



Waterwatch Southend Community Water Quality Summit

Leigh On Sea Sailing Club

7 August 2026

Chair: Anna Firth

Presenters and Contributors

Representatives attended from:

David Burton-Sampson MP's office

Bayo Alaba MP's office

Anglian Water

Southend-on-Sea City Council

Environment Agency

Sea Life Adventure

Southend Against Sewage

Waterwatch UK

Local businesses, community groups, councillors and residents

1. Opening of Meeting

Anna Firth opened the meeting and welcomed attendees to the latest Waterwatch Southend Community Water Quality Summit.

The Chair introduced Hollie Wells, who has joined Anglian Water and is working within Southend-on-Sea City Council on the A-WINEP programme.

Hollie explained that her role focuses on reducing spills and flooding through partnership-led interventions. She also highlighted her previous experience in sustainability and social impact and her personal connection to Southend.

The Chair noted the continued strong attendance at the summits and asked attendees who had not registered through Waterwatch UK to provide their details so that an accurate record of participation could be maintained.

2. Adoption of Previous Minutes

The minutes of the 22 May 2026 summit were reviewed.

No amendments were raised to the May minutes.

The Chair also returned to an outstanding clarification from the February summit regarding Anglian Water's position on storm overflow reductions.

Following review of the February recording, it was clarified that Dr Robin Price had referred to the potential to achieve a 75% reduction in storm overflow use by 2030 using conventional storage solutions. The later discussion had clarified that delivery through greener interventions would require a longer timeframe, potentially to 2035.

The clarification was noted.

3. Parliamentary Update

David Burton-Sampson MP

An update was provided on behalf of David Burton-Sampson MP.

Wet Wipes Labelling, Sale and Marketing Bill

Following discussions at previous Water Summits, David Burton-Sampson MP is progressing a Ten Minute Rule Bill addressing the labelling and marketing of wet wipes.

The proposed Bill would seek to:

- Prevent wet wipes being marketed or labelled as “flushable”.
- Require clearer “do not flush” messaging.
- Improve public understanding of the impact wet wipes have on sewer infrastructure.

The Bill is expected to be introduced in Parliament on 14 October 2026.

Anglian Water highlighted that wet wipes create impacts beyond pollution incidents. These include pump failures, equipment damage, maintenance costs and staff time which could otherwise be used for preventative work.



Attendees discussed opportunities to build wider public awareness around the Bill, including media activity and potentially a public petition following its introduction.

Water Restoration Fund

The meeting returned to the outstanding question from the May summit regarding the Water Restoration Fund.

The Chair clarified that the specific information requested was whether any of the 51 projects receiving funding are located within the Southend area.

David Burton-Sampson MP's office agreed to investigate and report back.

Bayo Alaba MP

An update was also provided on behalf of Bayo Alaba MP.

The meeting heard that work since the previous summit had included:

- Raising sewage discharge concerns with Anglian Water, Ofwat and the Environment Agency.
- Calling for improved transparency and accountability.
- Engagement with the Water Minister on wet wipes and sewer blockages.
- Engagement on national water reform legislation.
- Raising concerns regarding local lakes and the effect of drought conditions on wildlife and habitats.
- Discussions with Southend Against Sewage regarding water quality and infrastructure.
- Raising local concerns affecting the Three Shells lagoon and other areas with Southend-on-Sea City Council.

4. Community Presentation: Sea Life Adventure

Sea Life Adventure presented an overview of its growing local conservation and research programme focused on the Thames Estuary.

Areas of work include:

- Community beach cleans and litter monitoring.

- Research relating to European eels.
- Native oyster conservation.
- Water quality monitoring.
- Education and public engagement.
- Partnerships with universities, conservation organisations and local groups.

Water Quality Monitoring

Sea Life Adventure explained that water from the Thames is drawn into the aquarium to supply its displays.

Monitoring had identified occasions where bacterial levels in incoming water were significantly higher than recommended bathing water levels.

This prompted increased monitoring and the development of Project Tidal, which aims to explore the use of genomic techniques to better understand microbial communities within the Thames.

A funding application has been submitted to support metagenomic sequencing of water samples.

The project would seek to identify microbes present in the water and understand how microbial communities respond to pollutants and changing environmental conditions.

