



Chichester's Plan for Water

Gillian Keegan MP

Member of Parliament for Chichester

Foreword

When I first became an MP, I never imagined I would learn so much about the removal of wastewater. It is shocking to think such practices still happen in the 21st century, but you have to know there's a problem to fix it.

The Conservatives have been the first Government in history to face this issue head on. We have introduced strict new sanctions for water companies, ploughed millions of pounds into infrastructure upgrades, and developed the first ever nation-wide sewage monitoring system.

In 2010 approximately 7% of storm overflows were being monitored. By contrast that figure is now 100% as a result of this Government passing the Environment Act in 2021.

Since being elected as the Member of Parliament for Chichester, sewage and water quality have been some of the most common issues to cross my desk, and my position has always been clear: The dumping of sewage in our harbour and waterways is completely unacceptable.

I have not played political games on this issue and have always been straight on the facts around sewage and water quality. Our environment is too important to be used for political purposes.

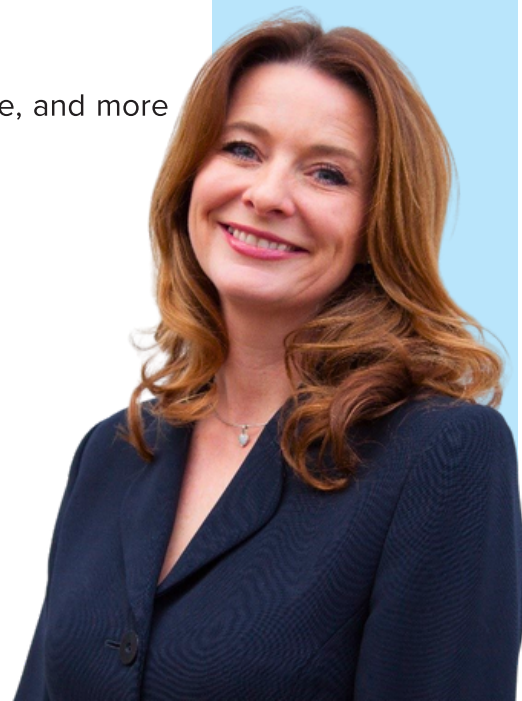
From the outset I have sought to engage positively with the community, understand the issues and meet with experts to formulate a plan to protect and defend our environment. I have also worked constructively with local and national organisations including Southern Water, the Environment Agency, Ofwat (the water regulator for England and Wales), Chichester Harbour Conservancy, Chichester Harbour Protection and Recovery of Nature (CHaPRoN), and Chichester District Council.

I hope that this document will help constituents to understand where we are, and more importantly what we are doing to bring an end to sewage discharges.



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Key Actions

Secured major commitments from Southern Water, including around **£56 million** of investment in our constituency:



State of the art **£30 million ultraviolet (UV) Treatment facility in Thornham**

£16 million investment to improve Chichester's water infrastructure

80% cut in sewage outflows by 2030



£90 million fine for Southern Water, whilst investigations by Ofwat and the Environment Agency continue



Supported legislation to ensure water companies reduce the impact of sewage discharges on the environment



Chaired **summits with key stakeholders** Ofwat, the Environment Agency and Southern Water



Co-founded the Southern Water Regional Forum to regularly hold the company to account



Convened in **excess of 50 meetings** with **water companies and government agencies.**

How Does Our Sewage System Work

A combined sewer system consists of both wastewater (from toilets, bathrooms, and kitchens) and stormwater



It's called a 'combined' sewer because both of these flow through the same pipes



During normal weather periods, all wastewater is directed to a sewage treatment plant



When it rains heavily, stormwater also enters the system



The combined flow of wastewater and stormwater in heavy rain can overwhelm the Victorian system



To prevent sewage from backing up during heavy rainfall, combined sewer overflows (CSOs) act as relief valves



The CSO's allow excess wastewater to spill elsewhere, avoiding sewage from backing up into homes and businesses, and creating a public health hazard



Highly diluted sewage spills are currently permitted under strict licenses by the Environment Agency (EA)



This means they can legally be used when the existing infrastructure is unable to cope with heavy rainfall



