

Scrutiny Review Sewage In Rivers And Waterways

October 2022 to March 2023

Foreword by Cllr Lisa Smart, Chair of the Scrutiny Review Panel

We undertook this review using the powers we have as an Area Committee under the Local Government Act 2000 and the Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council Constitution. Those powers allow us to scrutinise any issue of relevance or concern to the residents we represent.

I want to start by thanking those local residents who shared their concerns with us as local councillors about the state of local rivers. There are local people who want to swim in our rivers, who want to allow their children or pets to paddle in our rivers and they are simply not clean enough for that to be encouraged or for wildlife and nature to thrive.

The state of local rivers and the situation being allowed to persist where it is acceptable for water companies to pump sewage into them – as a norm rather than just as an exception - is a disgrace. Investment in infrastructure is needed so that this practice ends.

National government must change the law to stop this and it must enforce the laws that already exist. The Environment Agency must be resourced to a level whereby it is able to carry out the vital role it has.

Water companies should be transparent with the data about sewage pollution, and that includes letting local people know that their rivers aren't safe to swim in and when there have been sewage outflow events locally. They need to invest, and invest quickly, in building a water system that is fit for today.

Stockport Council has a role to play too. As a planning authority, the council could be stricter about new developments. And as a flood authority, it needs to push harder for more investment in infrastructure.

Our recommendations are at the end of this report. They are numerous and we feel our work is not yet concluded. Given the importance of this issue to our local community, and our local environment, a key recommendation is that more work is done by next year's Area Committee.

I want to thank those representatives from United Utilities and the Mersey Rivers Trust for engaging with this review in person. I also want to thank those from the Environment Agency and Stockport Council who provided information and evidence that has fed into this report.

Cllr Lisa Smart

2. Scope of the Review

- 2.1 Local rivers provide a key amenity for the area and are used for agricultural and recreational purposes as well as providing wildlife corridors and an important habitat. The review was undertaken to understand the condition of our local rivers and the key types of pollution affecting it. The review also heard evidence from key stakeholders – United Utilities, the Environment Agency and Mersey Rivers Trust.
- 2.2 At its meeting of 17th October, 2023, the Werneth Area Committee agreed the Scrutiny Review of Sewage pollution in local waterways and rivers focused on: -
- i. Understanding the issues affecting local waterways and rivers and understanding key stakeholder concerns regarding water quality,
 - ii. Reviewing the work already being undertaken by key stakeholders,
 - iii. Identifying opportunities to improve local residents' understanding of local waterways and rivers water quality and how they can contribute to its improvement,
 - iv. Identifying opportunities for future joint working opportunities to improve local water quality.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 The Werneth Area Committee appointed a Panel to carry out the Review comprising of the following members: -

Councillor Lisa Smart - Panel Chair
Councillor Angie Clark
Councillor Stuart Corris
Councillor Mark Roberts
Councillor Vince Shaw
Councillor Sue Thorpe

3.2 As part of the Review, the Panel had the support and assistance of: -

- Sue Stevenson - Head of Highways and Transportation
- Tim Collins - Flood Risk Management Team Leader
- Damian Eaton – CSS Manager (Democratic Services)

3.3 The Panel met on three occasions as part of the Area Committee meetings between June 2022 and March 2023 as part of the Area Committee meetings and followed the timetable set out below: -

Meeting One (17th October 2022) – Scope the Review and initial evidence gathering.

Meeting Two (23rd January 2023) – Focus on evidence gathering from stakeholders

Meeting Three (17th April 2023) – Final meeting to discuss and agree recommendations for final report.

