



West Sussex village residents face nervous wait for result of housing planning appeal as flooding reaches tipping point - 'No longer able to cope'



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Residents in Southwick have reached the end of their tether with ongoing flooding as they nervously await the result of a planning appeal for new homes in their local area.

Since the start of the year, industrial capacity pumps have been sited by **Southern Water** at all four corners of **Southwick Green** after 'massive overflows of untreated sewage' had been flushed out of the sewers by the excess rainwater coming off the Downs.

By the end of February, Southern Water had to arrange a 'huge tanker operation', operating on a 24/7 basis, to assist the pumps in keeping up with the 'massive surge of groundwater' stemming from the wettest February on record.

Road closures were in place in Southwick, with tankers, cones and fencing pictured last month.

Stephen Guy, of Southview Road, said he, along with neighbours, 'view the future with increasing concern and anxiety'.

He added: "Despite Southern Water's efforts, there were still considerable sewage spills in different parts of our locality, and although the tanker operation was withdrawn by the second week in March, the Southern Water engineers have assured us that it could be reinstated if we have another prolonged bout of rainfall. So, due credit to Southern Water for their response to the situation.

"However, what this last weather period has demonstrated is not only how unprepared the various agencies have been for this phenomenon, but also how the existing infrastructure is no longer fit for purpose.

<https://www.sussexexpress.co.uk/news/environment/west-sussex-village-residents-face-nervous-wait-for-result-of-housing-planning-appeal-as-flooding-reaches-tipping-point-no-longer-able-to-cope-4578712>

"The Southern Water pumping station on the coast road has been overwhelmed at several times by the torrent flowing through the area, leading to the polluting of the harbour and River Adur.

"And the sewage pipe network around **Southwick Green** is no longer able to cope with the volumes of effluent swollen by the groundwater. So, at some point Southern Water are going to have to address these problems – to help the residents understand what is being done to rectify the situation."

Southern Water has issued a statement in response to Mr Guy.

A spokesperson said: "We're sorry residents in Southwick have experienced issues over recent weeks following issues with high groundwater levels and heavy rainfall.

"Our teams are continuing to work around-the-clock to reduce the impact of groundwater on homes and businesses in the area.

"Our first priority is dealing with the immediate issues and when the pressure on our network has subsided we will be undertaking a number of investigations.

"These investigations will help us explore what long-term solutions could be used to improve our network in the area."

The water company pointed to the fact it has **spent £333m in Sussex since 2020** and is nearing £1bn of spending on water and waste infrastructure in that time.

Housing application appeal

Meanwhile, residents are nervously awaiting the result of an appeal hearing for a housing planning application – which they fear will exacerbate the flooding issue locally.

Described as a 'major concern for local residents', developers S&D Holdings proposed to demolish 53 and 55 Southview Road and construct of one, three-bedroom detached dwelling and eight, two bed flats in two, two storey blocks with new vehicular access from Southview Road and associated parking and amenity areas.

The proposed development is between Southview Road and Underdown Road, just north of Southwick Green.

Mr Guy, who was one of hundreds of residents to object, said: "The basis of the objections has been that not only is this land a refuge for local wildlife but, of more significance, acts to absorb huge volumes of rainwater, much like a giant sponge.

"There is also a water course that runs through it, once an old brook, which at times of such excessive rainfall, comes to the surface and starts to flow with increasing rapidity between the Southview Road and Underdown Road."

The developers said its proposal was in accord with Adur District Council and National Planning policy objectives to 'provide much needed family houses' for private rental.

They added: "The proposals make best use of vacant land within a residential area and will enhance the neighbouring area in both visual and amenity terms.

"The site is in an eminently sustainable location with good public transport links and local facilities. The applicant has actively engaged with the Local Planning Authority and has willingly and objectively taken on board issues and concerns raised previous applications and at pre app stage concluding with a well thought out and designed, low impact residential development to reduce the housing deficit in the region.

"The developers were told that separate drainage advice should also be sought to ensure that the revised layout is acceptable in terms of its impact on flooding locally."

Adur District Council refused the application as the layout, form, massing, size and scale 'fails to respect and enhance' the 'prevailing character and form of residential development' in the surrounding area.

An appeal has been lodged against the refusal. The appellant has 'sought to demonstrate' that the council's objections 'don't stand up to scrutiny'.

The developers were told that the application needed to be 'considered in terms of its flooding history'.

A planning document read: "The development must not flood and must not exacerbate flooding beyond the site.

"The site has a history of groundwater flooding and this also extends beyond the site. Neighbours refer to the site as having underground

springs and talk of some surrounding gardens also having them.

"The council's drainage engineer has also previously commented that 'there is a substantial risk that there is a confined aquifer under site which could be under artesian pressure.

"The inspector is invited to consider the drainage strategy which accompanied the application and proposes a set of action to ensure a satisfactory outcome."

The appeal began on February 23 and final comments are due on April 12. The decision date has not yet been confirmed.

Mr Guy said: "In order to bypass the local authority, [the developer] has chosen to submit the proposal to a national body, the planning inspectorate, in the hope that they will just consider the proposal, but not be mindful of the concerns of those hundreds of residents who are facing the inevitable consequences of this development.

"The major consequences will be to remove a crucial area of groundwater retention and divert the water course, almost certainly leading to even more long-standing residents facing flooding and sewage spillages, and likely including properties that previously have not been affected."

As 'the clock is ticking', Mr Guy called on Southern Water to 'intervene'.

He added: "If the development goes ahead, it will contribute to the burden on the sewage system, already unable to cope, and more worryingly, disrupt even further the natural ground water drainage system.

"For this reason, we, the local residents, demand that Southern Water intervene and object, in the strongest possible terms, to this development."

However, water companies' 'statutory obligations' are to provide water and wastewater services. They cannot refuse new connections and are unable to object to new developments, Southern Water confirmed.



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