

**HASTINGS BOROUGH COUNCIL
FULL COUNCIL MEETING
Wednesday, 22nd November 2023**

AGENDA ITEM 5(a)
QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

Supplementary question

Chris Hurrell asks Councillor Roark, Environment Portfolio Holder:

HBC say in their reply that *"The council has no information to substantiate the questioner's claim that Old Roar Gill has deteriorated since it was declared a Local Nature Reserve. As he rightly states, the current biodiversity of the gill is unknown."*

Whilst it is true that current biodiversity is unknown (and that is why we urgently need an ecological survey) it does not need an ecological survey to recognise the level of neglect and the fact that the gill has deteriorated.

I am perturbed that HBC deny that the gill has deteriorated over the last 20 years. There is abundant evidence of sewage pollution (Southern Water admit to pollution and councillors have also stated the gill was polluted), the streams have been blocked, the gill is full of litter, the pathways are closed, there are no maintenance contracts in place and the gill management plan ignored.

Councillor Barnett posted a clear statement that the gill has deteriorated following a visit to the gill:

"I wasn't convinced this was the whole story. So went to have a look today, walking up from Alexandra park, along the stream under the road and up to the waterfall, a popular Victorian tourist attraction.

Last time I did this, a couple of years ago, the valley had a magical atmosphere despite, or perhaps because of, the way nature has taken over with trees and stone structures fallen into the stream. Today it seemed abandoned with so much debris that the stream was almost totally blocked in parts. There was a strong sewage smell near the bridge, and a bit upstream from there. I found two pipes that might have fed muck into the water, but no clear evidence of raw sewage."

The public have been in contact with HBC and their councillors for 6 months, pointing out the neglect of the gill, with loads of photos showing the poor state of the gill. Councillor Roark has been included in many emails highlighting the condition of the gill.

Could Councillor Roark explain why despite all the evidence gathered and statements from Southern Water, the Environment agency and HBC councillors why the answer claims that *"The council has no information to substantiate the questioner's claim that Old Roar Gill has deteriorated since it was declared a Local Nature Reserve".*

Could she explain how much evidence is needed before it is accepted that the gill has deteriorated?

Answer

Councillor Roark, Environment Portfolio Holder:

I share the questioner's frustration, however the fact is that the Council does not have objective baseline data from which to determine if the Gill has deteriorated in biodiversity since it was declared a nature reserve. Some parts of the infrastructure of the path have of course deteriorated in terms of the wooden structures and earlier this year a part of the walkway was closed off for health and safety reasons. We are working towards securing an environmental survey of the area and continuing to work with the EA on water quality, but the Council does not have baseline data in terms of biodiversity in the nature reserve which would substantiate the questioner's original claim.