For this reason the Government has legislated to ensure water companies invest significant sums of money to improve capacity and tackle the overuse of CSOs



Can we just stop using CSOs

CSOs (combined sewage overflows) are not a recent phenomenon

The **current combined sewer model** adopted across the country was **built in the Victorian era**

The model consists of **hundreds of thousands of kilometres of combined sewers**

A complete separation of these would remove the need for storm overflows

However recent estimates have suggested this would cost between ***£350 billion and £600 billion**

To put this into context, the estimated **total expenditure for the Ministry of Defence in 2023/24 is roughly *£32.4 billion**

Therefore the **cost of replacing our combined sewer system** would be somewhere **between 10 and 19 times the UK's current spending on defence**

* Estimate for the separation of Storm Overflows taken from Evidence Project, Water UK, November 2021 (page 2)

* Figures for anticipated Defence expenditure are taken from the OBR's (Office for Budget Responsibility 'A Brief guide to the public finances)

Chichester's Action Plan

I have worked to reduce the impact of sewage discharges and improve water quality within the constituency.

Some examples of this work can be found below:

- Demanded Southern Water ***invest in modern sealing of their network** to ensure its capacity can **better manage groundwater infiltration**, which has now been included in their 2025-30 business plan.

**Press Release 'Southern Water Solutions on the Table Following Latest Talks with Gillian Keegan MP' 29th March 2023*

- **Secured the inclusion of UV treatment at Thornham** in Southern Water's 2025-30 business plan, which will go a long way to **reducing levels of harmful bacteria in the water** should the worst happen and overflows occur.

**Press Release 'Southern Water Solutions on the Table Following Latest Talks with Gillian Keegan MP' 29th March 2023*

- Co-founded a regular regional forum with my colleagues Penny Mordaunt MP and Alan Mak MP that regularly **holds Southern Water to account as well as driving action on their current pathfinder projects.**

(see column for more details on pathfinder projects)

- Demanded **improvements to Southern Water's Beachbuoy monitoring system** to improve the accuracy of their data and better understand the scale and impact of discharges within the constituency.

**Gillian Keegan MP Demands Better for Chichester Harbour' 27th January 2023*

- Campaigning to ensure **Chichester District Council submit their proposed local plan** to protect Chichester's environment from speculative development, and further pressure on local sewerage infrastructure.
- A Specific focus of this work has been in **Thornham and Apuldram** where the **proposed Local Plan pledges to *restrict and manage development.**

**Chapter 4: Climate Change and the Natural Environment, paragraph 106 & 107, p85)*

- Demanded that key agencies including Southern Water and the Environment Agency **outline a clear plan to end sewage discharges** in Chichester.



What are 'Pathfinder Projects'

Southern Water's 'major turnaround plan' describes how they will invest to improve their environmental performance by 2025

This plan includes a record investment of ***£3 billion**

It uses this investment to fund a number of pathfinder projects

Pathfinder Projects are a series of trials designed to reduce the use of storm overflows

2023 saw the creation of the wetlands at Lavant Wastewater Treatment Works

Developed to reduce the frequency of storm overflows into Chichester Harbour

The project, involved the planting of more than 1,500 reed plants

This wetland reduces groundwater that would overwhelm Chichester Harbour and the River Lavant

These sites are both impacted by high levels of groundwater overloading

Therefore reducing the use of storm overflows

The Wetlands also removes contaminants such as nitrates from wastewater

**Southern Water press release 'Southern Water delivers against customer and environmental goals 6 months into turnaround plan' 29th November 2023*

**Southern Water Press Release 'West Sussex wetland to boost water quality and help drive down storm overflows into Chichester Harbour' 5th April 2023*

What Has Been Achieved So Far?

