The countryside charity
Cornwall

Cornwall Matters September 2025

CPRE Cornwall newsletter
issue 18: September 2025

We welcomed Jenny Cruse to our management committee after our AGM, and she has provided an update on the long and painful saga of **Halgavor Moor.** This application for a large development of housing on greenfield land along the River Camel valley has been staunchly opposed by a strong local group, including Bodmin Council.

Stephen Horscroft describes progress on CPRE's **Dark Skies** initiative, proposing specific areas where Dark Skies can be encouraged and preserved. For Cornwall, so far, we have Bodmin Moor and West Penwith, where, if the weather allows, we can see the great spectacle of the night sky.

Focussing on t**he Fal and its precious maerl beds,** John Killick gives a thoroughly researched account of the 'Canary in the Coalmine': those fragile but essential habitats that face the double threat of too much, too fast developments and serious doubts about future water and sewage management.

In July this year Cornwall Council passed a motion to formally recognise Cornwall as the 'fifth nation' of Great Britain. This, the leader said, is '...not a slogan or a branding exercise' but '… We are ready to take our place. We are ready to be heard. We are ready to shape our future on our own terms.' They went on to produce a document called 'The Cornwall We Know', setting out the evidence base that will help shape the Cornwall Council Business Plan for 2026-30. Meanwhile, work goes on to formulate the Council's new Local Plan: aligning this with the government's New Planning Policy Framework will not be easy. Cornwall's special needs and priorities do not fit well with the nationwide picture. More on this in future issues.

Between September and January, a series of sessions will be taking place across Cornwall as part of *The Cornwall Local Plan: Planning to 2050.* Members of the community are invited to join these sessions and share their thoughts about how they want the future of Cornwall to look over the next 20 years, covering housing, infrastructure and the environment. The plan will set out what gets built and where, and you can influence the plan now by sharing information and views at the drop-in sessions, which are completely free. Go to the website below to see when there is a session near you. Additional sessions will be added as they are confirmed.
https://www.tickettailor.com/events/creativekernowcornwallcouncil

As always, we have to appeal for help, membership and donations. Could you lend us a bit of expertise? Give a little time to help with our committee's work? Persuade a friend to join us? If so, please do get in touch.

And please have a look at our posts on Facebook or Instagram – we need all the 'likes' we can get!

♥ AND A BIG THANK YOU FOR YOUR CONTINUING SUPPORT ♥

Halgavor Moor, Bodmin (Planning Application PA20/10618)
Jenny Cruse

This application came forward subsequent to Halgavor Moor being allocated by Cornwall Council as BD-UE2a land, a designation for specific locations where major growth and regeneration could be delivered under the Cornwall Strategic Policy framework, in this case to create over 3,000 new-builds in the Bodmin area. This allocation was immediately seen as controversial and following a large public meeting in 2018 an appeal was lodged to have the allocation revoked. The Portfolio Holder at the time said this could not happen without completely rewriting the Local Plan. The Sites Allocation Strategic Plan was adopted by Cornwall Council's Cabinet in 2019 but there was a clause which stated that should any application not comply with ecological and environmental tests, it could be refused. The Halgavor Moor planning application by Wainhomes proposed 540 homes: it has faced significant opposition since, due to concerns about its impact on the environment, significant ecological damage, drainage and potential flooding. Over 360 objections have been raised by residents and organisations, including Bodmin Town Council and the former MP for North Cornwall, Scott Mann.

Key Objections and Concerns:

1. Environmental Impact

Concerns have been raised about the impact on nature and wildlife, particularly given the boggy nature of the land and its role as a wildlife corridor and for carbon sequestration. The area is also a habitat for protected species such as salmon, bull head trout, dormouse and otters. The loss of sessile oak and other rare native flora and fauna is also of grave concern. The area is a valuable local amenity as it is used by residents for walking, jogging and sports activities; it is is a precious rural green space and walkway very close to an urban area.

2. Drainage and Flooding

The Environment Agency initially objected due to concerns about potential flooding and the impact on the River Camel, however, their latest report makes a very long list of conditions which would need to be met in order to remove their objection.
Cornwall Council's Lead Flood Authority has objected and has been running a year's porosity testing, which concluded this May. We are awaiting their latest report.

