

District Councillor Emily O'Brien

Report on June Activities

I have just got back from the Local Government Association Conference which is always an interesting temperature check. There was some useful learning around local government reorganisation both formally and through conversations with other councils. I've also recently attended a Rights of Nature symposium as part of London Climate week, plus a TCPA (Town and Country Planning Association) event in the House of Lords – they have been very strong on the horrors of the Planning and Infrastructure Bill, and it was an excellent event.

Still on planning, the Southern Water Group which was set up after we then Wealden and multiple other councils passed our 'sewage' motion has finally secured a meeting with the government minister Emma Hardie, which was useful – the sheer number of councils there alone sends a message. She listened to our feedback about Southern Water's unwillingness to engage with us and join up the dots on planning and wastewater provision.

Wealden have been in the news recently because the government inspector upheld their use of a Grampian condition at appeal. This has caused consternation in developers and lots of 'blocker' accusations. I've had some questions asked about this so to be clear we have asked officers at LDC to use Grampian conditions whenever possible however it does rely on the water company to say there is a problem with treatment capacity in the first place. This is what happened in Wealden (though strangely Southern Water later changed their mind). We know Southern Water aren't performing but because it takes place under permit, so called 'emergency' sewage discharge which is actually routine doesn't allow us to impose a condition on the basis of it – we need the water companies to tell us they have an issue. Which we continue doggedly to try to do.

Still on Southern Water, I'm continuing to advocate for Mill Road residents whose gardens have suffered flooding and waterlogging following the Caburn Field development, and Southern Water have agreed to re-look at their previous decision at a more senior level to allow a connection for the fix which has been agreed for this. Fingers crossed for a positive answer.

It's been a busy month with lots happening in my portfolio plus a cabinet meeting. The highlight of the month has naturally been attending the opening of Ringmer Swimming Pool and having a fabulous swim there. I've also attended a water blitz event on local citizen science water testing plus the anniversary of Furniture Now. I'm delighted to that the Cockshut stream restoration was awarded 3 awards under the Sussex Heritage awards scheme.

Thank you to RPC for responding to the freight strategy, we have also responded as a District Council.

I've also written to the new Chief Exec of the South Downs National Park about the issue of onerous and expensive planning requirements being applied in the wrong way – they are designed to put nature back into bricks and mortar development but an actively discouraging nature restoration projects large and small (e.g. Almond Field and the Cockshutt) and offering to facilitate a discussion around this. He has made positive noises about already looking into the problem.

Please note I have a period of leave from 18th July to 4th September, forward issues my fellow ward councillors will be covering.

Kind regards

Emily O'Brien (She/her)

Green Party Councillor for Ouse Valley & Ringmer

Cabinet Member for Nature, Climate & Food Systems at Lewes District Council

Deputy Chair, Local Government Association People & Places Board

Twitter: @EmilyLincOBrien | Facebook: @GreenEmilyOBrien