



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

Seacole Building
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Rebecca Pow MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State

T 03459 335577
defra.helpline@defra.gov.uk
www.gov.uk/defra

By email only

28th March 2022

Dear all,

Since our stakeholder meeting much work has been underway in relation to the nutrients issue we discussed. I am writing to update you on the interim advice which was issued by Natural England on Wednesday 16th March 2022 to help address the delivery of nutrient mitigation in areas where protected sites are in unfavourable condition, such as the Somerset Levels and Moors, in order to meet the requirements of the Conservation of Species and Habitats Regulations 2017 (as amended).

The advice issued will not be new to you, but recognising the complexity of delivering nutrient mitigation, Natural England have provided improved tools and guidance to calculate the amount of nutrient mitigation needed. In addition, DLUHC will provide £100,000 in each affected catchment for an officer to support the management of strategic mitigation projects across a whole catchment area. Catchment officers will work closely with the Planning Advisory Service and Natural England staff at local level. In addition, the Planning Advisory Service is running a series of workshops to support affected local planning authorities.

As you know, Defra agencies are also continuing to work with EnTrade to develop a Somerset Catchment Market pilot in part of the River Tone and Parrett catchments. The first market round will be ready in April/May, subject to agreeing legal responsibilities with Local Planning Authorities. EnTrade are supporting the implementation of Somerset West & Taunton's interim mitigation strategy and development of a Somerset-wide Phosphorous strategy.

Natural England continues to work with individual developers and consultancies to innovate and bring forward viable solutions – including wetlands, permanent wooded buffer strips and orchards as well as upgrading inefficient septic tanks therefore helping a growing number of developments to proceed. Natural England is also working closely with farmers in and around the Somerset Levels and Moors through Catchment Sensitive Farming and agri-environment schemes to reduce nutrient inputs and improve site condition.

These are pragmatic short-term steps but do not amount to a permanent solution that will improve water quality and allow sustainable development to proceed, and so we are going further. The government already has highly ambitious plans to reduce nutrient pollution from both agriculture and sewerage works and has further plans for the future. From 2020 to 2025, water companies are investing £2.5 billion in measures that reduce nutrient

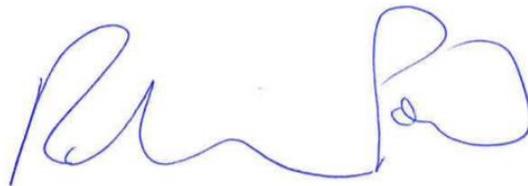
pollution, and under the landmark Environment Act, we have made it a statutory duty for water companies to produce comprehensive statutory Drainage and Sewerage Management Plans setting out how they will manage and develop their drainage and sewerage system over a minimum 25-year planning horizon. We will explore legislation to further strengthen requirements to reduce nutrients at source, providing greater certainty for Local Authorities and enabling more sustainable development.

To address agricultural nutrient pollution, we have provided new funding for 50 additional Environment Agency officers to deliver more targeted inspections, and Defra will publish guidance on the Farming Rules for Water shortly to clarify expectations for farmers and raise standards of nutrient pollution management. Government is also helping farmers to adopt practices that drive reductions in nutrient pollution through our Farming Investment Fund, Catchment Sensitive Farming partnership, and our Future Farming programme.

The Planning Advisory Service are running a series of workshops over the next few weeks and months. You can find more information in the Chief Planner's letter and at <https://local.gov.uk/pas/topics/environment/nutrient-neutrality-and-planning-system>. Defra officials are also setting up a forum to hear from local authorities about their experience of delivering nutrient neutrality and would be happy to hear from you. Please contact nutrient.neutrality@defra.gov.uk for details. The advice letter from Natural England also contains the contact details for your Local Area team, it will be able to provide additional information and support on next steps.

I hope this gives some assurances that this issue is being taken extremely seriously. Knowledge and experience shared from this group has been most helpful as has the support of MP colleagues across Somerset.

Please let me know if you have further issues you would like to raise.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Rebecca Pow', with a stylized flourish at the end.

REBECCA POW MP