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CITIZENSASSEMBLYST



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# YOUR CAST NEWSLETTER

Keeping you up to date with our work, what we're planning and how you can get involved, direct to your inbox!

Now is the time for community-driven, people-powered change in South Tyneside.

# THE 'WATER EDITION'!

Ice cold with a slice of lemon or piping hot from your coffee (or tea) pot, however you like yours, water is essential to all animal and plant life on Earth - there is no life on earth without water! So welcome to CAST's 'water edition' newsletter!

Here at CAST we love a freebie! If you want some free stuff from Northumbrian Water to help you cut your water consumption, check out this [link](#)! See more practical (and free!) ways to save water [here](#)

If you missed the illuminating Universal Basic Income (UBI) event presented by the [UBI Lab Network](#), we've got you covered! Watch their presentation [here](#)

## WHAT'S IN THIS ISSUE?



News: Blue Flag lost? Flush the Wipe  
A potted history of sewage in the North East  
What is...a flood plain?  
Community Noticeboard



Get in touch with us: [here](#) Join us: [here](#)

# NEWS

## South Shields loses **Blue Flag** status?

Blue Flag status is presented to the best beaches around the world to celebrate the quality and diversity of our coastlines. Blue Flag beaches are recognised for their cleanliness, safety and for meeting the highest environmental and water quality standards. It would appear however that South Shields last won this coveted status back in 2018! Other beaches in the area have retained their awards, Roker, Seaburn, Whitley Bay and Tynemouth. So what's going on?

Water samples taken by the Marine Conservation Society rated the water quality at Marsden as generally 'good', a far cry from the strict standards set for Blue Flag beaches. The water quality of designated 'Bathing Waters' is determined through an annual process - water quality samples are taken during the official 'Bathing Season' (15th May-30th Sept.) and tested for bacteria to indicate if there is faecal matter in the water. Despite growing attention on water company environmental performance, there are still a significant number of Combined Sewer Overflows (CSO) discharges in UK bathing waters - a CSO is the emergency infrastructure designed to discharge untreated wastewater during periods of 'unusually heavy rainfall'. Unfortunately, CSOs are also being used outside these rainfall periods, resulting in environmental damage and increased risk to water users. According to figures released by the Safer Seas Service, Northumbrian Water had 31 CSOs in 2020 (read the full report [here](#)).

ALL water companies continue to treat the sea as an open sewer, dumping tonnes of raw sewage.

Should there be an obligation to provide open and transparent information to when and where sewage is being discharged? Let us know what you think [here](#)



## HAVE YOUR SAY ON... OUR BEACHES



Did you know the UK ranks just 25th out of 30 European countries for Bathing Water quality? (European Environment Agency, 2019) What can we do as a community?  
Get in touch [here](#) for more info.

### Bin the wipe campaign!

Wet wipes are the biggest cause of blockages and sewer flooding so **Northumbrian Water** are asking for our help!

The only wipes that can safely be flushed are wipes that have passed the water industry's standard, 'Fine to Flush', so unless they have the official 'Fine to Flush' symbol, toilet wipes, baby wipes, make-up wipes and cleaning wipes should all be binned after use - even ones that say they are flushable. Many of these wipes are made from plastic, which means they don't break down, and our toilets and sewer pipes are not designed for them.

Even if they aren't in your toilet bowl, they could get stuck in the pipes near your home - flushed wipes contribute to more than 60% of sewer blockages in the North East. Flushing the wrong things down the loo can cause huge problems. When sewage can't flow because of a blockage, it has to go somewhere - your street, your garden, maybe back into your house through the toilet, the drains in your bath, sink or shower, flooding your home with excrement and whatever else other people have been flushing.

We are all at risk from this, so please tell your family, friends and neighbours to 'Bin the Wipe'!



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## A potted history of sewage pollution in the North East by Steve Lavelle

Sewage pollution in the North East is not a new issue. Asiatic Cholera first arrived in Sunderland in 1831-2, the first such epidemic in Britain, bringing notoriety to the town and killing 215 people. Attempting to protect the coal trade, authorities denied that the disease was rife and quarantine measures, which might have safeguarded public health, were blocked. The local epidemic was spent by January 1832, but by then cholera was rampaging in Newcastle and beyond. Like all of Britain's mushrooming towns, Sunderland was heavily polluted and lacking in basic sanitation. Numerous investigations followed, based on the belief that cholera spread through the air. In fact, the responsibility lay with drinking water polluted by sewage, but this understanding came too late.