3. Highways

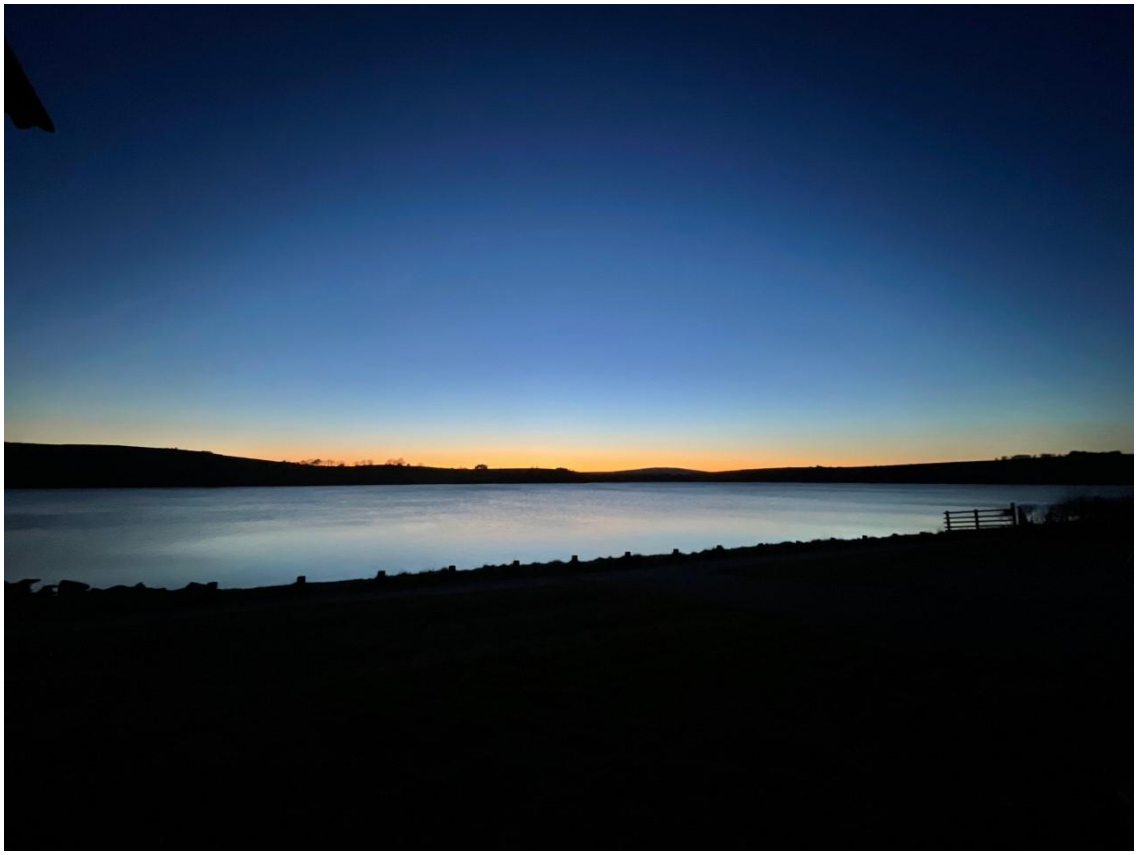
Highways objected to the application due to the very dangerous bridge over the railway that carries traffic from the A30 and A38. There is also another narrow humpback bridge coming in from the direction of the town. The access to the site will be close to a school and is currently being monitored for traffic flow information.

4. Phosphates in the River Camel Special Area of Conservation

The government's position, that South West Water upgrades due in 2030 will satisfactorily deal with the additional impact on the River Camel, is seriously in question. The unsatisfactory state of the River Camel SAC created a block on all development due to the poor state of the Camel and its effect on protected species. Since that time, no satisfactory mitigation has been put in place, and therefore, the Council would be putting the environment at risk by allowing further pressure on an already proven unsatisfactory Water Treatment Works. However, Cornwall Council have stated that Halgavor is included in the sites allocation, which enables the excess phosphates to be mitigated by upgrades to Nanstallon Waste Water Treatment Works. To my knowledge, the upgrades at Nanstallon have been limited to additional screening for fats, and I am not aware of any major upgrades to date.

5. Housing Need and over-provision in Cornwall

Some objectors argue that Bodmin is already on track to exceed its housing targets and that, therefore, the development is not needed. Since the current Government has increased the house building requirements in Cornwall by 46% this view is no longer valid. Neither is the current Local Plan (2010 - 2030) since it does not comply with the Government's new house-building strategy and requirements. A new plan is currently being created by Cornwall Council. It would be good to see any major development at Halgavor removed from Cornwall's Strategic Plan, since we are all now more aware of the importance of wetlands in creating wildlife habitats and carbon sequestration.



