

Motion A: Sewage pollution and Thames Water (proposed by Councillor Lidia Arciszewska) alteration by the proposer

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In 2024 Thames Water discharged raw sewage from their storm overflow tanks into West Oxfordshire rivers for 27.4 thousand hours, that is a 25% increase on discharges in the previous year and on average 1,600 hours of spilling from each of the WO Sewage Treatment Works. [To put it in perspective 1,400 hrs is equivalent to about two months.] Year on year increasing levels of untreated sewage are being discharged. These spills take place following even slight rain, although TW have permits to discharge raw sewage ONLY under exceptional circumstances.

Consequently, the current ecological status of West Oxfordshire rivers is catastrophic. Once beautiful and bountiful with vibrant life our rivers are now murky, dull and lifeless.

Moreover, we have a number of perennial problem areas in the villages across West Oxfordshire, where sewage notoriously backs up the residents' toilets, spills into their gardens, roads, public spaces and fields. All because the sewerage network is often overwhelmed following decades of underinvestment.

The Council has committed to reducing sewage pollution of our rivers and waterways and engaged with Thames Water during regular discussions. We have had some great successes. However, the problems with Thames Water are fundamental and their resolution is far ~~above of what the local authority can do~~ beyond the powers of the local authority.

Since Thames Water was privatised in 1989, the company has enjoyed great profits, and paid their shareholders, 80% of whom are overseas, some handsome dividends. It has also been rewarding their CEOs with enormous salaries and bonuses. At the same time the company has been 'sweating' the assets and cutting down staff numbers. Moreover, it managed to accumulate £18bn in debts. With this amount of debt the company is in no position to make necessary investments to get our rivers clean. It is estimated that Thames Water needs about £23bn to bring its crumbling infrastructure to the required capacity. The lack of this infrastructure will hold back the ambitions of the government to build the homes that we need.

Thames Water is currently trying to get a further £3bn loan at an eye watering 9.75% interest and with hefty service charges. Just before Christmas OFWAT agreed for the company to increase its customers' bills by 35% by 2030, though most of the increases will take place in the next couple of years. If TW get the loan, 46% of each customer bill payments will be funding Thames Water debt interest payments. This is not acceptable.

The only way out of the current impasse is for the Government to place Thames Water into a Special Administration Regime ~~and consider moving it into a non-profit or community benefit company.~~

The Council resolves to ask the Council Leader to write to Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Steve Reed, to request that Thames Water be put into a Special Administration Regime ~~and then moved to a non-profit corporation or community benefit company.~~