The intention is not to replace existing statutory monitoring but to add another layer of evidence and make water quality information more accessible to communities.

Sea Life Adventure also outlined work to integrate local Thames Estuary conservation into exhibitions, schools activity and public education.

Discussion highlighted the importance of distinguishing between bacterial measurements relevant to human bathing health and wider ecological health.

5. Southend Against Sewage Presentation

Southend Against Sewage presented evidence collected following a number of highly visible discharges from the Elizabeth Road outfall during July and early August.

The presentation included photographs, video footage, observations from Southchurch Park and independent water sampling.

Southend Against Sewage stressed that its concern was not an assertion that raw sewage was routinely being discharged from Elizabeth Road.

The central questions raised were:

- What water was being discharged?
- Why were the visible discharges occurring?
- What was the source of the water?
- What monitoring and public notification systems applied?
- What potential implications existed for swimmers using the nearby beach?

Independent samples presented by Southend Against Sewage were reported as showing elevated E. coli levels in samples taken from Southchurch Park and a highway drain.

Concern was also expressed that highly visible outfall activity could occur without corresponding public alerts, creating uncertainty for swimmers and residents.

6. Elizabeth Road Outfall

Given the concerns raised, the Chair asked Anglian Water to respond directly before continuing with the wider agenda.

Anglian Water stated that there was no evidence that sewage had been pumped from the Elizabeth Road pumping station during 2026.

Anglian Water also agreed to check the precise monitoring arrangements associated with the site.

The meeting heard that:

- Southchurch Park lake was not overflowing its main weir at the time of the incidents examined.
- A persistent source of water appeared to be entering the pumping system independently of the lake overflowing.
- The system can contain saline water entering through the wider drainage infrastructure.
- Samples taken by Anglian Water had not indicated ammonia associated with sewage.
- The visible force of the discharge can be caused partly by air within the pumping system.

Anglian Water emphasised that Elizabeth Road forms part of a surface water system rather than a conventional combined sewer overflow discharge.

Discussion highlighted the complexity of ownership across drainage infrastructure and the difficulty of identifying responsibility for individual pipes, outfalls and associated assets.

Public Communication and Signage

There was significant discussion about how visible surface water discharges should be communicated to residents and visitors.

Attendees agreed that highly visible outfalls can create understandable concern, particularly when people do not know what they are seeing.

Options discussed included:

- Clear public information explaining sources of surface water.
- Beach signage.
- Information on existing council resort boards.
- Social media communication.
- Coordinated messaging between Anglian Water, Southend-on-Sea City Council and community organisations.

Waterwatch UK confirmed that work was already underway to establish a multi-stakeholder working group initially focused on water quality data and monitoring.

7. Thames Estuary Ecology and Marine Life

A community presentation was provided on changing marine life within the Thames Estuary and along the Southend foreshore.

The presentation highlighted observations of increasing abundance and diversity of some species, including:

- Bass.
- Black bream.
- Stingrays.
- Native oysters.
- Razor clams.

- Manila clams.
- Ragworm.

The presentation suggested that warmer water and wider environmental changes are contributing to changes in the species found locally.

Discussion recognised that ecological health and human bathing water quality are different measures and should not be treated as interchangeable.

8. Anglian Water Investment Programme

Anglian Water provided an update on its Southend investment programme.

Bathing Water Programme

Anglian Water confirmed that work is progressing on additional storm storage intended to reduce spills affecting bathing waters.

Potential interventions include approximately 1,500 cubic metres of additional storage.

Seaway Car Park remains one of the locations under consideration.

Survey work has already taken place at Hartington Road, with further investigations required.

Additional survey work is planned following the summer season.

The current programme is targeting delivery during 2027.

A-WINEP Programme

Anglian Water also provided an update on the wider A-WINEP programme.

The programme is considering more than 100 potential interventions across identified catchments.

A “green first” approach is being explored, including:

- Rain gardens.
- Tree pits.
- Sustainable drainage.
- Permeable paving.

- Landscaped storage areas.
- Above-ground surface water storage.
- Property-level interventions.

The programme is currently at an early optioneering stage and individual interventions are not yet confirmed.

Anglian Water and Southend-on-Sea City Council are working jointly to assess which opportunities are practical.

Early trial sites are also being explored so that interventions can begin before the wider programme moves into full delivery.