Bodmin Moor

Photo credit: Dark Skies Management Plan, 2023

Dark Skies

Stephen Horscroft

Dark Skies are perhaps something that we take for granted if we live in a rural area or even a small town. That orange glow of light that we can see when driving from a rural area into a town or city has a value for community safety, but in rural areas, especially, it can have a negative effect on nocturnal habitat.

Many animals rely on natural light cycles for survival behaviours such as navigation, reproduction and feeding. Many bird species migrate at night using moonlight and starlight for navigation, and with the capacity for bright lights to trap them, they can fly in circles or crash into structures. These include nightjars, bats, swifts, tawny owls and peregrine falcons. With habitat decline, access to what remains becomes more important. For example, the UK population of tawny owls has declined by around a third since the 1970s.

The food chain is also impacted by artificial light. Insects – particularly moths – of course love it, but this takes them away from the natural/hunting habitats of predators, as well as

hampering their own reproduction.

Besides environmental reasons, dark skies are also important for (interrelated) scientific, cultural, economic and health-related reasons. Dark sky areas preserve our ability to experience the night sky, especially for both professional and amateur astronomers, and can encourage opportunities for a niche cultural tourism. For example, Galloway Forest Park in Scotland saw a 140% increase in bed nights when the area gained Dark Skies status and it is also an instrument to extend the season.

Bodmin Moor was granted its status in 2017 and West Penwith in 2021. These are two of Cornwall's most remote rural areas and there is a thrill in experiencing the landscape and the skies that our ancestors would have experienced thousands of years ago. Monitoring through the Bodmin Moor Dark Sky Landscape Annual Report (2023) highlighted several good vantage points for Dark Skies including Siblyback Lake. There is also an opportunity for links with other tourism initiatives: Bodmin, for example, is really focussing on its assets which include tourism attractions, food and drink, its parks and gardens and the Camel Trail that runs through it, connecting town with countryside.

West Penwith is a more compact geography so light pollution from towns and villages could be a bigger problem. Cornwall Council is in the process of replacing its 55,000 street lights with LED solutions and has central control facilities to regulate when they are switched on and their brightness. This also contributes to the Council's carbon neutral ambitions. Some residents will be concerned with community safety implications, so there is a balance to be maintained, but human activity and the threat of crime are less likely in these rural areas.

Both locations now have Dark Skies Steering Groups on which CPRE Cornwall is represented. These are partnerships which include astronomers, representatives from education, local government, Cornwall National Landscapes (previously the AONBs), land management and tourism specialists. We focus on events, publicity and the possibility of future funding to promote these two important Dark Skies areas in Cornwall.

