LibDems trying to flush out the sewage in our rivers

The Liberal Democrats want to stop any sewage dumping into our rivers,

Christine Jardine MP has uncovered routine dumping in the River Almond with 14,008 discharges in 2022, a massive increase since 2021 when 10,799 incidents were recorded.

Recently at a meeting of The City of Edinburgh Council, Liberal Democrat councillor Jack Caldwell also raised the matter and pointed out there were a large number of Combined Sewer Overflow outputs (CSOs) in Edinburgh's waterways such as the Water of Leith, River Almond and the Figgate Burn. He said that many are not monitored despite Scottish Water and SEPA having promised to install monitors by the end of last year.

He asked for immediate action and that the Council Leader would write to The Scottish Government, SEPA and Scottish Water about the major concern that no-one knows exactly how much sewage is dumped into waterways in the capital.

His motion continued — Scottish Liberal Democrats are calling on the Scottish Government to:

- Introduce the first legally-binding targets for reducing sewage dumps.
- Speed up protection of bathing waters.
- Record and publish every sewage dump.
- Upgrade Victorian sewage network and improve infrastructure.
- Speed up protection of bathing waters.

The council agreed a slightly amended version of the motion, with all parties in agreement that "something needs to be done". The Labour administration added an important two paragraphs putting the responsibility on the Environment Convener. Their amendment read:

1. "Asks that the TEC Convener writes to the Scottish Government, Scottish Water and SEPA, outlining the Council's major concern that no-one knows how much sewage is being dumped in Edinburgh's biodiverse waterways, and request a six-monthly update on the installation of CSO monitoring should be requested along with ongoing data on spill volumes.
2. Further asks that the TEC Convener invites Scottish Water to host a workshop to discuss the issue with interested Councillors, key stakeholders (inc SEPA and CEC) and campaign groups including (but not exclusive to) The Water of Leith Conservation Trust, River Almond Action Group, Figgate Friends, Forth Rivers Trust and SOS Leith."

Cllr Jack Caldwell PHOTO ©2023 The Edinburgh Reporter

Cllr Caldwell said: "I could stand here and be angry about the situation we've found ourselves in from national bodies. And honestly, I am angry. I'm angry for the 11 species of fish, the dozens of species of birds, the thousands of species of plant life, and hundreds of thousands of residents that we represent live near and around our rivers and oceans in the city."

He explained that while the council has declared a nature emergency the river heritage teams are still constrained by Scottish Government agencies when it comes to the health of our waters. There were deputations from SOS Leith and The Water of Leith Conservation Trust who both work to improve waterways in the city. Jennifer Marlborough Secretary of Leith Harbour and Newhaven Community Council said that SOSLeith have been working tirelessly to investigate and report major issues regarding the number of Combined Sewer Overflow outputs (CSOs)

in the Water of Leith. But she said they had indicated their frustration in regular updates to the community council at the lack of active support or progress.

Deputations

Helen Brown, Trust Manager of Water of Leith Conservation Trust said: "We are very concerned at the obvious increase in frequency of CSOs venting into the Water of Leith. We see the evidence of these events as wet wipes and sanitary products are left on trees and branches along the river. We are still dealing with this waste attached to the riverside from a high flow event on 30 December."

She continued: "When Edinburgh University did a test in 2020 the river was in spate at the time and they recorded that the faecal bacteria counts exceeded safe levels, which demonstrated that there is a significant problem." She also explained that while in other rivers there is a tidal ebb and flow flushing the sewage into the sea this does not happen with the Water of Leith.

The photos that we have in our article are courtesy of the Water of Leith Conservation Trust.

Cllr Caldwell said that the two organisations had to get a volunteer freelance scuba diver to inspect the silt underneath The Shore before SEPA even started investigating. He said: "Can you imagine council if we legalised Gardyloo back on the High Street? Without any hyperbole this is the same thing."

The Environment Convener, Cllr Scott Arthur said: "I do have to say I think we're a long way away from reducing CSO spills to zero in our rivers. That would take quite a lot of time and quite a lot of money. But I think I don't think it's an

unreasonable target to aspire to."

Conservative councillor Jo Mowat agreed that it is "really really unpleasant" and added a requirement to ask for a report on the impact of new building on our waterways. She said: "Especially in the Water of Leith, which was an industrial waterway, when we've seen so much improvement in the cleanliness of that water, it's really disappointing that it is continuing to be polluted by the CSOs." She said the waterways are "such important nature corridors" not just for the wildlife but also for those who walk alongside them.

Ms Jardine said: "It is completely unacceptable that the Scottish Government seems to accept the dumping of sewage into our waterways by the government-owned water company.

"My constituents are outraged to see the once fresh and vibrant River Almond now resembling an open sewer flowing through the heart of their communities.

"Residents are rightfully concerned over the disruption the dumping is having on their hobbies such as walking or fishing, the impact to their health and the effect on local wildlife. They deserve to see this dire situation addressed.

"That is why Scottish Liberal Democrats are calling for the Environment Secretary to reduce discharges, ramp up monitoring, and accelerate measures to upgrade sewage systems to tackle overflows."