

15th August 2024

For the attention of the Clerk and members of Arne, Corfe Castle, Kimmeridge and Steeple Parish Councils,

Dear Clerk, and Members of the Council,

RE: The Corfe River

I am writing on the behalf of Church Knowle Parish Council concerning the Corfe River. The river rises in Steeple parish, flows through Church Knowle and Corfe Castle, and discharges into Poole Harbour at Arne. It is approximately 13.5 km long, from source to sea, and important to us all.

In 2018, the Corfe River Project began the important work of improving the water course through silt barrier fencing, coppicing and buffer zones, following a 'failure' classification by the Water Framework Directive for elevated levels of phosphates. Today, the river remains designated of 'poor ecological status' by DEFRA with elevated levels of both mercury and PBDE (polybrominated diphenyl ethers).

Whilst not all of the pollution can be attributed to the water industry, in 2023, Wessex Water self-reported discharging sewage into the Corfe River a total of 155 times for a duration of 1013 hours. The sewage treatment works at Corfe discharged for a total of 631 hours, Glebe Farm Pumping Station for 200 hours, and the pumping station at Church Knowle animal sanctuary for 114 hours.

This undermines the considerable efforts of the Corfe River Project. Clearly, the weather in 2023 was particularly poor, and the combination of sewage with storm overflows, with insufficient storage capacity within the system, is likely to be at fault. For example, in 2022, at Corfe Castle there were 22 such spills, compared with 60 in 2023. Variable weather patterns seem to be here to stay.

Church Knowle Parish Council intends writing to Wessex Water to request its proposals for investment in, and improvement of existing storage capacity. There may be ways we are able to work with the company, for example, in identifying appropriate sites to locate new storage.

After all, the Corfe River ultimately flows through the Purbeck Heath 'super' national nature reserve into Poole Harbour, which is a Special Protection Area, an SSSI and a Ramsar site. These designations not only help protect our environment but increasingly support tourism within Purbeck. I note the May 2024 changes to the 'nutrient neutrality' rules for Poole Harbour in relation to phosphates.

Going forward, we hope Wessex Water will be pushed to invest more into resolving legacy issues. Currently it invests £3m per annum in increased storage - but that investment is spread between Wiltshire, Somerset and Dorset and none is earmarked for Purbeck. Given the protected status of Purbeck/Poole Harbour, we feel that we should be top of their list.

I am pleased to append a draft letter to Wessex Water seeking clarification and setting out our concerns. We believe that having adjoining Parishes as equal, joint signatories to this letter would give this request weight. Clearly, this is a matter that requires discussion and your approval and I would be happy to attend the next meeting of the Parish Council in September to answer any questions you may have.

It would be our intention, once we have responses from our friends and neighbours, that we also approach RSPB Arne, DWT and the National Trust, seeking their support. Our intention is to encourage speedy investment into protecting our unique environment, which will benefit us all.

In the meantime, I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.

All the best,

Judith Newns.

Wessex Water
Operations Centre
Claverton Down Road,
Claverton Down, Bath,
BA2 7WW

Dear Mr Skellet,

Re: The Corfe River, Purbeck, Dorset

I write on the behalf of Church Knowle, X, X and X Parish Councils, with X, X and X as signatories to this letter.

The Corfe River flows through our parishes and its health is important to all of us. We welcome previous investments by Wessex Water into local projects, such as installing a UV system at Corfe to protect shellfish in Poole harbour. We would respectfully ask for more.

DEFRA has assessed Corfe River as having a 'poor ecological status' with elevated levels of both mercury and PBDE. Pollution from the water industry is confirmed by DEFRA as a reason for its failure to achieve 'good' status. This status is despite the good work of the Corfe River Project which, since 2018, has reduced silt and agricultural runoff.

We are very concerned to note the amount of untreated sewage discharged by you into the Corfe River in 2023 - for over 1000 hours. We would be grateful if you could confirm the dates, locations and durations of discharge, so that we may compare these with local weather data. Please could you also confirm the permitted number of spills by you into the Corfe river per annum. Please treat this as a 'freedom of information' request.

As I am sure you are aware, the Corfe river flows through the Purbeck Heath 'Super' National nature reserve, and ultimately into Poole Harbour, which is a SSSI, Special Protection Area and Ramsar Site. These environmental protections are significant and Purbeck Heath is lucky enough to support internationally important populations of invertebrates and birds.

Although 2023 was a very wet year, I am sure you will agree that weather patterns are changing and variable, and these conditions are likely to persist. Accordingly, we would like to work with Wessex Water to put matters right, for the long term. We note that you are investing in new storm overflow capacity elsewhere in Dorset, Wiltshire and Somerset. Given the sensitivity of your discharge into Corfe River, and ultimately, Poole Harbour, we politely request that you review and improve storage at all pumping stations and treatment works along Corfe river, with a view to being able to cope with '2023' weather conditions, as a minimum, going forward.

As Parish Councils we are happy to work with you to help establish suitable locations for storage. We do recognise that Wessex Water are not the only source of pollution to Corfe River and we will continue to work proactively with residents and farmers to do our bit.

I look forward to receiving your proposals.

All the best,

Judith Newns and ...