

Septic Tank Upgrade Scheme Promotion by Councillors (Revamp Your Tank)

Briefing Note No. 24-17

Service :

Further Enquiries to:

project officer (before 9th August)

Date Prepared:

Direct Line:

Environment

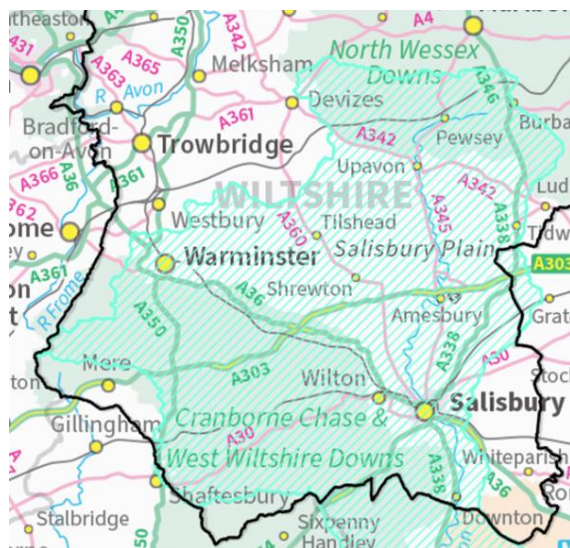
Rachel Jones, Ecology Manager or Louise Gillman-Wells, Nutrient Neutrality

22nd July 2024

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Introduction and Overview

1. Having been awarded the Local Nutrient Mitigation Fund by central government in December 2023, Wiltshire Council is offering fully funded grants for homeowners in the upper areas of the Hampshire Avon catchment. The grants aim to upgrade rural sewage systems and combat part of the problem of river pollution and eutrophication due to rural sewage systems. Having been running since April and receiving 600 applications, we are seeking support from parish councillors to further promote the scheme and encourage further interest in key areas.
2. Wiltshire Council has teamed up with Wessex Rivers Trust to improve water quality in the Hampshire Avon catchment (Fig1) and mitigate new housing development, due to its designation as a nutrient sensitive area. The grant specifically covers the



upgrade of poorly performing septic tanks to more efficient package treatment plants, along with the first year of servicing. The aim is to limit the excess nutrients from human waste entering precious water courses. More efficient non-mains sewage treatment reduces pollution, thus reducing its negative impacts on aquatic ecosystems, as well drinking water.

Fig1. The Hampshire Avon catchment is represented by the turquoise overlay, the black line is the Wiltshire boundary.

The problem

3. Septic tanks are simply designed to separate liquid and solid waste using gravity. The solid matter is partially digested by bacteria, whilst the untreated wastewater soaks into a drainage field in the surrounding soil. These systems can, if poorly performing or placed in inappropriate locations, release nutrient-rich wastewater into rivers, contributing to river pollution.
4. This results in high nutrient levels within waterways, which increases blooms of algal growth; a process called eutrophication. Algae form green carpets across the water's surface, blocking light and killing aquatic plants below the surface. This ultimately causes oxygen-starved waters. Of course, with fewer aquatic plants, there are fewer essential microhabitats for small fish and insects and, thus, the whole river and its ecosystem suffers.
5. Due to the Hampshire Avon catchment being designated as a nutrient sensitive area, new residential development must mitigate the new nutrient burden it will create, with mitigation required to be upstream of the pollution source (e.g. new development or wastewater treatment works etc.) As such, Wiltshire Council are seeking to prioritise mitigation projects, such as septic tank upgrades, in the upper parts of the catchment, to achieve the greatest benefit for both the rivers and development.

Part of the solution

6. In some of the more rural parts of our catchments, septic tanks are a notable source of nutrient enrichment in our rivers and surrounding landscape. Fortuitous timing of this government funding means that both development within the catchment and homeowners alike can benefit from the scheme.
7. Replacing septic tanks with more effective package treatment plants could significantly reduce nutrient enrichment of our precious chalk streams in the Hampshire Avon catchment. In turn, this would restore healthier ecosystems, benefiting plants, insects, and our characteristic species such as salmon, water vole, otter and birds, all of which rely on a clean and healthy river.
8. The upgraded systems work in a variety of ways, depending on which is recommended for the property, from simple biological treatment, to using bursts of aeration. Not only will they separate solids and liquids, but they also biologically treat the effluent so that it can be discharged safely straight into a water course. Moreover, if space allows, tertiary treatment can be added which remove even more nutrients.
9. Our unique chalk streams currently need all the help they can get. By ensuring domestic wastewater is treated to the highest of standards, we can maximise the environmental benefits and minimise the pollution potential of the effluent. The **Revamp Your Tank** campaign will actively contribute to improving water quality – supporting the health of the river, wildlife and our communities.