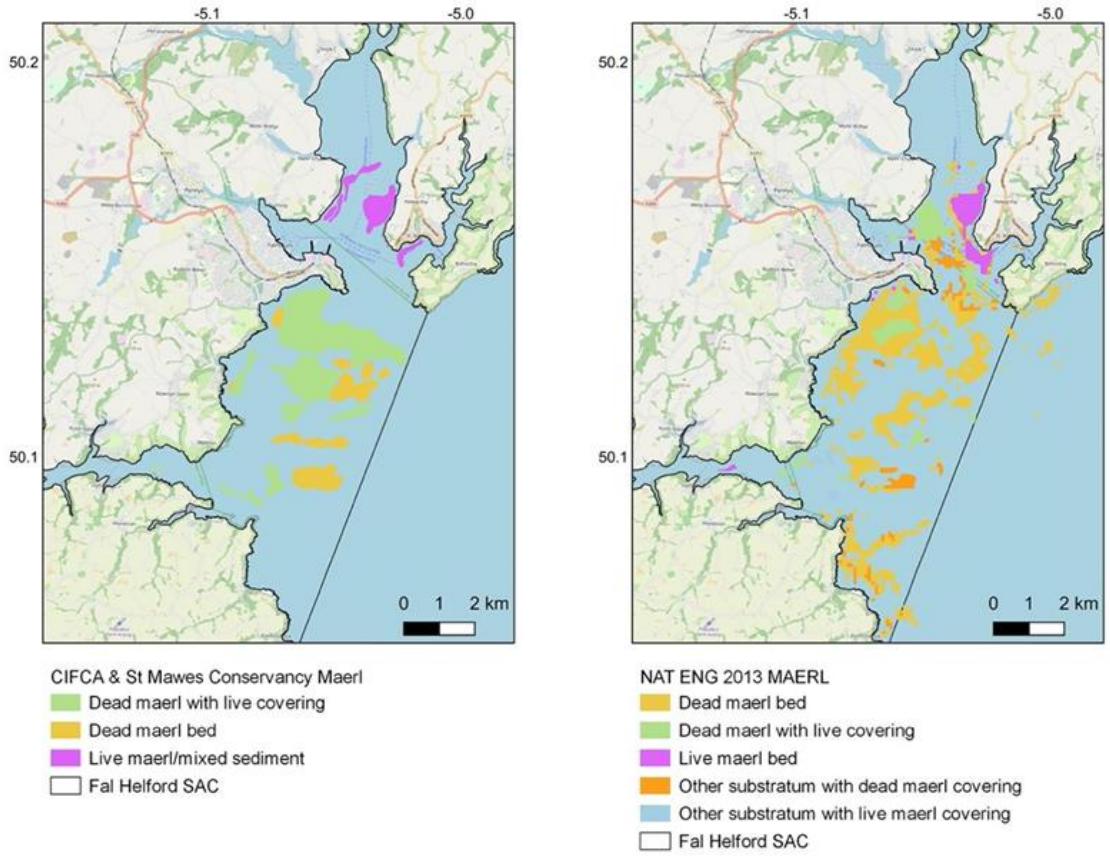
THE FALMOUTH MAERL: THE CANARY IN THE COAL MINE

John Killick

1: INTRODUCTION:

This year, divers working for Cornwall Wild Life Trust found to their dismay, that Falmouth's remarkable special coral like seaweed beds called maerl were being degraded by sewage overflows. 'Irreplaceable' Cornish coral beds could be killed by sewage' Times, May 2025. South-West Water – SWW – the utility in charge – a subsidiary of Pennon – will share the blame - but they will find it hard to provide effective sewage control in such a large and fast developing river catchment area as the Fal without wider collateral damage.

Figure 1: Location and condition of Maerl Beds in 2013, and 2022



Source: Cornwall Council, 'Carbon accounting and nature recovery options for blue carbon ecosystems in the Fal & Helford estuary, Cornwall' (Undated c.2023)

2: THE MAERL BEDS IN FALMOUTH BAY AND THE ESTUARY:

These were surveyed by Natural England in 2013. They found large live beds off St Mawes – pink, but much larger dead beds in the bay. The Maerl was surveyed again in 2022. The St Mawes beds were fine and there were some live areas in the Bay – green.

Figure 2: Maerl beds in pristine condition in 2023

Source: Matt Slater, Marine Conservation Officer at Cornwall Wildlife Trust, 28 November 2023

Maerl is composed of small – red, semi-hard, coral-shaped fronds or twiglets of seaweed-like algae. They accumulate as low banks in river estuaries and bays and make useful habitats for a wide variety of marine life. The maerl banks off St Mawes may be the best in the UK.

Individual maerl fronds or twiglets resemble coral but are quite dissimilar in nature and structure. Corals grow in warm tropical seas and are animate. Initially tiny spawn, they spread in great clouds of polyps, ultimately settling and developing hard exoskeletons of calcium carbonate that over time can form huge structures like the Barrier Reef off eastern Australia.

Figure 3: Maerl beds: Composition

Source: Matt Slater, Marine Conservation Officer at Cornwall Wildlife Trust, 28 November 2023

The seaweed-like algae of Mearl banks are inches high and photosynthesise light to capture energy and grow a few millimetres a year. To divers they appear as huge areas of ragged carpet. Absorbing small amounts of calcium in each cell they have defined form but unlike coral are not hard and sharp.

Both coral and maerl are impressive but vulnerable to modern developments. Pacific coral is being degraded by gradually rising sea temperatures that blanche and weaken the coral structures. Falmouth maerl is being weakened by sewage discharge and farm run-off that encourage the growth of brown and green algae that smother the maerl and reduce photosynthesis.

In addition, there is physical damage by fishing and other vessels, and rising water temperatures. As maerl grows very slowly - about 5 mm per year - recovery is slow and unlikely. Hence successive governments have designated the Fal estuary and the Falmouth Bay to St Austell Bay as Special Conservation Areas, and South West Water, Natural England and Cornwall Wildlife Trust are working with farmers to reduce run-off.

3: THE FAL RIVER CATCHMENT AREA

However, the reasonable hope that improved water quality and reduced pollution could preserve the maerl may be forestalled by the geography of the area and the rising population and development.