The overall A-WINEP programme has a March 2035 delivery deadline.

A request was made for future Water Summits to receive a clear programme tracker showing individual projects, status and indicative delivery dates.

9. Investigation of Previous Outfall Incidents

Anglian Water reviewed a number of incidents previously raised through the Water Summits.

Camper Road

The meeting heard that Camper Road is a surface water outfall which also receives flow associated with a combined sewer overflow upstream.

Anglian Water stated that the relevant EDM had shown no combined sewer overflow discharge during the incident previously raised.

The Environment Agency investigation had concluded that the discharge was associated with a burst potable water main operated by Essex & Suffolk Water.

The Environment Agency confirmed that the investigation had taken place and agreed that further feedback should be provided to those who originally reported the incident.

Gypsy Bridge

A previous report concerning foam around the Gypsy Bridge outfall was also discussed.

The meeting heard that similar naturally occurring marine foam had been observed across parts of Essex, Suffolk and Norfolk at the time.

The Environment Agency agreed to follow up the incident report and provide feedback.

Surface Water and Pollution

Anglian Water stressed that surface water outfalls can contain contaminants unrelated to the foul sewer network.

Potential sources include:

- Highway runoff.
- Misconnections.
- Burst water mains.
- Illegal discharges.
- Paint and chemicals entering highway drains.
- Oil and fuel.
- Blocked foul sewers overflowing into surface drainage.

The meeting agreed that the absence of sewage does not automatically mean that water discharged from a surface water outfall is clean or suitable for bathing.

This reinforced the need for clear reporting, investigation and public communication.

10. Reporting and Responsible Communication

Discussion took place regarding how potential pollution incidents are reported publicly.

Anglian Water encouraged residents to continue reporting suspected incidents to both Anglian Water and the Environment Agency where appropriate.

The Environment Agency confirmed that it cannot always provide individual feedback following every report because of the volume received, but acknowledged the importance of feedback in the Southend context.

The Chair asked the Environment Agency to consider whether communication could be improved, particularly where investigations establish that an incident was not pollution.

The meeting also discussed the importance of updating public information when investigations subsequently establish the cause of an incident.

All attendees agreed that abuse or threats directed towards operational staff, community representatives, councillors or other individuals are unacceptable.

Southend Against Sewage confirmed that an inappropriate social media comment directed at Anglian Water staff had been removed when brought to its attention and that the individual concerned had been contacted, with potential for onward referral to the police.

The meeting supported continued robust scrutiny alongside respectful communication between organisations and individuals.

11. Southend-on-Sea City Council Update

Southend-on-Sea City Council provided an update covering gullies, surface water infrastructure, outfalls, Blue Flags and development.

Gully Programme

The Council confirmed that approximately 23,000 gullies across the city have now been surveyed.

The previous approach of routinely cleaning every gully annually is being replaced by a risk and priority-based programme.

This will allow resources to focus on:

- Known hotspots.
- Gullies with high silt levels.
- Locations presenting greater flood risk.
- Areas where drainage performance is known to be poor.

Access remains an issue where parked vehicles prevent cleansing equipment reaching gullies.

The Council is considering traffic management options to improve access.

The Chair repeated an earlier request that ward councillors should receive indicative information showing when gully cleansing is expected within their wards.

The Council agreed to provide as much scheduling information as practical.

Outfall Repairs

The Council confirmed that it has 83 relevant outfalls.

Of these:

- 57 have either been repaired or assessed as not requiring intervention.
- 26 remain within the programme.

Work on the remaining outfalls, broadly between Chalkwell and Sea Life Adventure, is expected to begin after the school summer holidays.

The Council expects the programme to be completed within the current financial year.

12. Blue Flag Beaches

Southend-on-Sea City Council confirmed its continued commitment to the Blue Flag programme.

The meeting heard that bathing water quality is the first threshold for eligibility.

Only beaches classified as “Excellent” can proceed to a Blue Flag application.

Once that threshold is met, other criteria include:

- Beach management.
- Accessibility.
- Public information.
- Safety provision.
- Infrastructure.
- Facilities.

The Council confirmed that the number of Southend beaches eligible for Blue Flag applications has changed as bathing water classifications have changed.

The meeting agreed that improving water quality classification remains fundamental to recovering additional Blue Flags.

