

Full Council

18 October 2022



Report of: Director Legal and Democratic Services

Title: Petition Debate – ‘Enable group to address sewage pollution in the Avon.’

Recommendation

That Full Council debates the petition and refers it to the Mayor / relevant Cabinet member for a formal response.

Summary

Under the Council’s petitions scheme, where a petition has 3,500 or more signatures from people who live, work or study in Bristol, the petition organiser can request a Full Council debate.

The Council has received a petition with the title ‘Enable group to address sewage pollution in the Avon’.

The petition organisers have requested that Full Council debates the petition.

Details of the petition

1. The wording of the petition is as follows:

Petition title / subject: **'Enable group to address sewage pollution in the Avon.'**

Petition wording:

We the undersigned demand Bristol City Council to support us in addressing the issue of sewage pollution in the River Avon and to amend the 2009 bye-law prohibiting swimming.

Last year, Wessex Water discharged raw sewage directly into the river 23,524 times for a total duration of 151,258 hours.

To address this, community group Conham Bathing has been preparing an application to Defra for Designated Bathing Water Status at Conham River Park (and Eastwood Farm Nature Reserve), a beautiful and historic bathing spot that has been enjoyed by locals for generations. With this status, the Environment Agency would monitor the levels of sewage pollution at the site and be responsible for implementing improvement measures if the water is found to be of persistently poor quality.

The group need the Council's permission to submit the application, as it is the landowner of the site. However, the Council has refused to support their efforts due to the Bristol City Docks Bye-Law 2009: Part V, sub-section 49, which prohibits swimming in the harbour, including the stretch of river at Conham River Park, despite this being some distance away.

We are now demanding the Council amend this bye-law, so we can work towards enhancing and protecting the water quality in this treasured nature reserve, not only for public health, but for the river and the wildlife it supports.

2. The petition has been organised by 'Conham Bathing' (Rebecca Blease)
3. The petition has secured 5257 signatures to date, 5184 from Bristol residents. Verified as of 15 August 2022.
4. The Full Council is asked to debate the petition.
5. Under the petition scheme, the petition organiser is permitted up to 5 minutes to present and speak to the petition. The petition scheme allows a further period of up to 15 minutes for discussion of the petition by councillors at the Full Council meeting.
6. The Full Council has agreed the following in relation to dealing with petitions with over 3500 signatures: The topic of the debate should be referred to the Mayor/Cabinet, or other relevant body with the petitioner's views and Full Council's views.

RECOMMENDATION

Following the debate, the Full Council is recommended to refer the petition to the Mayor, in order that the Mayor can consider his response, in liaison with the relevant Cabinet member.