



Mike Deacon
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Ms De Vecchi
Council Leader
Lewes District Council
32 High Street
Lewes
East Sussex
BN7 2LX

Dear Ms De Vecchi,

I am a lifelong resident of Lewes and grew up in Landport in the 60's. As a boy I played by the river and learnt to catch fish there. This has been my passion ever since.

As you may know, on Saturday 10th October, I organised a one-off clean-up of the debris polluting the river in Lewes, because no individual body would take responsibility. I together with public volunteers and the Sussex Ouse Conservation Society, worked on two sites; the area below Cliffe bridge known as the rubble rapids and the trolley reef under Willeys bridge.

From the 6 metre stretch of river under Willeys Bridge alone, we recovered:

- 28 shopping trolleys
- 12 bikes 6 scooters
- 14 traffic cones
- 6 car tyres
- 1 skateboard
- 4 large road works signs
- several scaffolding poles
- 1 large metal beer Keg
- And incredibly, 2 full size steel football 'goals
- 'Plus loads of other miscellaneous debris

The whole operation was time limited by the tide, but we were still pulling out rubbish right to the end, and I could still feel more lying on the river bed. How much more rubbish is in the river? - Clearly a lot!

I had previously approached both Tesco and LDC asking for something to be done about the shopping trolleys polluting the river. Despite several requests to LDC and the EA, the trolleys under Willeys Bridge were left untouched for at least three years. I have also repeatedly requested Tesco to install coin-key trolleys to reduce theft and vandalism, but they have chosen to decline my request. They say that customers don't want them. I don't believe this. There are many people in this town who are customers of Tesco who do want them.

Throughout these discussions it became apparent, that LDC's view was that they were not responsible for removing debris in the river, that it was the Environment Agency's responsibility. However The EA took the view that unless the debris posed a flood risk they would leave it there. So much so, that when I wrote to

ask them to recover the debris at the Cliffe site, they went into the river and reported to me that they had removed 2 trolleys (which were deemed a flood risk) and bypassed the rest of the debris (bikes, a video player, tyres, traffic cones, scaffolding poles, plastic piping and sacks of builders waste, etc)! Clearly there was a responsibility gap between the LDC and the Environment Agency which needed to be closed to solve the problem permanently.

Surprisingly, when the EA heard of my plans to clean the river, they belatedly sent out a clean-up team 3 days before we were due to go in. They recovered from Willeys bridge area: a bike, a trolley, a fridge, plus some other items which were littering the bank side.

In this age of improved environmental awareness, especially as we are about to go into the era of the [South Downs National Park](#), - the responsibility falls on all of us to restore the riverbed to its natural state. I would like to propose that Lewes District Council, as part of the "Clean and Green" policy, permanently accept responsibility for the state of the river, and "regularly do something about it".

To this end, I suggest that LDC appoint a suitably equipped "river-watch team" to monitor and maintain the river, much in the way as is done on the adjacent Railway Land Nature Reserve, and treat the river with a similar degree of care as is afforded to a beach or woodland or open Downland environment. The Ouse produces sea trout of the highest individual average weight in the country. We have to do all we can to help keep these Sea Trout coming up our river!

Additionally I propose that all retailers in Lewes who provide shopping trolleys, be required to use an effective security system, such as a coin-key system, to prevent theft and vandalism. This would also stop trolleys being strewn around the town. Tesco plan an even bigger store in Lewes, with presumably more trolleys. This is a key opportunity to install an effective security perimeter system especially where they adjoin such an environmentally sensitive site as the river Ouse.

And if they don't?

On 26th October 2006, the Sussex Express published a piece about LDC adopting new legislation from February 2008 (Environmental Protection Act: section 99, schedule 4) to charge the supermarkets £75 each for allowing their trolleys to litter the town. I am not aware of in how many individual instances to date this has been enforced. Could you please provide me with this information.

You should note that in September 2001, it was reported that Tesco Store in Chelmsford were fined £37,517 at Chelmsford Crown Court, for neglectfully allowing 33 of their trolleys to be dumped into the rivers Can and Chelm. Why can't this happen in Lewes?

(www.edie.net/news/news_story.asp?id=4696&channel=0)

As you may see from the above, I am extremely concerned about the persistent problem of rubbish/trolleys etc. being dumped in the river Ouse in Lewes. Should you intend to discuss this matter in Council, I would be happy to attend and offer my advice to your members.

So what are LDC going to do about this problem?

I look forward to your positive response over this matter.

Yours Sincerely

M. E. Deacon
Campaign for a Cleaner Sussex Ouse