1. Better Treatment

- Following my campaign since January 2023, Southern Water have committed to **invest £30 million in UV treatment at Thornham.**
- This means that all **three waste water treatment sites with discharges linked to Chichester Harbour (Thornham, Apuldram and Bosham) will now be treated by UV.**
- This process **destroys disease causing organisms**, meaning water returns to the **environment much cleaner.**

* Press Release 'Southern Water solutions on the table following latest talks with Gillian Keegan MP' (29th March 2023 <https://www.gilliankeegan.com/news/southern-water-solutions-table-following-latest-talks-gillian-keegan-mp>)

2. Better Monitoring

- The Government has achieved its manifesto commitment to **monitor 100% of storm overflows** by the end of 2023.
- **Only 7% were being monitored** in 2010, making this the **first Government truly get to grips with this issue.**
- I regularly meet with Southern Water to ***push for improvements to the modelling and accuracy of their Beachbuoy system**, that provides real-time monitoring of sewage discharges in the catchment.
- Southern Water's **Beachbuoy** system underwent an **independent review last year**, with the improved website set to be launched in Spring 2024.*

*Press Release 'Gillian Keegan MP Demands Better for Chichester Harbour' (27th January 2023) <https://www.gilliankeegan.com/news/gillian-keegan-mp-demands-better-chichester-harbour>

*Southern Water Beachbuoy Website - 'Beachbuoy independent review' <https://www.southernwater.co.uk/water-for-life/beachbuoy>

3. Better Infrastructure

- Southern Water have **committed to sealing approximately 5km of private and public sewers** in the constituency.
- I called for this action to be taken in the wake of prolonged spills between December 2022 and January 2023.*
- This will **greatly reduce groundwater infiltration** which will significantly lessen the strain on the sewerage network.

*Press Release 'Southern Water solutions on the table following latest talks with Gillian Keegan MP' (29th March 2023) <https://www.gilliankeegan.com/news/southern-water-solutions-table-following-latest-talks-gillian-keegan-mp>



Within the last investment period (2020-25) Southern Water have invested heavily to improve local infrastructure

These investments have centred around reducing infiltration and increasing the networks capacity

Both of these will significantly reduce the use of storm overflows

They will reduce the amount of wastewater in the network, while also increasing that networks overall capacity

Improvements include a **£21.5 million investment** to improve the **Summer Lane Water Treatment Works in Pagham**

£1.2 million and £800,000 respectively to improve sites at **South Ambersham and Sidlesham**

Nationally, water companies are legally required to deliver their largest ever infrastructure investment

This consists of ***£56 billion** capital investment over 25 years

Between 2020 to 2025, **water companies are investing *£7.1 billion** to protect and improve the environment

Of this, ***£3.1 billion** is being ringfenced for **storm overflow improvements**

*Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) press release titled 'Toughest targets ever introduced will crack down on sewage spills' (26th August 2022)

*DEFRA press release titled 'Delivering the water quality we all want to see' (16th May 2022)

Our National Approach

Storm Overflow Discharge Reduction Plan

Stringent new targets to protect people and the environment.

The plan requires water companies to deliver the **largest infrastructure programme in their history**.

- By 2035, water companies will have to **improve all storm overflows** discharging around any designated bathing water.
- By 2035 they will also need to **improve 75% of overflows** discharging into high priority nature sites.
- By 2050, **these rules will apply to all remaining storm overflows** regardless of location.

Overflows that are causing the **most harm** will be **addressed first** to make the biggest difference as soon as possible.

The **Government will review this plan in 2027** to see where it can go further to end storm overflows.

The Environment Act 2021

Setting an **ambitious framework for environmental governance** including **strong safeguards** to protect against waste and water pollution.

The Environment Act 2021 introduced:

- **Legally Binding Targets:** Ambitious objectives on water quality to tackle the most significant pressures on our environment.
- **Reduction of Sewage Discharges:** Clamping down on water companies that discharge sewage into rivers, waterways, and coastlines.
- **Imposing new legal duties** on water companies to secure a reduction in the adverse impacts of discharges.

The Government's Plan for Water

Investing **£1.6 billion to reduce sewage discharges**.

Strengthening the powers of regulators to **hold water companies to account**.

Unlimited fines for companies that damage the environment.

Banning bonuses for water executives whose firms act illegally.

The plan also launched the **Water Restoration Fund**.

To guarantee **finances from water company profits** will be channelled into projects that **improve our environment**.

(OEP) Office for Environmental Protection

Established in January 2022 the OEP is an **independent statutory body** to **protect our environment**. Its key functions are:

Scrutinising and advising on the implementation of environmental laws.