After a severe outbreak in 1848, the government was forced to act and the Public Health Act of 1848 was passed. Boroughs such as Sunderland, became responsible for drainage and water supplies. William Crozier, the first Sunderland borough surveyor, mapped the town and planned an effective drainage scheme. The private Sunderland and South Shields Water Co. retained the best-known water engineer in the country, Thomas Hawksley, to advise them on piping water into homes.

Jumping forward 153 years to October 2001, a public inquiry took place into the levels of permitted sewage discharged into the sea on a stretch of the North-East coast. Thirty witnesses gave evidence at the hearing into Northumbrian Water's application to vary its permitted consent over discharges from outfall pipes at Hendon, in Sunderland and Whitburn, in South Tyneside following a number of objections over the discharge levels, led by the pressure group Campaign Against Sewage in the Sea at Sunderland (Cass) and Seaham Environmental Association. They claimed that discharges exceeded permitted levels, despite the opening of a £70m treatment plant in Hendon. Professor Malcolm Hooper, Cass chairman, said excessive flows of sewage bypass the new system on too many occasions, even when there is no rainfall, which was leading to effluent and debris littering our beaches. The inquiry lasted for three weeks and concluded that discharge permits be issued with strict conditions attached.

Despite a £10 million investment in 2017, the Whitburn sewage system discharged 760,000 cubic metres of sewage off the coast of Whitburn in 2019. Discharges were made 75 times over 24 days. In 2020, the Whitburn system was still regarded by the European Commission as not complying with EU environmental legislation. Untreated sewage continues to be discharged in light to moderate rainfall. The local authorities in Sunderland and South Tyneside have literally washed their hands of the issue and defer to Northumbrian Water who claim they have the capacity to treat sewage. In reality, they continue to rely on disposing of sewage into local watercourses and into the North Sea. Untreated sewage, including faeces and urine, contains bacteria, viruses (including coronavirus), toxins, pharmaceutical residues and microplastics. Untreated sewage also kills marine life.

What does the future hold? Will attempts to protect plans for housing development in 2021 mirror the attempts to protect the coal trade in 1831 by denying or ignoring that sewage pollution is a problem?

Read the full article [here](#)

## UPCOMING CAST MEETINGS

Interested? Got an idea or just want to listen? Why not come along?  
If you're not a member, just drop us an [email](#) and we'll send you the link!

Sustainable Communities  
Thu.4th March @ 5pm

CAST AGM  
Sat.20th March @ 11am

CAST are proud to support [SSTHC](#) - please don't forget their fortnightly meetings!

Get in touch with us: [here](#) Join us: [here](#)

# WHAT IS...A FLOOD PLAIN?

Each month, our section 'What is...?' will take an unbiased look at terms often used but never really explained. This month, the 'big four' talking points...

We're all acutely aware of the construction currently going on all across our borough...and what's in the 'pipeline' (pun intended!) But what is the impact of all of this development on our natural drainage? To understand the impact, first we need to know what the terms mean, so here's our quick guide to get you up to speed.

A 'water course':

'[A] natural or artificial channel through which water flows.' '[A] stream of water (such as a river, brook, or underground stream)'

The 'water table':

Essentially, the water table is an underground boundary between the soil surface and the area where groundwater saturates the spaces between sediments and cracks in rock. The soil surface above the water table is called the unsaturated zone, where both oxygen and water fill the spaces between sediments. Underneath the water table is the saturated zone, where water fills all spaces between sediments. This zone is restricted at the bottom by impenetrable rock. Water table levels vary between seasons, for example, melting snow or higher rainfall in the winter and warmer temperatures in the summer. Why are changes important? Rises in groundwater levels can cause flooding, reduction of the strength of the soil (soil erosion) and landslides. Reductions in groundwater levels can cause the soil to consolidate and contract and the ground surface to fall.

