Herts District Council calls on the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for the Environment to strengthen the legislation on the discharging of raw sewage into our rivers and coastal waters by:

- 1) Tightening and clarifying the regulations and law on the circumstances in which discharge of sewage might be permitted
- 2) Requiring prompt prosecution and fining of all offending companies,
- 3) Requiring the Environment Agency to audit the Water and sewerage companies regularly, every year, to ensure that they are reporting their operations accurately.
- 4) The Council also requests the Government to bring forward the date by which Water Companies are required to reduce their discharges by 50% -to bring it forward from 2048 to 2030.
- 5) This Council authorises the Chief Executive and the Leader of the Council to write to the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for the Environment to make these 4 requests.

Proposed by Councillor Joe Thomas

Seconded by Councillor Miriam Swainston