

Severn Trent Water correspondence dated 16 May 2024

Thank you for sending through the notes of the parish council meeting held on 9 May.

We are grateful that our letter was read out, but regret the context we understand was provided by some councillors. We all want to see the river flourish and Severn Trent is committed to addressing the one reason attributed to us why it is not yet at Good status (we account for one out of a total of eight reasons). What's more, Severn Trent has engaged significantly with the parish council in recent years, including attending the last meeting about the river, hosting a site visit for councillors and providing a number of written updates. We will address the one-eighth of the problem attributable to us no matter what is said or done, but addressing the broader problem will require partnership working, which in turn clearly requires trust and mutual respect.

Across the wider region we serve, we expect to spend roughly £15 *billion* between now and the end of 2030 maintaining and improving services, a very significant proportion of which will be spent on improving river water quality. Over the last few years, we have also increased our workforce from around 6,000 to nearly 10,000 and we have asked our teams to focus laser-like on what is most important to customers – maintaining services and making fast environmental improvements. We need this level of resource and focus to meet our commitment to ensure none of our operations cause any harm to rivers by 2030, a commitment of which we know of no company in Europe going further or faster.

We are focused, have the necessary financial resources for long-term investment and are making serious progress. But it would be wrong to suggest that a dramatic and visible improvement to rivers in Derbyshire will happen overnight. One reason is that designing and building major infrastructure inevitably takes time. But by far the biggest reason is that 87 percent of the harm to rivers in Derbyshire comes from other sources, not the water sector, with agricultural and run-off pollution from roads and urban areas being amongst the most significant. If we want to transform our rivers for the better, we need concerted action across a number of sectors.

The absolute priority should be for the water sector to rapidly reduce the harm it causes. Severn Trent is leading the way on this, although I accept the picture throughout the wider UK is more mixed. My point, however, is there are additional things we as a society can and should be doing. I would like to suggest three:

1. **We should better support farmers to farm sustainably.** Farmers do a vital job in often very challenging circumstances – and often don't receive appropriate support to farm sustainably. The incentives tend to be too short term. Severn Trent is working with around 10,000 farmers across our region to try to make a difference, but I am sure there is more every organisation can do, as well as us as individuals, to help make a bigger difference.
2. **We should try to keep pollution from roads and urban areas out of rivers.** Run off from roads and urban areas often has high concentrations of oil, particles from tyres and other pollutants. Stopping this pollution reaching rivers will take time as it will not be easy to 're-wire' the road and urban drainage network. But we should surely stopping the problem

getting worse. Should each highway authority set out a long-term glide path for reducing the problem?

3. **Third, we should ensure new houses and other developments are built sustainably.** Built-badly, new development can increase pollution as well as raise flood risk. Built-well, it can be a net gain for the environment and reduce flood risk. Are we as a society doing enough to encourage high quality, sustainable development?

We hope to be able to work constructively with the parish and others on these and other issues affecting the river. We also hope to have the opportunity to brief the council once we have finalised our own investment plans for the River Amber.

With best wishes