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West Sussex village flooding and sewage discharges: Business owners have 'lost half of their customers'



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Published 11th Apr 2024, 14:20 GMT

Updated 11th Apr 2024, 15:33 GMT



SussexWorld

The shadow environment secretary has visited a village in West Sussex to speak with residents about their concerns over flooding and sewage.



Steve Reed MP visited **Southwick** on Wednesday (April 10) to talk about sewage and 'Labour's plans to crack down on polluting water companies'.

He met with residents at the Port Kitchen Café at Shoreham Port and held discussions with Worthing Borough Council leader, and Worthing West MP candidate Dr Becca Cooper, as well as Tom Rutland – who is running to be East Worthing and Shoreham's first ever Labour MP.

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**.

Mr Reed OBE, who has been the shadow secretary of state for environment, food and rural affairs since September 2023, gave an interview to Sussex World on Southwick Green.

He said: "I have spoken to a number of residents who live nearby or have businesses here. They have been enormously impacted.

"**People** are passionate about this place and who can blame them because it's absolutely stunning part of the country.

The shadow environment secretary has visited a village in West Sussex to speak with residents about their concerns over flooding and sewage.

"My heart has gone out to people. I spoke to a lady who runs a business and she has lost half of her customers to what's going on. She is worrying about the viability of her business.

"People's homes are being flooded. They see sewage in their back gardens. They want these problems fixed.

"This is happening again because the government does not have a long term plan to fix the water industry and deal with much higher level of rainfall leading to increase in flooding and pollution. Sewage is coming into people's back gardens.

"Labour will do things differently."

Southern Water issued a statement about residents' concerns last month.

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.

Mr Reed said Labour would set up a flood resilience task force that would utilise the £5billion pounds allocated to deal with flooding by 2027.

"Only £1b of that has been spent," the MP said. "The rest is presumably sitting in the bank or the treasury.

"People here need that money to be spent digging out the ditches and get the floodwater away from people's homes. We need to put up flood defences and use natural flood management – plant more trees further up stream because they help the land hold more water. All of that can help reduce the flooding in places like Southwick and Worthing.

"Labour would that action so we can deal with the problem that is devastating so many people's lives."

Mr Reed said Labour would 'crack down' on illegal sewage dumping and put offending water companies 'under special measures'. Bosses who break the rules would 'end up in the dock', the MP said.

He added: "Last year, we had the worst levels of illegal sewage dumping that's ever been recorded.

"It means you can't take your kids into the sea as they'll get sick. It's damaging tourism.

"Residents have asked for direct accountability and they are right. Labour would make the water bosses personally and criminally liable if they allow their companies to illegally dump sewage in our rivers and waterways."

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Steve Reed MP, Labour's shadow environment secretary visited Southwick on Wednesday 10th April. Pictured with Worthing Borough Council leader Dr Beccy Cooper. **Photo: SR staff**



Steve Reed MP, Labour's shadow environment secretary visited Southwick on Wednesday 10th April. Pictured with East Worthing and Shoreham MP candidate Tom Rutland. **Photo: Photo: SR staff**

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