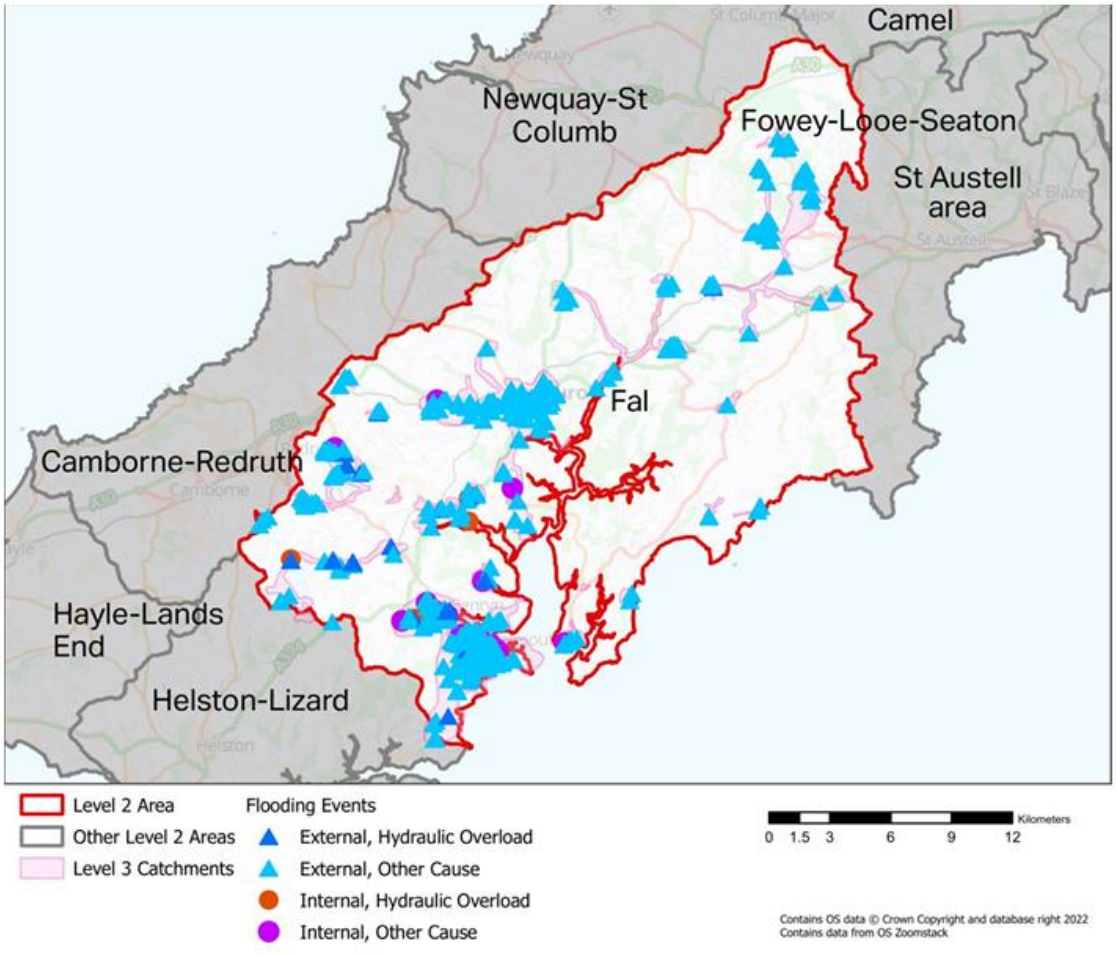
The map below, taken from the online South West Water, Drainage and Management Plan (DWMP) May 2023, shows the surprisingly large area drained by the Fal. The deep sunken valley Ria system includes Truro, Falmouth, and Penryn off the main estuary, large villages such as Mylor Bridge and St Mawes on adjacent creeks, inland towns such as Tregony, and Grampound – once ports – now silted up, and many villages upstream further in.

Heavy rains pour off the moors and hills to the north-east and west and drain into the estuary via these streams and creeks.

This hilly and dispersed catchment area had a population of 95,000 in 2020, which had just about doubled since 1961. In 2023, it was projected to grow to 115,000 by 2050, but now we know it will be substantially more because of the government's new National Planning Policy Framework, and will inevitably pose problems for any water and drainage system.

The map below shows sewer flooding by location and cause. Sewer flooding arises mainly when the network cannot handle the run-off from heavy rainfall – or needs to reduce pressure, and releases sewage mixed with surface water into creeks and rivers.

