

100  
YEARS



Campaign to Protect  
Rural England  
Cornwall Kernow

## Cornwall Matters May 2026

### CPRE Cornwall newsletter

issue 22: May 2026

This year's **Annual General Meeting** will be held at 11.00 am on **Monday 1 June at Wheal Martyn China Clay Museum** near St Austell.

We are delighted to announce that **Professor Malcolm Williams** has kindly agreed to be our Guest Speaker. He was the founder of the Social Research Unit at Cardiff University and his important research on new housing, its affordability and its relationship to the Cornish economy has been praised for the light it shines on the real impact of commercial housing developments here in Cornwall.

AGM papers with voting slips will be emailed later in May. Refreshments will be served from 10.30 and the meeting will start at 11.00, followed by Professor Williams' talk. The museum's café will be open for lunch. Email [admin@cprecornwall.org](mailto:admin@cprecornwall.org) to book your place.

\* \* \* \* \*

In this issue, we have two reports on the state of our sea and river water. **Jenny Cruse** sets out the disturbing condition of the River Camel and its surrounding area, which has suffered shockingly high levels of pollution from sewage discharge, with no sign of any damage mitigation works being underway and no reassuring programme of repairs to the Wastewater Treatment Works that threaten it. **Jane Howlett** underlines the relevance of Channel 4's 'Dirty Business' series for us here in Cornwall, where South West Water is among the worst offenders. Furthermore, large scale development is now encouraged under the government's new planning policy and applications are queuing up to threaten further disastrous damage to our seas and rivers.

**Stephen Horscroft** and **Gavin Barker** make an effective 'non-party-political' presentation on the case for devolution for Cornwall and for a representative Citizens' Assembly to promote real local democracy by involving local people to influence decision-making. They argue that Cornwall Council would be greatly strengthened in its dealings with central government if it could clearly demonstrate public support for greater autonomy for Cornwall in areas such as planning.



Our Centenary Events programme is underway and began with two walks at Golitha Falls on 10<sup>th</sup> April, guided by the distinguished Cornish Heritage expert **Iain Rowe**. The two groups, convened by **Stephen Horscroft** and attended by **Hilda Blacklaw** with celebratory plates of cake, met at the Falls carpark. The first group used the specially accessible path and the second the rather more challenging route to the Falls.

The next event follows on 8<sup>th</sup> May, also guided by **Iain Rowe**:

**'Natural Beauty and the Beast' 2: Phoenix Mine**

**Friday 8 May:** Walk starts at 10.30am

Meet point: Minions Heritage Centre – see the sail flags, NGR SX 26145 71453

What three words: ///dogs.positions.reserves

refreshments & facilities nearby.

**This event is free but booking is essential as numbers will be limited.**

To book your place go to: <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/a-guided-walk-led-by-the-distinguished-cornish-heritage-expert-ian-rowe-tickets-1985280222588?aff=oddtcreator> or email [admin@cprecomwall.org](mailto:admin@cprecomwall.org)



Iain Rowe, Cornish heritage expert.



## **The disturbing state of the River Camel**

Jenny Cruse

In 2021 Natural England wrote to Cornwall Council to say that the River Camel was in an 'unsatisfactory state' and due to European law, there must be an embargo on all development in the River Camel catchment area until the river is returned to a satisfactory state. In February 2026 Natural England, following confirmation from South West Water (SWW) about forthcoming upgrades to Wastewater Treatment Works (WwTWs), wrote to Cornwall Council to tell them that the embargo area is now reduced (see map below). Therefore, building developments in the Bodmin, Nanstallon, Scarletts Well, Blisland and St Breward WwTW catchment may now be approved - with appropriate planning conditions or obligations in place. After further talks with Planning Officers it appears that this direction is not evidence based. In other words, Natural England has not produced the evidence to substantiate their nutrient neutrality advice. Common sense would dictate that this is not a satisfactory situation as there is no evidence of either the upgrades or the fact that the River Camel is now in an 'improved' state.

In 2024 Nanstallon WwTW discharged 1,625.18 hours of untreated sewage into the Camel. In 2024 Blisland WwTW had a complete failure for nearly 12 months meaning 10 tankers of sewage had to be transported to Nanstallon WwTW. There was no

notification to residents, no public engagement and no apology to the residents for the inconvenience. After much pressure from the Parish Council and the ward member a visit to site revealed an essential piece of equipment had failed, which indicated a lack of investment in infrastructure.

A two-acre piece of land was purchased by Cornwall Council in preparation for a phosphate mitigation plan. The application has now been withdrawn with no known plans to put this phosphate mitigation plan in place.