Introduction – The Local Context and Background to the review

- 1.1 Many residents and community groups contact Councillors to express concerns about seemingly increasing incidents of sewer pollution to rivers and streams in our area. The national and local media highlight some of these issues and they have become more high profile in the past year or so, particularly as the impacts of Climate Change become increasingly apparent. Some campaign groups are encouraging dialogue with relevant authorities to try and improve our rivers for many reasons.
- 1.2 The Werneth Area of Stockport is home to several rivers and waterways, including the River Goyt, the Mersey, and the Tame. Unfortunately, these waterways have been subject to sewage pollution, which can have significant environmental and health impacts. This report will provide an overview of the current situation in the area, the legislation that could be passed to improve the situation, the changes that United Utilities could make to improve the situation, and the changes that Stockport Council could make to its policies to improve the situation.
- 1.3 According to data from the Environment Agency, there were 16 pollution incidents reported in the Werneth Area in 2021, up from 14 incidents in 2020. These incidents included both category 1 and category 2 pollution incidents. Category 1 incidents are the most severe, involving a major or widespread impact on the environment or public health, while category 2 incidents involve a localized or minor impact.
- 1.4 The Rivers Trust has also highlighted the issue of sewage pollution in the area, noting that the River Goyt is one of the most polluted rivers in the UK. The Trust cites a lack of investment in infrastructure and treatment facilities, as well as inadequate regulation, as contributing factors to the problem.
- 1.5 The impact of these incidents is clear from data collected by the Environment Agency. According to their records, there were 48 pollution incidents in the River Goyt between January 2020 and September 2021, 33 incidents in the River Tame, and 27 incidents in the River Mersey. These incidents have a significant impact on the water quality of the rivers, as they can lead to high levels of harmful bacteria, which can be dangerous for wildlife and for people who come into contact with the water. Further data from the Rivers Trust shows that the sewer storm outflow on Otterspool Road spilled 153 times in 2021 for a total of 1,326 hours. That's over 55 days continuously discharging into the River Goyt.
- 1.6 There are numerous sources of pollution in rivers in England (see Figure 1). The top 3 are listed below:
 - 1.6.1 Agriculture and Rural Management - Run-off from fields from agricultural land containing fertilisers, animal manures and sediment.
 - 1.6.2 Water Industry:

- Foul and combined sewage is treated at Wastewater Treatment facilities to meet the permit standards set by the Environment Agency (EA) before being discharged back in to the environment.
- Sewer outfalls exist on both combined sewer networks and surface water sewer networks and are permitted by the EA to discharge to watercourse. During intense or prolonged rainfall events combined sewer assets may surcharge and spill untreated, but diluted, sewage into rivers to prevent internal foul flooding of homes and businesses. Misconnections of toilets, washing machines etc in to the surface water sewer is not uncommon which can contribute pollution in to watercourses.