Figure 4: Sewer Flooding by Location and Cause



Source: SWW, Drainage and Wastewater Management Plan - DWMP, May 2023

Such spills on the north coast enrage surfers and deter tourists but arguably impact rather more on the calmer and less tidal waters of the semi-enclosed creeks and the main body

of the Fal estuary and Falmouth Bay. Spills from 67 monitored SWW outlets were: in 2019, 1,934; in 2020, 2,010; and in 2021, 2,019. Without effective intervention, these spills will grow as population increases and climate change provokes heavier rainfall.

4: LOCATION AND SEVERITY OF OUTFLOWS

The most likely source of the damage to the large Maerl banks situated off St Mawes are spills from Falmouth-Penryn, Mylor, St Mawes itself and the large marinas at Mylor Dockyard and in the Penryn river. The SWW DWMP Report provides details in several tables.

Table 21 is an alphabetised three-page colour coded assessment of the main risks to each part of the Fal Catchment Area. These include internal flooding, pollution incidents, storm overflow performance, compliance failure and sewage collapse. Figure 5 below shows the Falmouth part of the table (also including Newham and other areas).

Figure 5: Table 21. Problem Characteristics, Fal Estuary. p.37

Table 21: Problem Characterisation

TPU2	F1: Internal sewer flooding	F2: Risk of sewer flooding in a 1 in 10 year event	F3: Risk of sewer flooding in a 1 in 50 year event	P1: Pollution incidents (CAT 1-3)	P2: Severe Pollutions (Cat 1-2)	P3: Storm overflow performance	P4: WwTW (NUMERIC) compliance failure	P5: WwTW (DWF) compliance failure	A1: Sewer collapse
TPU 17: PORTLOE_FINESCN_PORTLOE	A	F	F	A	A	A	A	A	A
TPU 13: PORTSCATHO_STW_PORTSCATHO	A	F	F	A	A	F	A	A	A
TPU 9: FALMOUTH_STW_FALMOUTH	F	F	G	G	A	F	C	A	G
TPU 2: LADOCK VALLEY_STW_TRESILLIAN	A	F	F	A	A	F	F	A	F
TPU 4: NEWHAM_STW_TRURO	A	F	A	G	A	F	C	A	A
TPU 11: GWENNAP_STW_LANNER ST DAY	F	G	G	A	A	A	A	A	F
TPU 12: PONSANOOTH_STW_	G	G	G	G	A	A	F	F	G

RISK PATTERN	Assessment
A	No risks – system is resilient
B	Long term moderate risk
C	Long term high risk
D	Medium term moderate risk
E	Medium term high risk
F	Immediate moderate risk
G	Immediate high risk

Figure 14: Problem Characterisation legend

The prominence of green and black - indicating immediate moderate risk and immediate high risk of flooding and sewer collapse is bad news for the maerl and unfortunate for the residents. These findings are common throughout the rest of the table.

Further in the DWMP, Table 22, Problem Characteristics Description, pp. 40-51, provides specific details for each area. For Falmouth, these can be summarised as:
1: Conclusion: Requires additional investment for future resilience.
2: Historical: 21 internal flooding incidents: two external flooding hotspots - due to hydraulic overload. Five external flooding hotspots - due to other causes, and eight pollution hotspots near Commercial Road, Falmouth Marina, etc.
3: Future flood Risk: 6.9% of total properties are at risk of sewer flooding.
Four predicted flooding hotspots near Commercial Rd., etc.
4: Overflows: 26 overflows. Impact on the following beaches, and shellfish water – Maenporth, Swanpool, the estuary
5: **Assessment:** We are monitoring performance. May need to increase capacity.
In Mylor, 6.1% of the total properties are estimated to be at risk of sewer flooding, and in St Mawes, it is 9.8**%.**
Overall, eleven of the catchment areas of the twenty studied were 'performing well and were resilient for the future', but nine – including Carnon Downs, Chacewater, Falmouth, Gwennap, Ladock, Mylor, Newham, Ponsanooth and St Dennis- require additional investment to make them resilient for the future.