What is of concern is the pace at which housing developments will be approved without any evidence of upgrades from SWW. Natural England have not as yet provided the analysis to inform the amendment to the catchment, and therefore the evidence is NOT published or advised in any clear form other than in Habitats Regulations in individual planning conditions, which may or may not be scrutinised.

Fifty-eight open market houses in the Bodmin area (PA23/07573) were approved by Officer delegation on the 20<sup>th</sup> March 2026. Natural England had '*no objection – subject to appropriate mitigation being secured.*' However, without this mitigation the application would: '*Have an adverse effect on the integrity of the River Camel Special Area of Conservation*' and '*damage or destroy the interest features for which the River Camel Valley and Tributaries SIS has been notified.*'

This cannot be a satisfactory situation. To depend upon developers to self-regulate when they have a poor record of complying with conditions and completing developments in a timely and transparent way is somewhat optimistic.

Elsewhere in the Camel catchment area, discharge from the Delabole WwTW into the River Allen, which leads to the Camel, was at a frightening 3,264 hours of discharge in 2024. The embargo remains in place for this area and others where it is presumed no upgrades are planned.

Over the past five years, any development that has gone forward was previously passed, while housing projects are now coming forward that were held in abeyance during the embargo. A certain amount of work has been undertaken by the Environment Agency to encourage farmers to cover slurry pits (which is now a legal requirement), and some private farmers who were discharging septic tanks to fields have lost their license; that may have accounted for the increase in discharge at Nanstallon. It is well documented that during wet weather, septic tankers are forced to

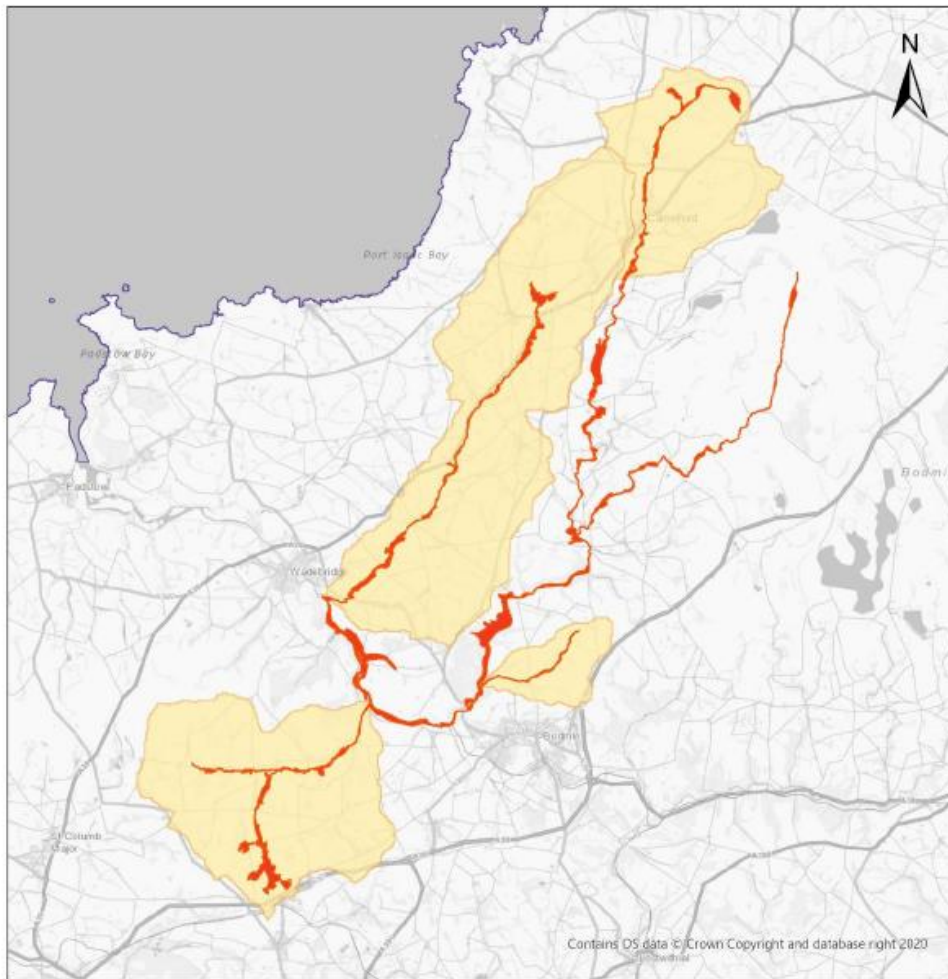
take their tankers out of Cornwall for discharge.

