



OPEN LETTER TO LOCAL PLANNING AUTHORITIES

Dear Sirs,

Water resources availability and sewage treatment capacity as material considerations

WildFish is an environmental charity that fights to protect the rivers and streams in the UK from pollution and over-abstraction.

Many of our most sensitive rivers and lakes are under threat.

Demands on infrastructure are out of step with the capacity of water companies to deliver adequate sewage treatment, or to provide sufficient water for consumers, without harming rivers and lakes.¹ It means that those rivers and lakes within your Council area are under real pressure from both pollution and over-abstraction.

Pollution causes direct impacts on ecosystems through fish-kills and general degradation of river habitat, including the nutrient enrichment leading to algal blooms.

Nowhere is this more obvious than, in times of drought and low flow, when an already depleted river is further stressed by over-abstraction under drought orders and permits.² That may occur while large quantities of sewage are discharged (treated and untreated, lawfully and sometimes illegally), into the shallow, over-

¹ See our report "No Capacity: no Development" https://wildfish.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/18.03.25_Planning-Report_Formatted_FINAL.pdf

² See our report on Abstraction: https://wildfish.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/WildFish-Abstraction-Report_090625.pdf

heated water. Similar issues arise when rivers already impacted by other pollution (such as agricultural pollution) are then subject to over-abstraction in summer months.

These situations lead to damage to the whole aquatic ecosystem and the species which they support, from plant life, to invertebrates, fish, mammals and birds. There is also a huge loss of amenity for people.

Some developers argue that because of the legal obligations on water companies to treat sewage, the question of sewage treatment capacity is not a material planning consideration.³

But it *is* a material consideration and must be taken into account. And planning officers and committees need to understand that when determining a planning application, permission should not be granted unless it can be clearly demonstrated that the local sewage works has both current and future capacity to deal with the sewage from present and proposed development.

The same is true for water resources. If a planning officer or committee cannot be satisfied that there are sufficient water resources available to provide a water supply to new development, they should not grant permission.

Otherwise, the Council will be complicit in the on-going downward spiral of sewage pollution and over-abstraction that is killing our rivers.

In the context of the Government's drive to build more homes,⁴ all councils must be able to demonstrate that they have properly consulted the water and sewage companies and that they are satisfied that there is capacity including whether

³ See our discussion of this in the report, "No capacity – no development" pp 11-12

⁴ See our article <https://wildfish.org/latest-news/the-planning-and-infrastructure-bill-a-huge-threat-to-nature-and-our-wild-fish/>



there are planned and costed upgrades and water resources guaranteed for delivery.⁵

To do otherwise is to be complicit in harmful environmental pollution.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Nick Measham".

Nick Measham
Chief Executive, WildFish

⁵ As our experience has shown, simply agreeing to grant permission where there is no actual or planned capacity on the basis that there is a condition in place which forbids occupation until that capacity is found (a “pre-occupation condition”) is not the answer – especially if the council insists, in contradictory terms, that the water and sewage company has a duty to ‘connect’ the development to the sewage infrastructure.