

Statement from County Councillor Elizabeth Eyre, November 2022

You may remember there were bathing incidents in the Avon this summer. This issue has been raised at both the County and District Council levels, and with the support of officers and our MP a full response has been received from the Environment Agency, the Agency which regulates the water and agriculture industries, and monitors river water quality.

I /we want to do more. As advised to the parishes of Fladbury, Charlton and Cropthorne, this item will now be on the Wychavon Rural Panel Agenda on January 23rd, 2023. I will feed back to residents after that meeting.

The two biggest sources of pollution affecting England's water environment are water companies' sewage management and diffuse pollution from agriculture.

The EA has advised that rivers such as the Avon, and other open water locations are not designated as bathing waters, therefore they are not routinely monitored for bacterial indicators such as intestinal enterococci or E. coli which are used to assess bathing water quality. The river Avon at Pershore does NOT have a designated bathing water status and risks from using these locations may be higher than at designated bathing waters.

I was pleased to be advised by the EA that rivers such as the Avon are managed to protect fish and wildlife. I learned from the EA that the river Avon is a heavily modified waterbody with high phosphate levels. The 2017 Avon course fish report undertook several surveys in the lower section of the Avon and did not highlight any cause for concern with fish populations. Netting surveys were dominated by roach, chub, and bleak. Compared to historical data roach and bleak numbers appear to be on the increase at both sites, although chub and dace were generally lower. These surveys are on a 5–6-year rotation so although the data is from 2017, a current survey is due in 2023 and I understand some fry surveys took place in August 2022.

Data from the time of the incidents related to children swimming did not indicate that there was anything unusual occurring until mid-July when chlorophyll levels (relating to algal blooms) began to rise.

- It would be good to talk through with the EA and STW what is meant in respect of the Avon by “a heavily modified waterbody” with high

phosphate levels, and whether the readings we have are as they would expect.

- Their views on bacterial indicator testing given they are aware of just how many people continue to swim between Pershore and Fladbury are requested.
- The panel wishes to hear more about the government's new environmental land management scheme rewarding farmers for the public good and through regulation, enforcement- polluter pays, the incentives and educational programmes the EA is running to reduce pollution.
- We are concerned about the on-the-ground regulation of STW and others. We are aware of the court cases that have led to fines, some very hefty but wish to know in the light of our data what more can be done.
- We are aware that Severn Trent is investing £566m between now and 2025 on projects aimed to support the UK's green economic bounce back following the pandemic. Projects include creating bathing-quality stretches of the river. There is a green recovery bathing rivers project in Warwickshire 49km of river, so why not Worcestershire?