



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

27th April 2023

Dear Neighbour,

Since being elected to be your Member of Parliament in 2019, I have had a number of emails from constituents with concerns surrounding sewage discharges both locally and nationally. I am proud to have the River Chess in our constituency, and with 95% of all chalk streams globally being in the United Kingdom and 10% here in South West Hertfordshire, I know how important it is that we maintain these stunning areas of natural beauty. I wanted to write to you to assure you that protecting our waters and rivers is a long-standing commitment of mine and I have set out below the work I, and my colleagues, have been doing on this issue.

As the Vice Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Waterways, I have been working with water companies to improve the quality of our waterways in South West Hertfordshire and beyond. I have held meetings with Thames Water and look forward to visits to the Aylesbury and Maple Lodge Sewage Treatment Works in the coming months. Through working with Thames Water, I have helped secure commitments to reduce ground water flooding risks that would affect storm overflows, to add new public Event Monitors to all storm overflows by 2023, and to increase sewage treatment at Chesham by 30%, which should accelerate progress to ending discharge of raw sewage the River Chess.

Over the past 12 months, I have been contacted by many constituents suggesting that I voted to allow for water companies to allow for water companies to pollute rivers with raw sewage. I want to explain why this is not the case.

During the legislative passage of the Environment Act, there was an amendment proposed by the Duke of Wellington which sought to ban all sewage overflows. In Britain, we have a Victorian drainage system which carries both rain water and sewage. When we have excessive levels of rain, the system can overflow with sewage. Upgrading the network would require digging up the roads to separate all of those pipes or creating enough capacity to filter all water – enough to fill 40,000 Olympic swimming pools. To avoid this entering streets and homes, water companies can allow for overflows to enter rivers.

MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR SOUTH WEST HERTFORDSHIRE

Whilst I felt this amendment by the Duke of Wellington was well-intentioned, it was a poor piece of legislation which would have dramatic effects on local communities and come at an extortionate cost to the taxpayer's money. Lords Amendment 45 would have required our entire Victorian sewage system to be updated immediately, which is estimated to cost more than the entire pandemic. As this Amendment would require a ban on all overflows, it is extremely likely that in a case of bad weather, raw sewage could flow into streets and potentially individual homes. Clearly, this is not a viable option. Taking this into account, alongside the fact that the Government could be forced to spend potentially unlimited amounts of taxpayers' during a cost-of-living crisis, I remain satisfied with the way I voted on this matter.

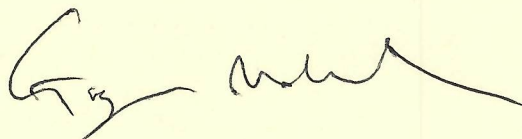
I know the Government is working hard to address concerns about raw sewage. In recent months, the Government has announced new measures, such as requiring water companies to produce comprehensive plans to cut down on sewage discharges and implementing new requirements for them to monitor water quality and publish data on storm overflows. The Government is also:

- Building Europe's largest infrastructure project to reduce sewage discharges. £4.3bn has been invested in Thames Tideway Tunnel super sewer which will be completed in 2025 to massively cut sewage discharges.
- Continuing to introduce clear monitoring requirements across the network. That means that from 10% monitored in 2015, 90% are now monitored and we will reach 100% by the end of the year.
- Increasing the Environment Agency's overall grant in aid funding by over 40%, and capital funding by 80%, compared to 2010.
- Incentivising water companies to invest £7 billion in key areas to replace failing infrastructure to avoid discharges. If a water company is found to be illegally polluting our rivers, they will be prosecuted. Since 2015, the Environment Agency has brought 48 prosecutions of this nature, securing fines of £137 million.

I am disappointed that both the Labour and Liberal Democrats are playing politics on this, claiming that many Conservative MPs are willingly allowing for sewage to enter our rivers. Under Labour's plan, water bills could increase by £400 a year per household, and in Labour-run Wales, sewage is discharged more frequently than it is here in England. On the other hand, the Liberal Democrats have proposed eliminating all sewage discharges immediately. This could result in the sewage network being backed-up and flooding homes, leaving many uninhabitable if this was to occur. Under their plans for a 'sewage tax', it is estimated to take more than 500 years to fund the end of sewage discharges. Based on this, it is clear that only the Conservative Party have a real plan to tackle sewage and improve water quality.

I recognise there is more work to be done and I will continue to work with Ministers, colleagues, local organisations and water providers to ensure that protecting our waterways remains a top priority. As ever, if there is something I can help with or you wish to raise with me, please do get in touch.

Kind regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'G. M. M.', written in a cursive style.