1.6.3 Urban Development and Transport – Run-off from highways containing chemicals, micro-plastics from tyres etc.

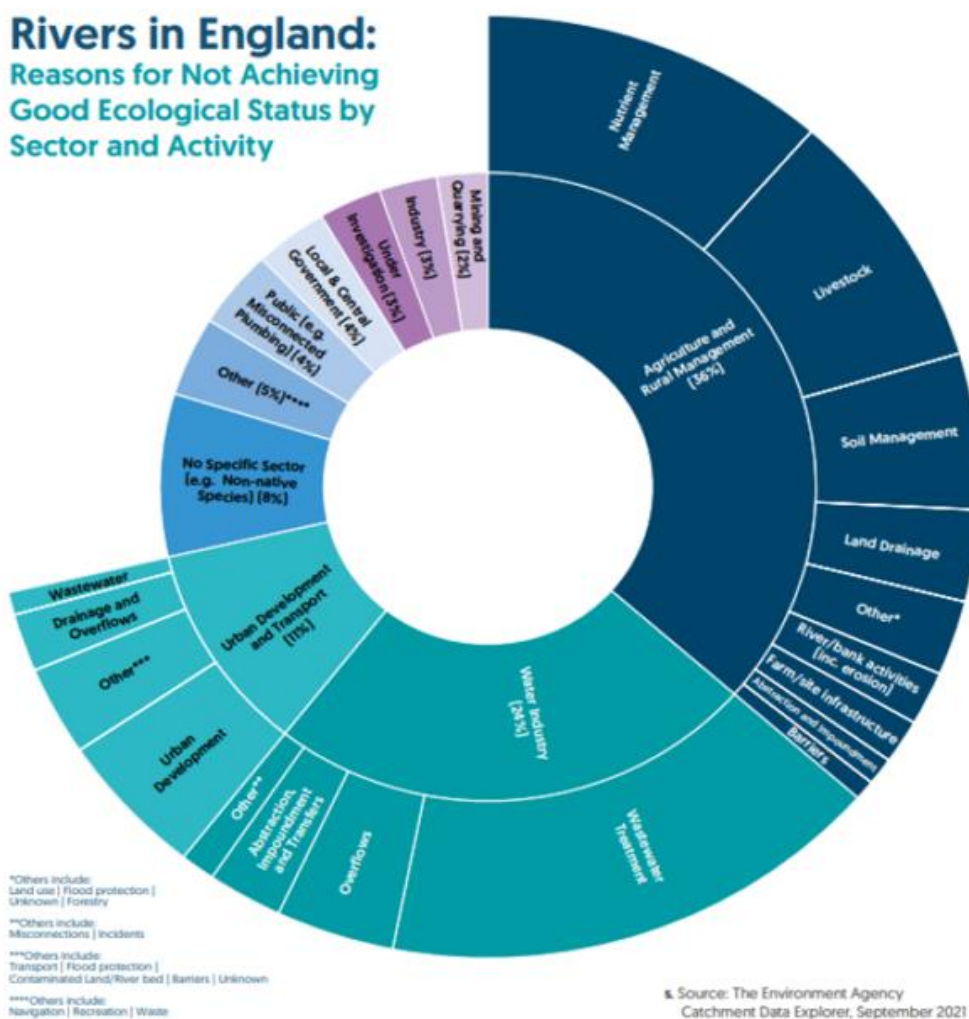


Figure 1. Source apportionment by sector which contribute to reasons for not achieving good in England, Environment Agency, September 2021.

2. Responsibilities and Key Stakeholders

- 2.1 The regulation of water quality and pollution to the environment rests with the Environment Agency (EA), which is government led through Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) and they take decisions about levels of investigation, projects, and priorities across England. All pollution incidents should be reported to the EA.
- 2.2 United Utilities (UU) are the water and wastewater service provider in the North West of England, and responsible for operating and maintaining the public sewers and wastewater treatment assets. UU is regulated by the EA through environmental permits and OFWAT through a regulatory contract set every 5 years.
- 2.3 The Highway Authority manages highway drainage, which should in theory have no sewerage, although there will be urban diffuse pollution aspects.
- 2.4 Developers and private property owners all have private drainage, are responsible for managing and connecting to the correct systems and should manage water sustainably.
- 2.5 We all have responsibility as a community and individuals.
- 2.6 The council has no direct role in managing water quality or sewerage but has interests to have a better and safe environment for our residents and local users.
- 2.7 The Council's flood team as part of the Council strategy as Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) is helping to manage flood risk by working with all the relevant organisations, as officers recognise that helping to mitigate flooding would also include natural water management and control. Council officers develop and share best practice to get multiple benefits such as better amenity and biodiversity.
- 2.8 The Council is responsible for planning and planning policy, while overseeing proper and sustainable development.
- 2.9 There are many leisure users who are interested in local water quality including anglers, wild swimmers, canoeists, walkers, friends of parks groups, etc.
- 2.10 In addition, waterways provide access to water and habitat for wildlife and livestock.

3. Sources of pollution

- 3.1 Diffuse pollution can be considered in two distinct aspects: rural and urban.
- 3.2 Rural diffuse pollution in most situations provides the largest influence on water quality, in that run-off from farmland, slurry stack and animal grazing enter our watercourses and this is rarely controlled.
- 3.3 Urban diffuse pollution can also be significantly heavy in urbanised areas. Often the data produced to consider likely sources of the harmful substances refer to urban pollution, which is simple run-off from streets. There is little to no control of this with conventional drainage systems. Gully pots in roads will act as a sump with an overflow that can catch sediment and particles normally, but in a storm, these will get washed into rivers.

- 3.4 Misconnections are also an issue, in that foul water enters surface water systems and often these are unknown, untraceable and unqualifiable. It is often poor building practices from small developments that connect toilets, sinks or predominantly washing machines to roof drainage outfalls. This foul water ultimately enters our rivers via surface water sewer outfalls. United Utilities do have a Contaminated Surface Water Investigation process to try and identify and resolve the misconnections, however with urban creep this process is continual.
- 3.5 Combined Sewer Overflows (CSOs) get significant media attention, in that water companies have to provide a release outlet for combined sewers. Although foul water is present for many systems to be able to overflow into rivers, a combined water sewer would have to be at capacity and so will be full of natural (run-off water) and road drainage. The theory is that when these overflow, the foul water will be heavily diluted with rainwater, as well as receiving fast flowing rivers. It is unlikely that people and animals will be entering the rivers at times of heavy stormwaters. These discharges are consented through EA permits and monitored by United Utilities Event Duration Monitors. Although the foul water is raw it is significantly diluted, and tanks are of a capacity, so designed to accommodate normal events. However, with increased and heavy rain events, systems cannot cope. It is clear that, given the frequency and duration of sewage discharges, some outflows are not coping even when there has not been an exceptional rainfall event.
- 3.6 Wastewater Treatment Works (WwTW) provide a valuable service in treating sewage from foul and combined systems. Most WwTW have three or sometimes four process stages to remove solids and treat the water to a specific standard before it is discharged back into the environment. WwTW have a robust sampling programme and compliance with permits is regulated by the EA.

