

Chichester District Council

Cabinet

8 December 2020

Public Questions and Answers Sheet

Question from Andrew Kerry-Bedell:

A 2018 Environment Agency report says the shellfish industry in Chichester Harbour should be worth over half a million pounds a year. Yet only two weeks ago the harbour quality water report showed faecal matter in the harbour well above the permitted limits to sell any shellfish from it. The September 2020 report in Science of the Total Environment into Chichester Harbour water quality and faecal indicator organisms also concluded:

“Compliance with the guideline E. coli standard of the Shellfish Water Protected Areas Directions was not consistently achieved. We suggest that better harmonisation of monitoring practices used in the various statutory programmes would help in understanding if the observed discrepancy in FIO compliance between waters and shellfish is due to actual pollution levels at compliance sites or other factors.”

The current Beach Buoy daily email reporting system is almost useless. Whilst harbour water quality is monitored, there is no storm discharge volume or compliance failure data available from sewage treatment outlets.

So what is Chichester Council doing to solve the lack of publically available daily water quality or sewage outlet reporting on faecal matter, nitrates and ammonia, and what action is proposed to create a better, more useable, accurate and actionable daily report for residents and the shellfish industry in Chichester Harbour?

Valuation of Chichester Harbour shellfish:

<https://secure.toolkitfiles.co.uk/clients/34087/sitedata/files/Research/Chichester-Shellfish-Valuation-Report-2018.pdf>

Answer from Cllr Plant:

Thank you for your question. The Council under its food hygiene remit, has a programme of shellfish sampling which monitors E.coli and biotoxin levels and from which the beds are then classified from A to C. The November samples fell into a B class for the beds in Chichester Harbour which requires the oysters to be purified for a minimum of 42 hours. Very few beds in England will have the higher A class of water, which permits immediate consumption without purification. That said, the Shellfish beds are affected by the storm water discharges and the Council is notified directly by Southern Water of any potential spills into the harbour from the waste water treatment works and the Council notifies the harvesters if harvesting is occurring. The Council also shares its shellfish monitoring data with the Environment Agency.

Nitrates and ammonia are not covered by the food hygiene monitoring. The Environment Agency, as the water regulator, rather than the District Council, is responsible for monitoring water quality through the Shellfish Water Protected Areas Directions and regulating and overseeing Southern Water's performance through their environmental permit for the waste water treatment works.

Beachbuoy is Southern Water's online release notification system. Launched in 2018 and improved in September this year following feedback, it is able to give automatic updates from Southern Water infrastructure. This service will continue to be enhanced and is the best route to receive first-hand the most up to date information.

The pressures on water quality range from diffuse pollution from villages and roads, pollution from waste water, and run off from agriculture and livestock. The Council sits on a waste water working group which includes all the key stakeholders, including the Environment Agency, Southern Water, Chichester Harbour Conservancy and through this group there are on-going discussions relating to improving harbour water quality in relation to the existing situation and the Sewage Treatment Works capacity necessary in relation to the Local Plan review. The Council, through this group, can feedback the concerns about Beachbuoy to SW and the EA at the next meeting.

Supplementary Question:

It was established at the last Council meeting on 24th November that the water quality group meets irregularly. A concern raised by Parishes and residents is that none of the items they raise or discuss or the results that are minuted get into the public domain. Like all Parish information discussed, the minutes should be in the public domain, where their information could be very useful in determining LP and NP policy and also influencing planning applications. How and when will the water quality group minutes be published and how does the Council propose that these are best circulated to Parishes?

Response to Supplementary Question from the Chief Executive:

Following the Council meeting on 24 November 2020 I have begun discussions with senior officers about the effectiveness of the water quality group as instructed by members. These talks are ongoing but once concluded I will advise members on how we can improve communications on the topics discussed by this group and will ensure an update is made publically available on the website.