

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

On 18 October at 5.30pm campaign group [Conham Bathing](#) attended a Full Council meeting to debate the issue of sewage pollution in the River Avon. The group proposed why Bristol City Council should amend a [2009 by-law](#), which prevents swimming in Conham River Park, and asked the council to support the group's [Designated Bathing Water Status](#) (DBWS) application as a means of tackling the sewage issue.

After a successful [ePetition](#)—which ran from 12 July 2022 to 12 August 2022—surpassed the required 3,500 signatures (with 5,257), Conham Bathing secured the right to a Full Council debate. The petition urges the council to amend a 2009 by-law which prevents swimming at Conham River Park in order to enable the group to apply for crucial DBWS. Last year, Wessex Water discharged raw sewage directly into the river 23,524 times for a total duration of 151,258 hours and DBWS is currently the only mechanism to tackle these types of incidents.

At the Full Council meeting, the debate regarding Conham Bathing's petition was allotted 20 minutes, of which Conham Bathing had five to present their case. Project Founder Becca Blease and Water Testing Leader Eva Perrin raised the following points underpinning Conham Bathing's case for amending the by-law: that Conham River Park is an historic and beloved bathing site in Bristol, free to access and close to the city centre; that there is currently no up-to-date or reliable water quality data for the site, other than the sampling conducted by Conham Bathing themselves, despite the site being very popular for all sorts of river activities including swimming, rowing, kayaking and paddleboarding; that the council's Ecological Emergency Strategy sets a target for ['100% excellent quality waterways which supports healthy wildlife' by 2030](#); and that by removing the by-law, not only would that enable the group to apply for DBWS in order to monitor, regulate, and improve the water quality at Conham, but more could be done for public safety with effective outreach and the dissemination of vital educational information.

Following the group's presentation was a statement from each political party in Bristol. Katja Hornchen, Labour councillor for Brislington East, announced that they supported the group's application, but raised comments around the safety of wild swimming. Green councillor for Bedminster, Tessa Fitzjohn, Conservative councillor Henry Mitchallat, Liberal Democrat councillor Andrew Varney and Knowle Community Party's Gary Hopkins all announced full support to amend the by-law in order to enable the group to apply for DBWS and protect the stretch of river which has been valued for generations in Bristol.

Following two seasons of local data collection and campaigning, in addition to a growing national demand for the government and local councils to act on river pollution, Conham Bathing are pleased to have received *rare* unanimous support from Bristol City Council to amend the by-law preventing the group from their DBWS application.

[Danica Priest tweeted](#) *"Impressive debate about water quality. A rare moment all parties were in agreement but no comment from the mayor."*

Commenting on the [demonstration that was held outside City Hall](#) during the debate, [Alice Peperell tweeted](#) *"Well that was a lot of fun!#RavingInBathers Rave on the Avon at College Green whilst @Conham\_bathing met with Bristol Council to discuss why we should have Designated Bathing Status. Seems there's a lot of support from all political parties!"*

The Conham Bathing group now awaits a statement from the Mayor of Bristol, Marvin Rees, who made no comment about his support for the by-law amendment in Full Council.

The group hopes the mayor will be in favour of amending the by-law, given that the council has given full support to the group's petition, along with the over 5,200 Bristolians who signed it. The statement from the Mayor will be publicly shared by the group upon receipt.

The Full Council meeting can be viewed [here](#)- our debate starts at 34 minutes.

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