4. Monitoring

- 4.1 Rivers are monitored through the EA. This can be supported by volunteers and charities to assist in understanding water quality and help advise the EA on strategies and areas of concerns.
- 4.2 CSOs are monitored and new legislation through the Environment Act 2021 has mandated water companies to reduce the number of spills from these assets to an annual average of 10 spills by 2050. This requires a significant investment programme over many years and will require both a reduction in the amount of rainfall that enters the combined sewer systems (from highways, overland flow, developments etc) through delivering sustainable drainage in urban areas, natural flood management in rural catchments, property level interventions such as water butts and rain gardens and other attenuation.
- 4.3 The catchment partnership works across organisations to share data and information. These work together to provide schemes to help mitigate poor water quality across all aspects.

- 4.4 Since the industrial revolution, there has been a significant improvement to our rivers with better practices and a more sustainable approaches, especially since our area is the first industrial conurbation.
- 4.5 In urbanised towns and cities (particularly industrialised areas), many of our rivers were used both as water assets and a means to dispose of used water. Because of this, waterways were often culverted and channelised. Other use of the land was deemed a higher priority. This meant that the natural processes of rivers were significantly affected, if not removed altogether.
- 4.6 It is clear that many of our rivers are still not in the best condition, although there are more reports of greater numbers of fish in upstream rural areas. Many of our rivers in the Upper Mersey Catchment are shown as Poor or Moderate.
- 4.7 It should be understood that heavily modified and unnatural watercourses can never achieve a “good” rating for water quality, as all the natural functions to clean water are often removed.

5. Solutions

- 5.1 The solutions can be wide reaching and challenging. In Stockport the Council works within the Upper Mersey Catchment Partnership (UMCP), which is a catchment coordinated approach set around the country by the DEFRA and supported by them. It covers a much wider area than Stockport, but mainly focuses on the Mersey, Tame, Goyt and Bollin Rivers, that all come through Stockport at some point (or at least the tributaries do in the case from the Bollin).
- 5.2 The partnership has a remit and strategy that is reviewed periodically. A prime driver of that is water quality, as well as other water related aspects. It is hosted and chaired by a charity, The Mersey Rivers Trust (MRT), who are a key delivery agent to highlight issues and aid other organisations. It is well supported by other Authorities and volunteers.
- 5.3 The partnership has used EA funding to provide schemes around the south of the borough, over the past three years.
- 5.4 Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA), EA and UU entered a trilateral partnership through a Memorandum of Understanding in September 2021 to consider a holistic approach to sustainable water management, and the Council is now working with EA and UU on schemes under a Place Based Planning Approach to look at all water aspects along rivers.
- 5.5 Also with money from EA Grant in Aid processes for flooding mitigation works, the Council wishes to provide both retro-fit and re-naturalisation of watercourses and ponds to both store and clean water. These aspects are relatable.

