

# Summary of NEDRA Meeting 3 October 2024 with Southern Water

**Date & Time:** October 3, 2024, | Duration: 1 hour, 31 minutes

**Hosted by:** NEDRA

**Special Guests:** Southern Water

**Main Topics:** River pollution, Southern Water's future plans, and storm overflows in Edenbridge

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## 1. Welcome and Introduction

Attendees were welcomed to NEDRA's first daytime meeting. The meeting was primarily focused on river pollution and storm overflows, with special guests from Southern Water's Clean Rivers and Seas Task Force in attendance.

Key points:

- River pollution, specifically in the River Eden, was the primary focus of the meeting.
  - Attendees were invited to engage in future surveys and citizen science projects to monitor the river's health and to volunteer to assist.
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## 2. Presentation by NEDRA on River Eden

NEDRA provided an overview of past and ongoing efforts to monitor and improve the health of the River Eden, highlighting the results of surveys and tests conducted in the river. The focus was on the various pollutants affecting the river, including pharmaceuticals, pesticides, and agricultural runoff.

Key points:

- The River Eden is currently facing significant pollution challenges.
  - High nitrate and phosphate levels are affecting aquatic life, particularly insect larvae, which are crucial to the food chain.
  - There was emphasis on the need for continued citizen involvement and highlights of past projects like the Big River Watch and the Water Blitz.
  - NEDRA aims to set up a local water-testing program which will require additional funding and support from the community.
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## 3. Presentation by Southern Water Task Force

Representatives from Southern Water provided insights into the company's upcoming five-year business plan (2025-2030) and the significant investment of £28 million for Edenbridge's storm overflow and wastewater treatment infrastructure. Southern Water representatives emphasised the importance of reducing storm overflows, supporting customers, and addressing environmental concerns.

Key points:

- Southern Water has proposed an £8 billion investment plan to improve water management across the region, double the previous investment.
  - The company is working to reduce storm overflows and address environmental degradation with a £1.5 billion budget allocated for reducing these overflows.
  - Plans are in place to support residents financially, especially with rising costs. Tariff discounts and hardship funds are available for those in need.
  - Investment will focus on upgrading wastewater systems, building wetlands, and supporting community projects aimed at reducing surface water runoff.
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#### **4. Community Concerns and Q&A Session**

Attendees raised concerns about the adequacy of local wastewater treatment facilities, the potential effects of new housing developments on the local sewage infrastructure, and the accuracy of flood risk assessments.

Key points from the discussion:

- Many residents expressed concern that the Edenbridge wastewater treatment plant, built in the 1950s, is inadequate for the current and future population.
  - There was frustration over the lack of coordination between developers and water companies, with residents pushing for better planning to account for environmental risks, especially with new developments.
  - Southern Water representatives acknowledged these issues and stated that upgrades to wastewater systems and storm tank capacities are being evaluated but require regulatory approval and funding.
  - Residents also highlighted concerns about how surface water runoff from roads and developments is being managed, as this contributes to river pollution.
  - Southern Water informed residents that there is no legal requirement for planners and developers to consult with Southern Water on developments.
  - Southern Water referred to their website, which they say has information on the future work for Edenbridge.
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#### **5. Southern Water's Response to Storm Overflows**

Southern Water explained how storm tanks work to prevent flooding and the importance of reducing surface water entering the sewage system.

Key points:

- They explained the mechanics of storm overflows, detailing how the excess surface water is managed during heavy rainfall events.
- Southern Water is investing in solutions like water storage, wetland construction, and drainage systems to minimise storm overflow impacts on local rivers.
- They emphasised the need for further investment in infrastructure to prevent overflow into rivers, which often happens during periods of intense rainfall.

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## **6. Future Actions and Next Steps**

The meeting concluded with a summary of upcoming actions for NEDRA and Southern Water. NEDRA encouraged more residents to get involved in river monitoring projects, and Southern Water committed to providing updates on planned upgrades to local treatment facilities.

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## **Closing Note**

This meeting addressed crucial concerns related to river health, pollution, and water infrastructure in Edenbridge. NEDRA is keen to involve more community members in ongoing projects, and Southern Water will continue to provide updates on their business plans and environmental efforts.

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## **Actions**

### **Actions for NEDRA:**

#### **1. Community Engagement and Volunteering:**

- Encourage residents to volunteer for ongoing nature and River Eden projects. Forms for interested volunteers were provided at the meeting.
- Continue to collect community input on river health and pollution issues and serve as a communication channel between Southern Water and residents.

#### **2. River Monitoring and Citizen Science:**

- NEDRA plans to expand water quality testing efforts in the Edenbridge area, including testing for E. coli and covering more sections of the River Eden catchment.
- Organise and promote events like the Big River Watch and participate in projects such as the Water Blitz to gather data on river health.

#### **3. Collaboration with Southern Water:**

- Facilitate ongoing communication with Southern Water, ensuring that questions and concerns from residents are relayed and responses are shared back with the community.
- Advocate for improvements to local water infrastructure and support Southern Water in gathering community feedback for future business plans.
- Collate and submit residents' feedback and questions to Southern Water

## **Actions for Southern Water:**

### **1. Infrastructure Improvements:**

- Address specific concerns about outdated sewage systems in the Edenbridge area, particularly the need for upgrades to handle increasing demand due to new housing developments.
- Investigate individual cases of inadequate sewage systems, such as those involving old septic tanks, and provide follow-up responses to affected residents.

### **2. Transparency and Data Sharing:**

- Continue to develop and release tools like the "Rivers and Seas Watch" to provide real-time updates on water quality, expanding its scope to include rivers, not just coastal areas.
- Maintain transparency about investment plans and ensure that the community is kept informed about the progress of infrastructure upgrades and other environmental initiatives.

### **3. Stakeholder Collaboration:**

- Collaborate closely with other water companies, local authorities, and community groups like NEDRA to address pollution issues collectively
- Engage with the community through regular updates, presentations, and opportunities like site tours to build trust and demonstrate the measures being taken.

### **4. Follow-up Commitments:**

- Southern Water representatives committed to following up with residents after the meeting regarding specific concerns raised, including cases of storm overflow management and wastewater infrastructure.
- Offer to provide additional written information and updates once further regulatory approvals and plans are finalised.
- Offer to provide a site visit to the Edenbridge Sewage Treatment Facility