



Cabinet Office
Perceval House
14/16 Uxbridge Road
London W5 2HL

Dear Ms Bentley,

It has been brought to the attention of Ealing Council by our residents that raw sewage has potentially been discharged into the River Brent.

We have also been made aware of reports stating that the air along the River Brent at various locations has a putrid stench and that the water is discoloured due to a presence of foul sewage. The areas most affected in Ealing are Perivale, central Ealing, Pitshanger and Hanwell.

The pollution incident has adversely impacted aquatic river life such as eels which have been witnessed clustering around outfalls gasping for oxygen, as well as reports of fish and invertebrates dying as a result of potential discharge of foul sewage in the river network. Generally, eels have a high tolerance to low oxygen levels which suggests that there has been a significant pollution incident (potentially from organic matter like foul sewage) in the river. To our knowledge based on reports, the source has been traced back to a Thames Water outfall upstream in the London Borough of Brent.

In our Council Plan for the next term, we have committed to protecting Ealing's biodiversity, planting 50,000 trees across the borough, and creating 10 new parks and open spaces. As a borough which is striving to promote clean, healthy living, and to improve and protect the environment for our residents we find this situation both disappointing and unacceptable.

Ealing Council declared a climate emergency in April 2021 (Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy 2021), committing to treat the climate and ecological emergency as a crisis requiring immediate and vital action. Our strategy outlines our commitment to influence the key theme of nature, with an objective to enhance biodiversity and to reduce the loss of plants and wildlife.

The objectives set out in this theme will be delivered alongside our Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) 2022-2027 which is our strategic framework and road map for improving biodiversity in our borough, including all plant and animal life. Equally importantly is for the borough to retain a diversity of habitats which are connected to each other. In the same way that the climate emergency and the ecological emergency are intrinsically linked our climate and ecological emergency strategy and the council's BAP are linked and the achievement of the goals in one strategy will facilitate the achievement of goals in the other.

The River Brent traverses through Ealing along adjacent to parks and green spaces, thus, any pollution of the river adversely impacts the ecology within Ealing. The trees, hedgerows, parks, rivers, ponds fields and gardens in Ealing all have a vital role to play in storing carbon and combatting climate change.





We expect a response from Thames Water clarifying whether foul sewage has been discharged into the River Brent, and if so, for Thames Water to clearly state that the practice of discharging foul sewage into water bodies will stop with immediate effect, and that they will both clean up their act, and urgently adopt measures to clean up all affected water bodies within the Borough of Ealing as well as the wider catchment area, to improve the water quality and increase diversity of plant and animal life. Ealing Council will need to explain to residents and stakeholders what happened, but also what is being done to prevent problems in future.

Also, we expect Thames Water to thoroughly investigate their sewer network for foul water misconnections to the surface water sewer network, and to provide a firm commitment to urgently rectify the damage caused by misconnections. The Environment Agency should be notified as a matter of urgency with the aim of Thames Water presenting their findings of the investigation, so in collaboration with the Environment Agency, it can be determined if environmental regulations have been breached under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and this can be followed up with relevant enforcement actions.

We need to have a clear understanding of the scale of the problem and would be grateful if Thames Water can report back and meet up with us to discuss further.

Best wishes,

Cllr Peter Mason
Leader of Ealing Council

Cllr Deirdre Costigan
Cabinet Member for Climate Action at Ealing Council