Investigating complaints concerning breaches of environmental law by public authorities, including the Government.

Authorised to take **legal action** in serious cases.

Operationally independent from the Government.



What is the water quality like in our constituency

The Environment Agency collects water quality data each year from May to September across the UK's designated bathing sites

This accurately grades bathing sites across the UK to ensure they are safe and clean for swimming and other activities

Our **current constituency consists of 3 designated bathing sites:**

West Wittering

Bracklesham Bay

Selsey

All 3 of these designated bathing sites have achieved the **highest classification of "excellent" every year since 2019.***

These water quality assessments are **measured under the European Bathing Waters Directive Classification**

More information on this can be found on the Environment Agency's Swimfo Website

*Data according to Environment Agency data which can be found on the Swimfo Website <https://environment.data.gov.uk/bwq/profiles/>



Mythbuster

There has been a huge amount of misinformation regarding the issue of sewage spills and water quality.

Here are just a few examples:

Claim: Legal restrictions on sewage overflows have been reduced

- I have **always voted to increase restrictions and monitoring of sewage overflows.**
- **Claims that any permit conditions have been relaxed are untrue.**
- All **discharges that were unlawful** before the Environment Act are **still unlawful.**

Claim: Sewage overflows can be turned off immediately

- **Turning off sewage overflows** will result in sewage **backing up into homes and businesses.**
- Upgrading the entire network immediately would **cause huge disruption to our roads and lives.**
- It would **cost between *£350 - 600 Billion.**
*Estimated cost from the Rivers Trust
- To put this into context, all central government departments combined are expected to spend £421.7 billion in the 2023/24 financial year.

(According to the Office for Budget Responsibility's 'Brief guide to the public finances')

- The Government's **plan is the only fully costed, feasible option.**
- The plan requires the **largest ever infrastructure investment in water company history.**

Claim: The Government are not doing anything to tackle storm discharges.

- Currently **investing in improvements to 800 overflows.**
- Whilst water companies are **currently investing £3.1 billion in storm overflow improvements.**
- Introducing proposals to **ban bonuses for water companies.**

Claim: Underfunding of the Environment Agency (EA) has caused more sewage pollution.

- The Government has **increased the Environment Agency's overall funding by over 40%.**
- **Capital funding has risen by 80%** since 2010.
- **The Government has recently given an extra £2.2 million per year to the EA** for water company enforcement activity.
- Since 2015 it has **brought 58 prosecutions** against water companies, **securing fines of over £142 million.**



West Wittering Beach, in our constituency, is a Blue Flag beach,

The Blue Flag is one of the **world's most recognised voluntary awards for beaches.**

In order to qualify for the Blue Flag, a series of **stringent environmental criteria must be met and maintained**

West Wittering Beach is **1 of only 77 beaches** to have this award in the **whole of England**

It has **held the award consecutively for the last 20 years**

More information can be found on the official Blue Flag website: <https://www.blueflag.global/>

The Work Continues...

We have already made significant improvements to infrastructure, monitoring and treatment.

However the work continues and some of the future projects and initiatives I will be pushing for as your MP will include...

1. Reducing standing water and flooding

Pushing Southern Water to **invest in the rollout of smart water butts and planters** across our constituency.

Facilitating collaboration between Southern Water and local councils to **implement sustainable drainage systems along our highways.**

Helping to **reduce the levels of standing water** that often flood the constituency during wet weather events.



2. Nature-Based Drainage Schemes

Campaigning for Southern Water to **invest in nature based solutions to reduce flooding and surface water run-off.**

These solutions include **wetlands and tree planting schemes** that will **tackle excess groundwater** whilst embracing our constituency's environment.



3. Improvements to pumping station infrastructure

Demanding Southern Water conduct **detailed assessments of sewerage infrastructure around the constituency** to inform future upgrades, investment and improvements.

Investment in Chichester

Southern Water have committed to significant spending in our constituency in their next investment period (2025-30).

This includes:

Thornham - £30 million

Chichester - £16 million

Lavant - £8 million

Bosham - £1.4 million

Sidlesham - £500,000

Pagham - £500,000

This means our constituency will receive roughly **£56 million** worth of investment to tackle storm overflows in the next five year period.



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