5: SOUTHWEST WATER'S INVESTMENT PROGRAMME

SWW has responded to its perceived need and to both regulator and popular pressure by planning substantial investment programmes, some already underway. Listed on its website is a 'Drainage and Wastewater Management Plan: Falmouth Case Study, May 2023' describing plans, 2028-40, to improve wastewater and sewerage affecting Gyllingvase and Swanpool beaches, and the Penryn Sewer Replacement Works on Commercial Road, which is already causing traffic jams this year.
As well as these immediate programmes in Falmouth and Penryn, the SWW report also assesses medium- and long-term needs.
Their table 13 shows that even in dry weather, four of the 17 areas listed: Mylor, Ponsanooth, Portloe and Tregony, were approaching design capacity and need additional investment. In Table 25, after considering all weather challenges and conditions, SWW lists the eleven more seriously challenged areas and the remedial works required.
Their Table 27 provides estimates of the quantities of storage - measured in cubic metres, and of land - measured in hectares, required in each area to provide additional storage works to buffer storm overflows. It also estimates for network enhancement - measured in

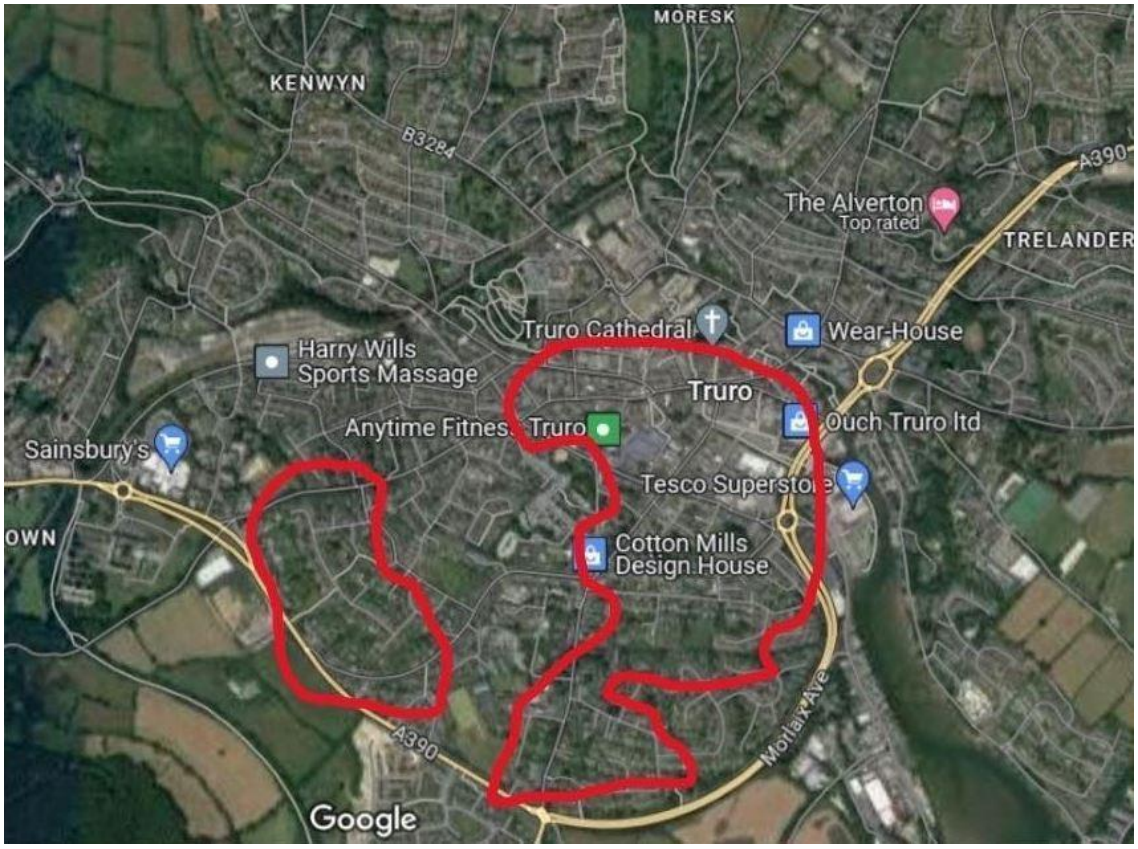
kilometres, to serve and connect the system.
The areas with the largest programmes were: North-Fal-St Stephen's in Brannel – 5656 m3 + 8.54 ha + 41.4 km, Newham – 3316 m3 + 11.5ha + 21.5 km, Falmouth – 2753 m3 +7.36 has + 0 km, and Mylor – 799 m3 + 9.25 ha + 15.8 km. These amounts of storm storage needed to buffer the system, plus 'network enhancement' to connect it, would daunt any company.
Hence, SWW noted (on p.73): "… that these are high-level strategic planning proposals and do not represent a commitment. The plans and overall programme need to be assessed against other risks and against the wider South West Water programme for risk and affordability."