6. General solutions

- 6.1 The Water Industry National Environment Programme (WINEP) is a mechanism developed by the EA to deliver benefits to the natural environment and provides information to water companies on the actions needed to meet applicable environmental legislative requirements. The WINEP is driving a significant programme for the reduction of spills from storm overflows and phosphorus reduction from WwTW, in line with the Environment Act.
- 6.2 In recent years two CSOs have been significantly improved at Mersey Square in the Town Centre. A buried large tank is in front of the Plaza Theatre and more recently a buried larger tank scheme using Morrison's Car Park was built to assist consented outfalls to Crookille Brook in Bredbury. The costs of these improvements are ultimately paid by all water users in water rates. It is often a challenging solution in a built-up urban environment and an unsustainable model to keep trying to build larger tanks and larger sewers.
- 6.3 The impact of new development and more pertinently urban creep is increasing our demand and use of every sewer system and impact on our rivers.
- 6.4 Reducing the reliance on old combined systems is a way to reduce the impact and put more into surface water sewers. However, that still has the problems of urban diffuse pollution, but it will slowly reduce the impact on water treatment capacity and spills into rivers from diluted sewage.
- 6.5 Many of the older combined sewers are in areas of historic and industrial heritage and in built-up areas. New building development must have and use newer and separate systems, and the LLFA advises the Local Planning Authority (LPA) on such for planning applications.
- 6.6 There currently stands in legalisation the right to connect new developments or redevelopments to sewers, although this may change in 2024. If an existing area or land has an existing connection to a combined or any other sewer UU are obliged to accept. Only the LLFAs can intervene and seek that the developer looked at alternatives due to the flood risk issues.
- 6.7 Climate Change provides more intense and frequent rain events that have a severe impact on our drains, sewers and watercourses that were designed and naturally formed to cope with previous water situations but now they are often overwhelmed and flood and this does mean that all forms of pollution enters our rivers and so by slowing water down and creating more natural, or to mimic natural, processes water is better treated and captured and filtrated before it becomes run-off and drainage.
- 6.8 Urban creep affects our system and creates more water and run-off that collects pollution and the influence particularly of front gardens being paved over to create drives in itself creates more problem with water quality but especially when drives drain run-off directly to our roads and the drainage then has to deal with additional volumes and diffuse materials that would have prior to paving been treated naturally and slowed down. Planning permission is required to pave a front garden for this reason.
- 6.9 By trying to re-naturalise many aspects about water management we can reverse or help some issues. The better use and conservation of assets such as ponds, natural streams and brooks help to clean water. In an urban environment where modified watercourses or complete removal of

watercourses and the replacement with culverting or sewers water quality can never achieve a good status and so providing more hard-engineered solutions add to the problems and more soft and greener solutions are being promoted and used.

- 6.10 Natural Flood Management (NFM) is being developed and supported across the industry and schemes are being put in here and across the country. There are serious challenges to these in terms of perceived effectiveness compared to hard conventional flood defence work, but it is apparent that allowing water to be treated by nature is more effective and cost-effective. The other main challenge is the Health and Safety aspects of slowing water, holding water and allowing that to release slowly adds to a perceived fear of risk from volumes of open water. The benefits of NFM are not just flood mitigation measures but they can provide attractive amenity and continual water processing, as well as valuable habitats for wildlife.
- 6.11 Sustainable Drainage (SuDS) is now a vital part of the process for all developments and redevelopments. Traditionally it was felt that waste-water (surface and foul) should be passed quickly to somewhere off site and to another receptor. These are often at full capacity and cannot cope. With SuDS the onus is with all developers that water should be managed and treated as close to the site as possible and even kept on the site mimicking the natural processes available locally. SuDS is now the recognised industry standard, but it is still being difficult to fully achieve fully cost-effective solutions and better sustainable approaches from developers. SuDS has been in the UK for other 20 years. In relation to Stockport, officers have been encouraging its use for about 8 years and supported by the introduction of the role as LLFA in Stockport. The LLFA has more influence on this after 2014 amended legislation. An example of a SuDS project within the Werneth Area was installed recently at Greave Primary School.
- 6.12 Green walls and streets are being promoted across the country and we should continue to promote their introduction. In Stockport we have had a first few Green Walls that although not immediately apparent help with pollutants and run-off in that nature deals with as well as creating a better aesthetics and wider biodiversity. It could be the same with Green Streets where instead of draining roads to a series of pots to outfall to a River, water is managed through series of measures to hold and capture water through landscape features. We should also consider green / blue streets. It has been proved that access and being in an environment near water, and it being greener, is much better for our mental health.
- 6.13 Grant Authorities are now moving away from engineered solutions with their grant schemes and both EA and UU are developing and giving out grants to provide greener schemes.

7. Water Quality in England (Environment Agency)

- 7.1 The Environment Agency (EA) does not cause the pollution in England's waters, it is caused by the people who pollute. The water quality and the ecological health of rivers must improve. The two main sources of poor water quality are agriculture, and the water industry discharges. There is also a

growing threat from urban runoff, plastics and forever chemicals. As more people look to England's rivers for recreation, we all need to up our game.