A 'flood plain':

Floodplains are generally flat areas of land next to a river or stream. Why are they important? They are natural flooding outlets for rivers, provide a habitat for wildlife and are usually very fertile agricultural areas as floods carry nutrient-rich silt and sediment and distribute it across a wide area. Is it a good idea to build on them – your call!

'Flood alleviation':

The construction of flood walls, banks and planting vegetation to retain water. Temporary measures include metal/plastic barriers, sandbags and pumps. South Tyneside Council have several flood alleviation projects: Cleadon Lea - an embankment and storage area seeded with wetland wildflowers, Sunderland Road - new sections of drainage ditches created and improvements made to existing ditches to increase capacity for surface water, Monkton - creation of marshy areas to help prevent surface water reaching residential areas. You can access South Tyneside Council's flood alleviation plans [here](#)

Many of our traditional sewage systems are already at capacity. Given the predicted increases in development, demand and climate change on our aging infrastructure can only result in increasing our risk of surface water flooding. What do you think?



## March: Free ports

Do you have any terms you're unsure of?

Let us know [here](#) and we'll take an impartial, honest look into them for you.

# COMMUNITY NOTICEBOARD

LGBTQ+ services: if you're aged 11-25 and are looking for support, Humankind offer services covering 1:1 and family sessions and LGBTQ+ and gender identity groups. You can find the contact information [here](#)

Take a look at the Jan/Feb MOTW newsletter [here](#)

Kooth is a free mental health and well-being community for 10-25 year olds. February sees the launch of their #DontDoltAlone campaign. They've also got some online events - see what they've got planned [here](#)

Spread the word to those without internet access - Cultural Spring have launched two new projects aimed at 'offline' South Tynesiders. The 'Wish You Were Here' project: residents are sent a postcard and instructions. Complete a weekly creative activity and post it on to create a chain of postcards across South Tyneside! The second project will combine the work of singing and letter-writing groups. The letter-writing group write a weekly letter then record passages to be used to create songs, performed at six weekly singing workshops! If you, or anyone you know, is interested, please contact Emma on 07469 030 256 or email [info@theculturalspring.org.uk](mailto:info@theculturalspring.org.uk) by Friday, February 19th.

Do you know anyone aged 11 - 25 who supports our parks and green spaces? Groundwork have secured funding and are now able to offer training to these young people to support their engagement with the parks and their personal development. If you know anyone who fits the bill, they can contact Holly Ayrton via [Holly.Ayrton@groundwork.org.uk](mailto:Holly.Ayrton@groundwork.org.uk) or 07942 747 371.

Azalea academy are offering free digital training modules, including online basics, Office programs, online safety, online job searching and managing your money online. Learners who complete 3 modules will receive a Level 1 City and Guild in Online Basics, complete 1 or 2 and you'll receive a certificate. Interested? Just call 07729 676 433 and leave your name and number to get registered.

Watch: [Council Standards Committee meeting](#) - Friday 19th Feb.@10am



## DID YOU KNOW...

Have you been thinking about a career change?  
Looking at the skills you have for employment?

Skills South Tyneside offer Career Coach sessions where you can explore your options and interests. The course is for anyone 19 or over, looking to explore their skills, career options and identifying steps to move closer to goals.

If you feel stuck in a rut, unable to progress or have circumstances that are impacting on your career, Career Coach may be able to help. Using bespoke online careers tool to identify strengths and transferable skills, they can support you to identify suitable opportunities within the current jobs market.

If you're struggling for ideas, it's worth doing a career assessment to highlight the types of jobs and tasks best suited to your skills, interests and experience.

For more information, [click here](#)

## IN THE CAST PIPELINE...



Here's what we're working on at the minute...

We're currently working with Morrisons to address the problems of litter and abandoned shopping trolleys around the stores in South Shields and Jarrow. We're due to meet with them this week, so we'll have an update for you in the next newsletter!

We'll also be meeting with the council's [Cleaner Greener Communities Board](#) to put forward some more of our ideas! Again, we'll have an update for you next month.

Interested? Why not get involved?

Get in touch with us: [here](#) Join us: [here](#)