13. Planning and Development

The Council confirmed that Bournes Green remains subject to a live planning application and therefore officers could not comment on the merits of the application.

Regarding the Salvation Army proposals within Castle Point, Southend-on-Sea City Council confirmed that it had objected to the location through the relevant local plan process.

Further information on that objection is available through the Castle Point planning process.

14. Environment Agency Bathing Water Update

The Environment Agency provided an update on 2026 bathing water sampling.

Approximately 11 samples had been taken at that stage of the bathing season, against an expected total of approximately 20 samples per location.

The Environment Agency reported that results had generally been very good during the dry summer.

One notable exception was a sample from Jubilee Beach on 4 June, where an elevated E. coli result was recorded.

The sample had been taken before a later thunderstorm which triggered some combined sewer overflows.

The Environment Agency explained that periods of dry weather followed by rainfall can result in a “first flush” from roads, gullies, ditches and other surface drainage.

The meeting was reminded that the presence of E. coli does not automatically establish sewage pollution.

Bathing water classifications are based on four years of monitoring data rather than individual samples.

15. Prittle Brook

The meeting returned to concerns regarding Prittle Brook, including vegetation, debris, pollution and uncertainty over ownership and maintenance responsibilities.

The Environment Agency explained that responsibility depends heavily upon riparian ownership.

Landowners adjoining a watercourse can have responsibilities extending to the centre of the watercourse.

The Environment Agency has permissive powers to intervene where blockages create a flood risk, but those powers do not necessarily extend to maintenance for visual or amenity reasons and where made aware of problem areas (locations and photos), they could provide Land Registry search to help identify owners.

Anglian Water confirmed that land between its boundary and parts of the brook is not owned by Anglian Water and may involve railway land.

Southend-on-Sea City Council referred to previous work identifying riparian owners following earlier flooding events.

A specific location near Priory Crescent Bridge was raised.

The Council requested a map or screenshot identifying the precise area so that responsibility could be investigated before the next summit.

The Chair confirmed this as an action point.

16. Public Alerts and Monitoring

A question was raised regarding a recent public alert which remained active for an extended period despite no apparent rainfall.

Anglian Water representatives indicated that investigation had not identified an actual discharge but that work was continuing to establish why the alert had been triggered and why it remained active.

The issue reinforced previous concerns raised through the summit regarding false alerts and inconsistencies in public-facing monitoring information.

17. Water Data Quality Monitoring Working Group

Waterwatch UK provided an update on the new multi-stakeholder Water Data Quality Monitoring Working Group first proposed at the May summit.

Daniella Boon confirmed that an invitation had been circulated and that responses had already been received from councillors and Anglian Water representatives.

Further participation is being sought from community organisations and other stakeholders.

The working group will provide a dedicated forum to examine issues including:

- Differences between monitoring and alert platforms.



- False or unexplained alerts.
- Communication of surface water incidents.
- Public understanding of water quality data.
- Feedback following reported incidents.
- Opportunities for clearer multi-agency communication.

Interested attendees were invited to contact Waterwatch UK to participate.

KEY THEMES

- Surface water systems remain poorly understood and require clearer public communication.
- Visible outfall activity does not automatically indicate sewage discharge, but surface water can still contain contaminants.
- Investigation and feedback following reported incidents need to become faster and clearer.
- Significant investment in sustainable drainage and spill reduction is progressing through Anglian Water and Southend-on-Sea City Council.
- Asset ownership remains a recurring barrier to resolving local drainage and watercourse issues.
- Bathing water results during 2026 have generally been positive, although individual elevated results require continued scrutiny.
- Recovering additional Blue Flags depends first on achieving “Excellent” bathing water classifications.
- Community evidence and reporting continue to identify issues requiring investigation.
- Public reporting should remain robust while distinguishing confirmed facts from incidents still under investigation.
- The new Water Data Quality Monitoring Working Group will provide a dedicated forum for resolving monitoring and communication issues.