7.2 Agricultural Pollution

- 7.2.1 With regards to Agricultural pollution, farming is integral to a prosperous future, and they want to work constructively with the sector at every opportunity on environmental improvement, flood management and net zero ambitions to make the whole country more resilient going forward.
- 7.2.2 Agriculture is the biggest sector they regulate in terms of individual businesses, with c.100,000 premises that cover 70% of the land in England. Agricultural diffuse pollution is one of the biggest contributors to poor water quality in England.
- 7.2.3 The EA has received a new share of national Government funding to help tackle this issue. Teams will increase farm visits focusing on high-risk locations, previously non-compliant businesses, and those farming sectors of concern. The EA is also increasing monitoring at high-risk locations.
- 7.2.4 The EA has almost doubled the funding available for the Catchment Sensitive Farming programme over the next three years. The new annual budget will be £30 million, up from £16.6 million in 2020-21. This means it will cover 100% of England's farmland, up from 40% of its current coverage, with every farmer able to access advice and support by March 2023.
- 7.2.5 50 additional full-time employees have been recruited for farm inspections with a dedicated Agriculture Regulation team of ten officers in our area. These officers will be deployed to high priority catchments such as those containing protected habitats or farms intelligence indicates are breaching the rules and causing pollution.
- 7.2.6 The government is also increasing funding for farmers to tackle water pollution via Catchment Sensitive Farming – a partnership between Defra, Natural England and the EA which provides free 1-2-1 advice to farmers to help them reduce pollution through management of farmyard manure and soils, among other things.

7.3 Sewage Pollution.

- 7.3.1 It is the responsibility of water companies to manage their operational activities to comply with all relevant environmental legislation.
- 7.3.2 Monitoring and transparency from water companies has significantly improved in recent years, so that everyone can see what is going on. This includes:

- 8. Event Duration Monitoring: This measures how often and for how long storm overflows are used. The EA has increased the number of overflows monitored across the network from 800 in 2016 to more than 12,700 in 2021, the equivalent of almost nine in ten storm overflows now with monitoring devices. All 15,000 overflows will have them by the end of 2023. All the data is published online.**

9. Flow-to-full treatment: EA has also asked companies to install new flow monitors on more than 2,000 wastewater treatment works to identify what is happening at those works during the sewage treatment process itself. This has led to a major investigation, announced in November 2021, with the EA requesting more detailed data from all wastewater treatment works.

10. Storm Overflows Taskforce: Through the work of the Storm Overflows Taskforce – made up of Defra, the EA, Ofwat, Consumer Council for Water, Blueprint for Water and Water UK – water companies have agreed to increase transparency around when and how storm overflows are used:

- make real-time data on sewage discharges available at bathing sites all year round.
- publish annual monitoring data on their websites so that progress in reducing their use can be tracked. The EA will compile this data into an annual report that is easily accessible to the public. This data is also being used at an operational level to prioritise the most frequent spills for further assessment by EA officers.
- The EA has launched a major investigation into possible unauthorised spills at thousands of sewage treatment works in England.
- The EA will continue to publish updates when appropriate where these will not prejudice any potential evidence or proceedings.

11. Specific Council lead

- 11.1 Since the introduction of the Council's role as Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) council officers have been promoting and working across many services and external organisations and charities to collaborate to improve our water. Whilst the duties as LLFA firmly lie with flood risk the management of water and particularly natural management of water also provides other outcomes. Officers have taken the lead and been involved in many aspects of water issues and liaise with all parties.
- 11.2 Changes to legislation has brought about changes to the local authority role as LLFA to advise the LPA on Planning Applications. It possible that this may become a formal and separate SuDS Approval Body to ensure that SuDS are used in major developments.
- 11.3 Stockport Council has been acting as a partner and driver for change and working with other organisations to promote and improve best practice and to provide schemes that slow water down and treat water sustainably.
- 11.4 As a LLFA officers have influenced and sought that significant opportunities in developments were taken with regards to water management. There are developments with green walls and some schools have introduced wetlands, notably Werneth High School. Case studies have been developed to demonstrate that SuDS can be delivered effectively.

