

Report from District Cllr M Martin regarding Water Quality and Beach Safety. Presented to the Town Council on 19 August 2024.

- The weather had been generally dry so there were not as many permitted discharges during July and August, although there were a few around 6 August. So far this year Budleigh had had 45 discharges, in comparison with Exmouth 22, Sandy Bay 20, Sidmouth 18, Beer 27, Seaton 18. The target was no more than 20 per beach per year.
- There had been 25 non permitted discharges so far this year, against a known 10 in 2023.
- Exmouth spills. On the night of 14 August the rising main from Maer Road pumping station to Maer Lane sewage works suffered a pipe burst, which led to an uncontrolled spill of raw sewage into the Maer Brook and thence to the sea. This was supposedly contained by SWW installing a temporary repair, then on Friday night and into Saturday there was a major discharge of sewage at Maer rocks as the Maer Road tank overflowed because the temporary repair had not in fact yet been made and the tankers could not keep up. The Beach Safety Officer had taken the decision to close the bathing rather than wait for the Environment Agency (EA) and a Public Incident Report Tool (PIRT) was then subsequently issued. This spill ended at 19.35 on Saturday night and the PIRT was withdrawn at 19.35 on Sunday 18 August.
- Communications from SWW were, as usual, poor. They had made a few statements in this period, including the claim that they had notified the EA as soon as the discharge started on Saturday, which they had not. The EA were in fact informed by the ESCAPE group which was why the second PIRT was not issued until 14.47 when the spill started at 11.31 (not counting the two the night before). They also made no formal notification to EDDC as required by the bathing water regulations.
- She had been disappointed to hear this morning from the EA that they consider the Saturday spills to be permitted under the emergency clause of the permit. She had pushed back on this since the burst happened on Wednesday night, therefore discharge some 48 plus hours later cannot really be considered an emergency.
- The Exmouth bathing water was open again this morning, but the Blue Flag was still down while officers/councillors considered whether in good conscience it could be raised before SWW had made a permanent repair; she was not confident of no further discharges, especially if it started raining.
- Beach Management. The access matting had been installed at Seaton, Sidmouth and Budleigh beaches. This work was supported by joint funding from town councils, and by grants from the EDNL A4A fund, and from the Shared Prosperity Fund. There was still a small pot of Shared Prosperity money left which would be spent on some semi-permanent access ramps to allow additional access points at Budleigh and maybe Seaton beach. The matting will remain in place until mid-September and then be lifted and stored for the winter before being reinstalled next May.
- She wondered if it would be helpful if the Beach Safety Officer came to speak to the Council.