

Technical Guidance Note

Solent and South Downs, June 2019

Wastewater treatment capacity for new development in the Solent Area

The Environment Agency is responsible for protecting and improving the environment. We fulfil these duties through a range of activities, including, deciding on whether to grant environmental permits for discharges to the water environment.

Any persons wishing to discharge polluting substances into the environment are required to apply to the Environment Agency for an environmental permit. These permits will set limits on the amount of certain pollutants that can be released by the discharge to ensure impacts on the environment are considered, and that it will comply with relevant legislation.

In granting permits we are required to ensure that the operations they authorise do not have an adverse effect on Natura 2000 sites, a network of nature protection areas made up of Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs) designated respectively under the Habitats Directive and Wild Birds Directive. This includes assessing new authorisations as well as reviewing existing ones to help maintain and improve the condition of these sites and to comply with the requirements under these European Directives.

Between 2000 and 2010, the Environment Agency undertook a Review of Consents across the country to assess the impact of effluent discharges from Wastewater Treatment Works, at maximum permitted levels, on Natura 2000 sites. Part of this work looked at nutrient enrichment and the impact on the Solent area. As a result of the Review of Consents process several large Wastewater Treatment Works discharging into the Solent area, including Chichester Harbour, had tighter nutrient limits applied to their permits to ensure the discharges continue to protect sensitive and important estuary environments, and comply with relevant legislation. This led to improvements in treatment technology being installed at the Wastewater Treatment Works and in turn reductions in levels of nutrients entering the Harbour from these point sources.

Since 2017 we have been providing input to Southern Water's Business Plan for 2020-2025 through the Water Industry National Environment Programme. Using our evidence we have confirmed that no further investment is needed to treat wastewater to a tighter nitrogen limit for any of the treatment works in the Solent area.

Where new development can be accommodated within the current water discharge activity permit limits of individual Wastewater Treatment Works, i.e that there is capacity to take the extra wastewater flows from new development whilst still treating effluent to the same standard, then we consider the development would be acceptable.

It is recognised that growth beyond the existing permit limits is likely to be constrained with many Wastewater Treatment Works in the Solent area already treating to a standard known as Best Available Technology. Through both the Chichester and the Partnership for Urban South Hampshire (PUSH) Water Quality Groups we will work with our partners to address how development beyond existing permit limits can be accommodated whilst ensuring that the environment of the Solent and its harbours can be protected. In addition we are working with other sectors to identify ways in which they can reduce any impacts they have on the water environment of the Solent.

For more information contact our Sustainable Places team at planningssd@environment-agency.gov.uk