FORMAL ACTION LOG

Ref	Action	Owner	Deadline	Status
A1	Confirm whether any Water Restoration Fund projects are located within the Southend area	David Burton-Sampson MP's Office	Next Summit	Open
A2	Continue development of the Wet Wipes Labelling, Sale and Marketing Bill and consider opportunities for local awareness activity	David Burton-Sampson MP's Office	14 October 2026	Ongoing
A3	Confirm monitoring arrangements associated with the Elizabeth Road outfall and clarify any outstanding technical points	Anglian Water	Next Summit	Open
A4	Explore public-facing communication and signage explaining surface water outfalls and naturally occurring coastal phenomena	Anglian Water / Southend City Council / Waterwatch UK	Next Summit	Open
A5	Provide a clearer A-WINEP programme tracker showing project status and indicative delivery stages at future summits	Anglian Water	Future Summits	Open
A6	Provide feedback on the Environment Agency investigations into Camper Road and Gypsy Bridge incidents	Environment Agency	As soon as practical	Open
A7	Consider improved feedback to those reporting incidents, particularly where investigations establish no pollution occurred	Environment Agency	Next Summit	Open
A8	Progress remaining 26 council outfall interventions	Southend City Council	Current financial year	Ongoing
A9	Provide ward councillors with clearer indicative information regarding gully cleansing schedules	Southend City Council	Next Summit	Open
A10	Provide Waterwatch UK with the Council's riparian ownership guidance for publication with the minutes	Southend City Council	With minutes	Open

A11	Investigate ownership and maintenance responsibilities for the identified section of Prittle Brook near Priory Crescent Bridge following receipt of a location map	Southend City Council / relevant agencies	Next Summit	Open
A1 2	Investigate the recent public alert which remained active despite no confirmed discharge	Anglian Water	Next Summit	Open
A1 3	Convene the first meeting of the Water Data Quality Monitoring Working Group	Waterwatch UK	August 2026	In progress
A1 4	Seek additional community and stakeholder representation for the Water Data Quality Monitoring Working Group	Waterwatch UK	August 2026	In progress

REGULATORY, DELIVERY AND COMMITMENTS TRACKER

Ref	Commitment / Position Stated	Organisation	Timescale / Context	Follow-up
R1	Bathing water storm storage programme progressing	Anglian Water	Target 2027	Future summit updates
R2	Wider A-WINEP spill reduction programme progressing using green-first optioneering	Anglian Water	To March 2035	Programme tracker
R3	Approximately 1,500m ³ storm storage being considered within bathing water programme	Anglian Water	Design / optioneering	Ongoing
R4	More than 100 potential green infrastructure opportunities being assessed	Anglian Water / Southend City Council	Early optioneering	Ongoing

R5	All approximately 23,000 Southend gullies surveyed	Southend City Council	Completed survey stage	Priority cleansing programme
R6	26 remaining council outfalls programmed for intervention	Southend City Council	Current financial year	Progress update
R7	Only bathing waters classified "Excellent" are eligible for Blue Flag application	Southend City Council	Annual classification process	Review following classifications
R8	2026 bathing water samples generally showing strong results, with one notable elevated Jubilee Beach result discussed	Environment Agency	2026 bathing season	Continue statutory sampling
R9	Surface water outfalls may contain contaminants even where no sewage discharge has occurred	Anglian Water / Environment Agency	Public information	Communication work required
R10	Elizabeth Road incidents discussed were not identified by Anglian Water as sewage pumping events	Anglian Water	Investigation presented 7 August	Outstanding technical clarification
R11	Camper Road incident attributed following investigation to a burst potable water main	Environment Agency / Essex & Suffolk Water	Investigation completed	Feedback to reporter
R12	Water Data Quality Monitoring Working Group being established	Waterwatch UK	August 2026	First meeting to be convened

Next Meeting

The next Waterwatch Southend Community Water Quality Summit is scheduled for:

Friday 30 October 2026.

Publication Disclaimer



These minutes are intended as a summary record of discussions and presentations delivered at the Waterwatch Southend Community Water Quality Summit held on 7 August 2026.

They are not intended to be a verbatim transcript.

Statements relating to technical, regulatory, scientific or legal matters reflect comments made during the meeting and should not be relied upon as formal regulatory guidance.

References to positions, findings or commitments reflect information presented by attendees and have not necessarily been independently verified by Waterwatch UK.

Attachments

<https://waterwatchuk.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/08/Riparian-Ownership-Leaflet.pdf>

<https://waterwatchuk.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/08/Southend-Summit-August-2026-Anglian-Water-Presentation.pptx>