How the scheme works

10. Wessex Rivers Trust (WRT) is running the communications campaign on Wiltshire Council's behalf. Any communications materials have our appropriate sign off, and they will be funnelling members of the public towards their own webpage and our own website to find more information and updates on the scheme, including frequently asked questions. As well as using social media platforms, WRT has already hosted several live informative events, are organising more, and may also organise an online event. All activities are gauged towards spreading information on the campaign, promoting uptake and educating the public, targeting our primary key areas in the headwaters:
 - Nadder: Donheads, Semley, Swallowcliffe and Ansty
 - Upper Wylve Valley
 - Bourne Valley: Cholderton and Ford
 - The Till: above Shrewton and Winterbourne Stoke
 - Upper Avon: Woodford Valley and Durnfords
11. Wiltshire Council's website hosts the Expression of Interest form where members of the public can register interest. Their applications are assessed on a rolling basis to make sure the home is in an appropriate place for nutrient mitigation. Projects are prioritised according to several criteria and their complexity, meaning that more complex projects will take more time to be released to contractors to work on.
12. The council has just onboarded the first contractor Libra Utility Services Ltd and is soon to get underway with project site visits and surveys. Should the survey and information given be accepted by the resident, they enter into a direct legal agreement with the contractor. Once the works are complete, they can opt in to an alert system which will remind them when they need to arrange for their tank's maintenance, according to the manufacturer's guidance.

What to do now

13. Interest in the scheme has been promising since the launch in April 24, and we are about to start physical improvement works at 125 sites as our 'first batch'. We would like to continue to promote higher uptake levels, and are asking the help of all parish councillors to disseminate information and encourage residents to take up this generous offer. Locations of particular interest include Cholderton, Ford, the Woodford Valley, Durnfords, Semley, Swallowcliffe and Ansty, the Donheads, and Winterbourne Stoke.
14. Wessex Rivers Trust have organised more information evening events in Tisbury (29 Aug), Amesbury (10 Sept, posters attached for both), and Maiden Bradley (Wessex Rivers Trust will do their own poster drop in this location). If councillors would be able to disseminate this information and print/ offer posters more widely before these events, it would be most helpful. Additionally, if hard copies would be helpful, please email revampyourtank@wiltshirecouncil.gov.uk with the quantity you require and an address to send to.

For more information:

See website: [Biodiversity and development - Wiltshire Council](#)

Also see Frequently Asked Questions on the page above

Generic email for the scheme: revampyourtank@wiltshire.gov.uk

Contact Officer:

Rachel Jones, Ecology Manager – Rachel.Jones@wiltshire.gov.uk or

Louise Gillman-Wells, Nutrient Neutrality Project Officer – Louise.Gillman-Wells@wiltshire.gov.uk



Wessex
Rivers Trust

Working in partnership with

Wiltshire Council

Wiltshire Council Funded Septic Tank Upgrade Scheme

Wiltshire Council and Wessex Rivers Trust are collaborating to improve water quality in the Hampshire Avon catchment.

Find out how you can help improve the health of your local river, including Wiltshire Council's septic tank upgrade scheme operating in your area at:

Thursday 29th August, 7pm - 8pm,
Tisbury Village Hall (Victoria Hall)

Fully funded grants are available for homeowners in specific areas of the Upper Avon catchment to upgrade your septic tank to a cleaner package treatment plant tailored to YOUR property.

Check Your Eligibility & Find Out More on the Wiltshire Council website to see if you qualify for this fantastic opportunity:

www.wiltshire.gov.uk/planning-bio-development





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Tuesday 10th September, 7pm,
Bowman Centre, Amesbury

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The health of our rivers is at risk. Pollution from wastewater, including septic tanks, is harming our local wildlife. Some of our most iconic species, including salmon, are suffering due to the effects of pollution in the Upper Avon catchment.

Revamp Your Tank! Following a new law, old septic tanks discharging to surface waters (e.g. rivers, streams, and ditches) must upgrade. Wiltshire Council is here to help!

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