- 11.5 As a Council the LLFA promoted and worked with the Local Education Authority to provide a SuDS scheme at Greave School Woodley to provide ponds and swales in order to provide multiple benefits including water quality.
- 11.6 As a developer the Council has provided schemes, which utilise SuDS.
- 11.7 The Council is developing schemes and working with our partners to provide schemes and find grants and secure budgets to work around and along rivers and streams.
- 11.8 The council is initially funding a study project this year to review solutions in Romiley and next year this will be supported by EA study grants. The project may be focused on NFM measures in the higher catchment around the many culverted watercourses in Romiley.
- 11.9 With the Council's active involvement with our partners, officers have been invited to work alongside an UU lead project for Place Based Planning.
- 11.10 The Council also plays a significant role with the EA led projects and the Council has already started applying for schemes and seeking grants to provide NFM measures with the design and support of MRT.
- 11.11 Officers have promoted and liaised with the EA, UU and Sports England about working with Stockport golf clubs and have identified key partners to take ideas forward.
- 11.12 As Highway Authority (HA) we aim to promote and provide more sustainable solutions for our roads. Officers are looking for opportunities and options to provide greener streets in our borough and be able to treat run-off better than it being released into adjacent rivers. Putting water in the ground, where it would have been naturally anyway, is better for the environment.
- 11.13 As HA and LLFA officers have been working with GMCA to produce a Greater Manchester Design Guide for Highway SuDS that give encouragement to highway designers to include and use landscape techniques to drain highway water effectively. It is hoped that this will ultimately reduce our drainage maintenance costs.
- 11.14 Stockport Council have formally adopted sections of new highway that use permeable paving techniques, where instead of water run-off going into offline systems and into rivers, water drains through the surfacing directly into the ground.
- 11.15 If the Council is presented with tangible evidence from any source the LLFA can act in enforcement roles for activities requiring consent, such as culverting and for misconconnections.

12. The Future for United Utilities

- 12.1 Through United Utilities' Catchment Systems Thinking (CaST) approach, they can understand the needs of the environment and ensure that existing and emerging challenges are addressed in a holistic and integrated way, providing sustainable and cost-effective solutions. United Utilities are embedding that approach through programmes such as 'Better Rivers Better North West' and

'Green Recovery' which are currently live and delivering environmental and social benefits to communities on the North West of England.

12.2 Better Rivers Better North West is a commitment to kick start river revival and will deliver £230million in environmental improvements, leading to 184km of improved waterways by 2025. The four-point plan sets out United Utilities' commitments to:

- **make sure the company's operations progressively reduce impact to river health.**
- **be open and transparent about our performance and plans.**
- **make rivers beautiful and support others to improve and care for them; and**
- **create more opportunities for everyone to enjoy rivers and waterways.**

12.3 Green Recovery is a programme to support economic recovery post the COVID pandemic and includes multimillion-pound investment that has been co-created with partner organisations to deliver environmental improvements in rivers, protect habitats, combat invasive species, enhance water quality, drainage and reduce pollution.

13. The Upper Mersey Catchment Partnership and Catchment Co-ordination

13.1 The Upper Mersey Catchment Partnership (UMCP) is one of just under 100 catchment partnerships in England. These are civil society-led organisations, supported by funding from Defra, which involve all organisations mentioned in the report. It consists of public, private organisations and open to any stakeholders. It is not for profit, with an interest in a river and its catchment.

13.2 The advantages of working in catchment partnerships are:

- **The focus of the group on improving rivers, streams and lakes**
- **Sharing expertise on water issues such as water storage and management; flooding; water quality; supporting wildlife**
- **The opportunity to deliver multiple benefits from a single project**
- **Developing cross-sector collaborative projects which are more likely to attract funding.**

13.3 The full UMCP meets five times a year and agrees an overall strategy, priorities and plan. Sub-groups focused on specific locations or issues meet separately. In the Upper Mersey the current sub-groups cover the River Tame, Micker/Norbury Brook, and South Manchester Urban Brooks, and working with golf courses and rural issues. Most of these priorities are directly relevant to Stockport and water quality.

13.4 In recent years the UMCP has grown in membership and the members have become more active in collaborating in conceiving, developing, fundraising and delivering projects. This more active engagement has created success, which in turn encourages further engagement.

13.5 An UMCP collaboration project is supported by England Golf to review Stockport based Golf Clubs and it is planning the installation of natural flood management measures on golf courses.