All of this does not paint a pretty picture for the future of the Camel River. This was once a thriving salmon spawning area, with bull head trout and a good otter and other protected species population. The river remains in an unsatisfactory state, and it cannot be possible to make improvements whilst large housing estates are approved for build. Significant damage is done to wildlife under construction and subsequently the introduction of concrete and loss of natural drainage causes local flooding;




Government planning policy has put pressure on Cornwall to allocate for over 4,000 houses per year and to determine in favour of developments some of which have no benefit for local people who cannot afford open market prices. Brown field sites are left undeveloped since they are often expensive to bring to buildable standard.

This revised policy directive is now in place in the Camel Special Area of Conservation. The question is not answered as to how Cornwall Council, as the 'competent authority', is making very important planning decisions without the evidence in place to confirm that no further damage will ensue for the Camel River.

## Annex B - Map showing the revised catchment area for River Camel



### Area Where Natural England's Nutrient Neutrality Advice Applies for River Camel SAC

-  Local Authorities
-  Sites of Special Scientific Interest (England) © Natural England
-  Surface water catchment area of relevant designated site due to nutrient pollution



### **‘Dirty Business’ & Sewage Spills**

Jane Howlett

Many people will have heard of, or seen, the series **‘Dirty Business’**, a docudrama aired on Channel 4 during February this year. The series investigates the UK’s sewage pollution or ‘outfalls’ into our rivers and seas, whilst companies like Southwest Water are generating high shareholders profits. Sadly, it also covered the loss to a family of their daughter, after she had been swimming in sewage contaminated water at a Blue Flag beach at Dawlish Warren in Devon. Although being diagnosed with E.coli 0157 that caused hemolytic uremic syndrome, the Inquest recorded a verdict of death by misadventure. Many personal stories were covered in the three episodes, including a surfer who developed an incurable ear condition after swimming in polluted water. The programme itself was the result of a 10-year investigation into an Oxfordshire River that had uncovered different and persistent ‘outfalls’ of sewage and the damage they had caused to the environment. Surprisingly, it is possible for anyone to obtain statistics for any area of the country to show sewage ‘outfalls’ from the various water companies simply by looking on the internet.

However, how can it be right to monitor outfalls from South West Water in hours? Data released in March this year covering 2025, shows that SW Water was responsible for 407,006 hours of sewage spills from storm overflows across the entire region. This

covers Cornwall, Devon and parts of Dorset and Somerset. Whilst this was a lower figure than 2024 it represents the longest duration of any water company in England. Portreath, a beautiful beach on the North Cornwall coast recorded 661 hours of sewage discharges, despite having an 'Excellent' rating, yet it did not appear on the Key Rated Beaches list in Cornwall (2025). The Carnon River received 1,000 hours of dry day spills and is now designated as a heavily polluted river. It starts in Chacewater and is joined by both Trewedna Water and the River Kenn before it merges with Tallack's Creek to become Restronguet Creek, which eventually flows into the English Channel at the mouth of the Carrick Roads. The Environment Agency monitors water on 89 designated beaches in Cornwall from May to September and ratings are based on the concentration of bacteria (E.coli and Intestinal Enterococci).

Is it now to be considered an essential part of a beach visit, to look on Cornwall Council's website and check 'Bathing water quality', or look on the Sewage Alert App created by Surfers Against Sewage? - in fact, it is also possible to check their 'Live Sewage Map' to see where sewage discharges are happening right across the UK. To quote: 'sewage outfalls in Cornwall primarily exist due to an overwhelmed, outdated combined sewer system and legal loopholes, that cannot handle heavy rainfall, forcing water companies to discharge, or "dump" untreated sewage into the ocean and rivers to prevent it backing up into homes and streets. (Visions of medieval times). These overflows are legally permitted during high rainfall but are often blamed on under investment in infrastructure'.

In March this year Southwest Water pleaded guilty to six years of pollution-related charges and they are expected to be sentenced in June. This includes the River Camel, which is a Special Area of Conservation and is a key habitat for Atlantic salmon, bull head fish and otters. See:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/south-west-water-pleads-guilty-to-six-years-of-pollutions>

There are many instances of sewage being seen in the sea at our beaches and rivers and it now appears to be our responsibility to check before visiting these areas. Is it down to the water companies who have concentrated on their share holders' dividends and bonuses for their staff, rather than investing in an ageing and inadequate infrastructure - or is it us, continuing to build houses that connect to a system that cannot cope? What about the wildlife, the freshwater fish that used to live in our rivers, the flora and fauna, the enjoyment of a swim in the sea or a paddle in a river, and to see clear clean flowing water therein?

