

Questions at the Event

Question:

Has the Edenbridge treatment plant (built in the 1950s) had any major upgrades since then?

Answer:

Yes, it has had upgrades. Southern Water mentioned upgrades to the pumps and a ferric system upgrade. Southern Water added that there has been investment in the very recent past. Southern Water will follow up with a detailed breakdown of the investment.

Question:

How does Southern Water get involved with developers and planning at an early stage to ensure correct capacity?

Answer:

Southern Water explained that water companies are not statutory consultees on planning applications. They can comment if asked but cannot refuse connection. Southern Water is campaigning to change this situation.

Question:

Is there a plan to convert to a two-pipe system (separate sewage and surface water)?

Answer:

No specific plan was mentioned. Southern Water noted that such a conversion would cause major disruption and require significant investment.

Question:

Why can't developers pay for infrastructure upgrades?

Answer:

This question wasn't directly answered. Southern Water representatives noted it was outside their decision-making power.

Question:

What is being done about the condemned tanks at the Edenbridge treatment works?

Answer:

Southern Water couldn't comment on this specific operational issue. Southern Water will follow up on this question after speaking with their operations team.

Question:

Is the water that runs off roads and fields clean, or does it need treatment?

Answer:

Southern Water explained that road runoff can contain various pollutants like oils and fuel, which can be harmful to treatment works and the environment. It's not a simple solution to send it directly to rivers.

Question:

Was Southern Water consulted on the Reg 18 local plan?

Answer:

Southern Water wasn't sure but promised to find out and follow up on whether they commented on it.

Question:

How accurately can flood risks be assessed for new developments?

Answer:

Southern Water explained that flood risk assessment is the Environment Agency's responsibility, not Southern Water's. However, Southern Water mentioned that modern modelling techniques can predict groundwater issues quite accurately.

Question:

What modelling figures does Southern Water use for rainfall predictions, considering climate change?

Answer:

Southern Water believes they do look at global warming figures, but this is sourced out to a business partner. Southern Water will follow up with more detailed information on this.

Question:**Why wasn't there mention of planting trees as part of the water management strategy?**

Answer:

A Southern Water representative explained that while they're not actively planting forests, they have to meet biodiversity net gain targets. This means replacing any green areas removed during their work, plus an additional 10%.

Question:**What is being done about the inadequate sewage system in Edenbridge, especially with projected housing growth?**

Answer:

Southern Water acknowledged the concerns but noted they legally can't refuse connections to new developments. They mentioned their planned £28 million investment for Edenbridge to tackle storm overflows, but didn't provide specific details about expanding system capacity.

Question:**How can the community add their voice to press for water companies to become statutory consultees in the planning process?**

Answer:

Southern Water representatives encouraged continued lobbying of MPs and councillors, and to keep holding Southern Water accountable.

Question:**Would Southern Water Host an Event to the sewerage works?**

Answer:

Southern Water from Southern Water offered to organise tours of the Edenbridge wastewater treatment works for interested residents. He stated, "If someone wanted to come and have a tour around Edenbridge wastewater treatment works, we would absolutely organise that so we can show you what we're doing. Because we have nothing to hide."

Question:

A question was raised about the data used in modelling. A local Cllr mentioned that when asking about rainfall figures, he was told they were using data from the late 1950s with a percentage added on top to account for changes. He pointed out that this approach might not be adequate, given that events previously considered "once in 100 years" are now happening multiple times a year. Southern Water representatives acknowledged this concern and committed to following up with more detailed information on their modelling approach and the data they use.

Answer:

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Question:**Is there any plan for a moratorium on payments to shareholders during the investment period?**

Answer:

Southern Water clarified that Southern Water hasn't paid any external dividends to shareholders since 2017. This decision was made by shareholders and the board, with the intention of not paying shareholders until improvements are seen.

Question:**How much liaison is there with other water companies or authorities in shared catchment areas?**

Answer:

Southern Water emphasized that collaboration with other water companies, stakeholders, local authorities, Wildlife Trusts, and communities is key. He mentioned that there's probably not been enough of this in the past, but moving forward, there is a lot of close contact and working groups with all involved parties.

Question:

What about the debt financing that Southern Water is engaged in? This question was raised by an audience member who pointed out that while Southern Water may not be paying dividends, they are financing a significant amount of debt (mentioned as 5.7 billion). The implication was that this is still a form of using customer money instead of improving infrastructure. Southern Water representatives did not directly address this point during the meeting.

Answer:

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Question:

What is being done about houses that are not on main drains, particularly in rural areas around Edenbridge?

Answer:

This issue was raised by multiple audience members, highlighting the pollution risk from septic tanks and other non-mains sewage systems. Southern Water didn't provide a specific plan for addressing this but acknowledged it as an issue. They offered to look into specific cases if details were provided.

Question:

Is Southern Water mapping surface water systems in Edenbridge?

Answer:

Southern Water representative (possibly James) mentioned that Edenbridge has a lot of foul mapped sewers but not much in the way of surface water mapping. He suggested that there are likely unmapped surface water areas and lines, possibly managed by the local authority. He indicated that mapping these systems would be one of the first steps in understanding and addressing drainage issues in Edenbridge.

Question:

What sustainable drainage solutions is Southern Water implementing in other areas?

Answer:

The representatives mentioned several sustainable drainage solutions they're implementing in various areas, including:

Installation of tree pits in Margate

Implementation of "Central gates" in Winstonfil that use AI to manage sewage flow

Creation of attenuation tanks and swales in new developments

They emphasized that solutions vary depending on the specific needs of each area.

Question:

What happens when the sewer lining fails?

Answer:

Southern Water explained that the lining material goes rock hard and has a 75-80 year lifespan. If it fails, they would come back and redo it. He emphasized that this method is less disruptive than replacing pipes, even if it's not necessarily cheaper.

Question:

How much does the sewer lining process cost?

Answer:

Southern Water provided a specific example, stating that for the Fairlight project, lining about two kilometres of sewer would cost just shy of £400,000.

Question:

Is there a way to separate foul water from surface water for houses not on main drains? This question wasn't directly answered, but it led to a discussion about the challenges of connecting rural properties to main sewers and the costs involved.

Answer:

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Question:

What is being done about misconnections where surface water is entering the foul network or vice versa?

Answer:

A Southern Water representative explained that they are actively working on identifying and correcting misconnections. They gave an example of work done in Tankerton Circus to redirect a surface water line that was incorrectly connected to the foul network.

Question:

How effective are the slow drain water butts in reducing storm overflows?

Answer:

Southern Water provided an example from Haven Street on the Isle of Wight, where installing 130 slow drain water butts in customers' homes helped reduce spills at the local pumping station by 70%.

Question:

What educational initiatives is Southern Water undertaking?

Answer:

Southern Water mentioned that they deliver school assemblies when installing rain planters at schools. These assemblies teach children about the combined sewer system and the importance of managing surface water runoff.

Questions Following the Event

Question:

How can Developers build houses in an area where the Water Company cannot cope with the present number of houses? Is it not a responsible action for the Water companies to advise the Government of this situation?

Answer:

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Question:

Would it not be a good idea for new developments to have water storage tanks built into basements of houses.

Answer:

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Question:

When will all these new plans for handling excess rain water be up and running, as it is now urgent.

Answer:

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Question:

The Hever Triathlon was cancelled due to E.coli fears. What is being done to clean up the River Eden. Also is it harmful to be a resident with a dog who walks through these flood waters?

Answer:

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