14. Key Findings & Recommendations

- 14.1 Overall, a multi-faceted approach is needed to address the issue of sewage pollution in the Werneth Area of Stockport. United Utilities, Stockport Council and local residents all have a role to play in improving the water quality of the rivers in the area. By investing in new infrastructure, implementing green policies and working together to address this issue, it is possible to make a real difference and ensure that the rivers in the Werneth Area are healthy and safe for people and wildlife.
- 14.2 The Panel made the following observations and recommendations in relation to resolving the issue of sewage in rivers: -
- The Council should continue to work with UU and the EA to improve conditions in local rivers.
 - Concern was expressed regarding the timeframe and funding available to support these improvements
 - Mersey Rivers Trust was to be commended for the projects it undertakes to improve the Mersey Rivers and Council officers should continue to seek funding and opportunities to work with them.
 - The public, businesses and farmers needed to be better informed about the condition of local rivers and watercourses and how they could contribute to their improvement.
 - Local rivers are used for canoeing and other recreational activity and therefore their improvement should be a priority.
 - Swimming in rivers was becoming more popular and the Council should be encouraging the improvement of watercourses to facilitate this with long term ambition of the rivers reaching the appropriate standard for bathing.

15 Recommendations

15.1 The following recommendations should be made to Cabinet:

1. The panel notes that change is needed at a national level to bring about change at a local level. As such, the panel requests that the leader of the council write to the Secretary of State for Environment, Farming and Rural Affairs asking her to bring about the legislative changes needed to clean up our rivers and put a stop to sewage pollution. Specifically, that should include:
 - 1.1. The introduction of a legal requirement for water companies to report sewage discharge in real-time and warn local people when untreated sewage is released into our rivers.
 - 1.2. The establishment of a new independent environmental watchdog to hold water companies to account and ensure they meet their obligations.
 - 1.3. The establishment of a new duty of care on water companies to ensure they do not pollute rivers with sewage.
 - 1.4. The establishment of a new fund to support farmers in reducing their environmental impact, including measures to reduce pollution from agricultural runoff.
 - 1.5. Increased investment in wastewater infrastructure to ensure that sewage is properly treated before being discharged into rivers.
 - 1.6. A review of the regulatory framework governing water companies to ensure that it is fit for purpose and can effectively protect the environment.
2. The panel asks that the Chair of the Scrutiny Review write to United Utilities to invite them to a future meeting of the Werneth Area Committee to detail their plans invest in sewage treatment and to stop sewage dumping in local rivers.
3. A request should also be made of United Utilities that they should increase monitoring and reporting of sewage discharges into local rivers. This could help to identify problem areas and ensure that the company is taking appropriate measures to reduce pollution This reporting should include signage to inform the local community that local rivers are not safe to swim, canoe or paddle in as they are used for sewage dumping.
4. Ask that the Cabinet consider the Scrutiny Review Panel findings and recommendations at a future meeting and provide a response to the report to members of the Werneth Area Committee within 6 months of the report's consideration.
5. The panel's findings show that the poor water quality in our rivers affects residents, businesses and local wildlife, and every effort should be made to reduce that pollution as quickly as practicable. The panel requests that Council officers continue to work with the EA, UU, Mersey Rivers Trust and other key stakeholders to achieve this aim.
6. The panel requests that the council, where possible, holds all stakeholders (including but not limited to United Utilities) to account for their actions and their compliance – or non-compliance – with relevant legislation.
7. The panel recommends that a review of the Council's planning policies be undertaken with a view to making changes where needed to use the powers of the council to reduce the percentage connected to combined sewers.
8. The panel requests that the Council considers what more can be done to promote improvements to the condition of its watercourses including rivers,

streams, reservoirs and ponds, working with landowners, friend's groups and other partners.

9. Recommend that the Werneth Area Committee also review the sewage leak that occurred in Otterspool and see if there are any lessons that can be learned by United Utilities and by the council including improving the transparency to the public regarding any future sewage leaks.
10. Recommend to the members of the Werneth Area Committee in the 2023-24 municipal year that they undertake Part 2 of this review. That second part should strive to answer the following questions:
 - 10.1. What can be learned from the recently released 2022 sewage outflow data as it relates to rivers within the Werneth area?
 - 10.2. What specific local infrastructure investment is needed to improve water quality in local rivers?
 - 10.3. Should bathing water status be sought for rivers within the Werneth Area as a way of driving change?