6: CONCLUSION

It is fortunate that Cornwall Council has a Marine Nature Recovery Programme aimed at restoring marine ecosystems and supporting sensitive habitats like maerl beds. It draws support and information from Cornwall Wildlife Trust, Cornwall Council's own data, the Environment Agency and Natural England. It is non-statutory and voluntary but can certainly focus public opinion, draw official attention and suggest higher standards.
Pennon, owner of SWW, is a large metropolitan institution mostly foreign owned. It has announced an ambitious South West Water Business Plan 2025-2030 costed at £2.8 billion, which seems to confront all the main issues. However, it is the subject of four criminal investigations, and the chief executive of its parent group has been forced to resign. Given the problems it faces and this record, it is inevitable that people question how well SWW will respond.
The UK model of private regulated monopoly is unique, with characteristic strengths and weaknesses: a company's desire to divert profits, and the public desire to hold down rates. Pennon shares these with its British rivals; all organisational models have problems.
The Cunliffe Report on the Water Industry, published this July, suggested regional and local bodies should have more input into company decisions and behaviour so as to impart more responsibility and vigour – something of the old Joe Chamberlain mayoral model.
The Report also suggests water companies should be able to mediate the 'Right to Connect' where, faced with ambitious Local Planning Authority plans, they lack capacity (see Chapter 7 of the Cunliffe report).
Cunliffe's recommendations may help – but SWW, Ofwat, and regional boards are all fairly distant from our particular problems. Apprehension about Cornwall's NPPF revved up building requirement and doubts about SWW's capacity and reliability, raise inevitable concerns about the safety of the maerl and, far more importantly, about our future more generally. The maerl appears to be a canary in the coalmine: warning of the risk of too fast and too much development: for our public health and more widely, for our special local

environment. CPRE Cornwall's suggestion is that there should be no more extensive construction in the more severely affected areas until the necessary remedial measures have been decided and are well underway.

Planning



A map showing the 210-acre Fairpark solar development area overlayed on Truro city centre (Pic: Carnon Action Group / Google Earth)

PA23/02629 (APP/D0840/W/25/3365652) Solar photovoltaic (PV) array/solar farm with a battery energy storage system on land adjacent to Trewaters Bungalow, South of Carland Cross

The proposal is for a 210-acre solar park in open countryside, which could potentially be the largest in Cornwall.

Cornwall Council refused the application in November 2024, stating, “The proposed solar arrays and associated infrastructure would, by virtue of their manmade appearance and regular layout over a significant area of the landscape, cause harm to the character of the immediate rural landscape. The significant benefits of the scheme are not judged to outweigh the extent of this harm.”

The appellant’s case is based on mitigation, reversibility, visual containment, public benefits and a belief that the harm caused by a 210 acre solar farm on agricultural land is not “significant adverse impact” under Policy RE1(c) and that the benefits are substantial enough to outweigh any limited harm, in line with NPPF paragraph 180(b)

We support Cornwall Council’s decision to refuse the application and believe that the Planning Inspector should dismiss this appeal.

The appeal will be heard on Tuesday, 16 September 2025.

Recent Decisions

Penhale Camp, Camp Road, Holywell Bay 9 new and three refurbished dwellings Planning application PA22/02794 APPROVED	Shute Hill, Breage Residential development Planning application PA23/09456 APPROVED
Acorn Croft, Crowan Permission in Principle for 1 dwelling Planning application PA25/04582 REFUSED	

Objections Awaiting Decision

Harvey's House, Lowertown Three holiday glamping pods and parking Planning application PA25/03809	Tyringham Place, Lelant Development of 50 dwellings Planning application PA25/01847
Lost Gardens of Heligan Car park and crossing Planning application PA/25/02624	Castle Horneck, Penzance Development of 140 dwellings Planning application PA25/00085
Pandarosa Farm, Bodmin Development of 58 Dwellings Planning application PA23/07573	Cold Northcott Wind Farm Repowering & extension of wind farm Planning application PA23/02727
Halgavor Moor Development of up to 540 dwellings. Planning application PA20/10618	

Appeals to the Planning Inspectorate - Awaiting Decision

APP/3365652 (PA23/02629) South of Carland Cross Fair Park Solar Farm	APP/3352891 (PA23/05034) Land South Of Pengelly, Bosavern Construction of a pond
APP/3369960 (PA24/06454) Cove Hill, Port Navas Self-build dwelling	APP/ 3359104 (PA24/04886) Boat Cove Lane, Perranuthnoe. Construction of a chalet
APP/3353157 (PA22/10184) Trelissick Gardens 225 space car park	APP/3352494 (PA23/02502) Gillyflower Golf Club Clubhouse,19 holiday lodges