A search on the internet reveals that 'Windrush Against Sewage Pollution' or WASP (the group that was featured in the series), have a blog. This very interesting blog highlights 'Dirty Business' and gives some rather alarming statistics. It also accuses the water companies, some who are in overseas hands, of receiving the proceeds of crime. They state that: 'the water industry has been funded by bill-payers to carry out maintenance and upgrading work over the 35 years of private ownership, and the water company's Board of Directors have certified to Ofwat that they have had the funding to do it, year on year.' A very interesting read.

In conclusion: where do we go from here? People are becoming more interested in what happens to the expensive water bills we are now facing and in the long-term effects on our environment.



### **Devolution and the role of a citizens' assembly**

Stephen Horscroft & Gavin Barker

Along with CPRE branches across England, CPRE Kernow campaigns to protect and enhance our rural landscape. It influences planning policy, responds to planning applications that adversely impact our natural environment, fights for green space that is integral to good physical & mental health and therefore productivity, promotes sustainable development and seeks to promote a thriving countryside for all.

Yet like all campaigning organisations, it operates within a diminishing democratic space as decision-making on key planning issues is ever more centralised, with unsustainably large and top-down housing figures imposed on Cornwall. The challenge before it is stark: if CPRE Kernow is to win the battles it fights, it needs to join forces with others to end Whitehall diktat and win back real power for Cornwall in areas like planning while jointly articulating an alternative to the prevailing 'growth' agenda. By bringing power closer to home, we all benefit. But how?

In July Cornwall Council [backed a motion](#) which included two key demands: it called on the Government "to formally recognise Cornwall as the fifth nation of the United Kingdom..." and secondly, "to shape our future on our own terms".

Some progress has been made in the promise of a bespoke devolution deal for Cornwall, but Council motions can only take us so far. What is needed is a wider public conversation that mobilises public demands for real devolution of power. To that end, several voluntary organisations have come together to propose a high-profile Cornwall-wide 'citizens assembly': a 40-50 strong assembly composed of ordinary people from all walks of life chosen by democratic lottery in a way that accurately reflects Cornwall's population.

This offers the opportunity to scrutinise the role of Councillors in decision-making on this topic over and beyond internal Cornwall Council mechanisms and to better understand interaction between central Government, local MPs and the Council. It should be noted that there is no job description for Councillors and no requirement for them to engage with communication from their electorate, although the good ones do.

Over three to four weekends or days the citizens' assembly would offer a platform for the current Leader of Cornwall Council, Cllr Leigh Frost, to outline the rights, powers and resources that the Council believes Cornwall needs in order "to shape its own future". At the same time the citizens' assembly would listen to a range of other voices that could include constitutional experts, Gorsedh Kernow, representatives from parish and town councils, voluntary organisations, environmental campaigning organisations

like CPRE and local community leaders. Not all speakers will agree or share the same vision, but the intention is for the citizens' assembly to first inform themselves of the issues before deliberating among themselves to arrive at a reasoned judgement. Ideally, this will be one which broadly backs the demand for real devolution of power to Cornwall, including its own powers and functions, establishing another piece of evidence of public opinion.

There is a potential alignment of interests here: Cornwall Council's negotiating hand with government will be greatly strengthened if it is seen to have the active backing of an informed, representative cross-section of the local public. But for that to happen, it also needs to demonstrate how power will be shared with local communities and local voluntary organisations to enable them to have an active say over key decisions that affect people's lives. If it cannot do this, it is unlikely to get the backing of the citizens' assembly.

This is important for Cornwall Council because of the degree of 'bad press' it gets from local media and apparently from social media comments by the public. It does not appear to be a popular organisation, which in turn compromises its legitimacy, its ability to function and its importance as the only organisation representing the whole of Cornwall – nonetheless with a democratic mandate – to speak for Cornwall.

Without devolution this 'speaking' is compromised. While it advocates for fair funding and reminds the Government of the expense of service delivery to a growing rural population, at the same time, it has to work with the Government to deliver almost 90,000 more homes in Cornwall in the period to 2050. Ironically this will put more pressure on service delivery and infrastructure provision without fair funding and an appropriate devolution deal. Such issues need to be teased out in a citizens' assembly.

The Council's hand will be further strengthened if it also gets the backing of the Cornwall Association of Local Councils (CALC) and the main Town Councils. But it may not do so unless it can set out a clearly defined 'deal' which ensures that power and resources are shared appropriately (and not hoarded) and where Parish Councils are treated as equal partners. In turn, representatives from CALC who are invited to speak to the citizens' assembly would need to demonstrate a willingness to promote more open, participative ways of working with the communities they serve.

A citizens' assembly offers an ideal opportunity to bring the full range of stakeholders together, air key issues and find common ground and a common vision. Equally

importantly, by aligning the interests of Cornwall Council, parish councils, voluntary organisations and local people, the citizens' assembly can catalyse a public movement for Cornish autonomy.

One thing is certain: the present business-as-usual approach is not working. It is haemorrhaging trust. More of the same will simply make matters worse. Cornwall Council acknowledges that [the way the Council engages with residents is "broken"](#) and there is variation between how communities view the Council between its various Community Area Partnerships (CAPs)

The answer is to embrace a more open, participative way of working with local people, to bring about a system change from consultation to co-design. A specially convened citizens' assembly can spearhead such an enterprise. By doing so, Cornwall Council can start to win their trust and backing for a real devolution of power - for the 'opponent' we face is not Cornwall Council, it is Whitehall, and a Westminster political class whose grip on power is strangling local democracy along with any meaningful devolution of power. That decision-making class is often not even based in Cornwall – the place for which it is making those decisions.

## Planning



Speedwell Solar Farm. Credit LDA Design/Speedwell Solar Farm Ltd.

Speedwell Solar Farm Ltd, a subsidiary of Europe's largest renewable energy producer Statkraft, proposed a 40MW solar farm across almost 200 acres of farmland covering 22 fields at Gwinear for 40 years, generating enough electricity for approximately 12,000 homes. The scheme also includes a car park and a biodiversity area linked to Gwinear Community Primary School.

Local opposition was strong, with objections from Gwinear-Gwithian Parish Council, St Erth Parish Council, Hayle Town Council, nearby businesses and local residents.

Despite Cornwall Council's planning officers recommending approval, the planning application was refused on a vote of ten in favour, with none against and one abstention citing the loss of high quality agricultural land and the impact on nearby heritage assets including the Grade II listed Lanyon Farmhouse.

Speedwell appealed the decision (Ref: APP/D0840/W/25/3370949). Last month, a Planning Inspector, Mr R. E. Jones, allowed the appeal, stating that the proposal would not cause significant landscape or visual harm, nor would it result in a substantial loss of the best agricultural land. The Inspector acknowledged that the proposal would cause harm to the designated heritage assets at the site, but the benefits of the renewable energy project outweighed that harm. The main benefits cited were the proposal's contribution to national and local renewable energy targets, biodiversity enhancement, and a proposed new school car park to address current congestion and parking issues.

In summary, the Inspector stated that *"the public and planning benefits associated with the scheme are very considerable and weighty. The totality of these benefits and their collective weight offset the considerable importance and weight attached to the heritage harm and the non-compliance with the development plan, the Framework and the Act in those respects. Accordingly, the proposal is judged to be acceptable, having regard to the material considerations."*

## Recent Decisions

Pandarosa Farm, Bodmin  
 Development of 58 Dwellings  
 Planning application PA23/07573  
**APPROVED**

APP/3352891 (PA23/05034)  
 Land South Of Pengelly, Bosavern  
 Construction of a pond  
**ALLOWED**

APP/3369960 (PA24/06454)  
 Cove Hill, Port Navas  
 Self-build dwelling  
**DISMISSED**

APP/3370949 (PA23/09696)  
 Land At Lanyon Farm, Gwinear  
 Solar farm  
**ALLOWED**

## Objections awaiting Decisions

Rezare Reserved Matters, one dwelling Planning application PA26/01211	St Ewe Egg Laying Shed Planning application PA26/00787
White Cross, Cury Outline permission for 12 dwellings Planning application PA25/06135	Mawgan Outline permission for 33 houses Planning application PA25/07215
Lost Gardens of Heligan Car park and crossing Planning application PA/25/02624	Cold Northcott Wind Farm Repowering & extension of wind farm Planning application PA23/02727

Tyringham Place, Lelant Development of 50 dwellings Planning application PA25/01847	Halgavor Moor Development of up to 540 dwellings. Planning application PA20/10618
---	---

**Appeals to the Planning Inspector**

APP/3373503 (PA24/00042) Pendower Beach House Hotel 20 unit aparthotel complex	APP/6000863 (PA25/00680) Boat Cove Lane Perranuthnoe Replacement chalet
--	---

**END**

