

Homes sewage blamed for our filthy Southend beaches

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Southend councillor responsible for tourism Derek Jarvis says beaches in the town are close to getting their Blue Flag ratings back after clean-up operation

SOUTHEND'S beaches were left contaminated with raw sewage because pipes from homes and businesses were not connected properly, the Echo can reveal.

Tens of thousands of litres of raw sewage seeped into the sea from dodgy plumbing pipes at string of properties including a plush penthouse block, two churches and a yacht club.

Several properties with misconnected or broken drains were uncovered during a ten-month probe into the source of increased pollution levels at Southend's beaches, which may have been the main factor in the town losing Blue Flag status for all its beaches over 2012 and 2013.

In all 133 misconnections were found by Anglian Water, who spent £200,000 on the Southend Water Quality and Improvement Project.

A report about the project said: "More than 100 properties were identified as misconnected. Most notably in High Street, Southend. A block of 64 flats which had at least half of the foul waste entering into the surface water sewer and a yacht club which had been connected incorrectly were among key finds."

Audley Court, a development of flats built ten years ago, was identified as having toilets, sinks and washing machines wrongly connected in around 40 of its flats, which meant contaminated water flushed untreated into the sea at Jubilee beach.

Six toilets at Crowstone Christian Centre in Crowstone Road, [Westcliff](#), were discharging onto [Chalkwell](#) Beach, while collapsed pipes near St Peter's Church in Hinguar Street, [Shoebury](#), meant it inadvertently polluted East Beach.

Problems with misconnections were also found near Thames Estuary Yacht Club in The Leas, Westcliff, which affected Westcliff Bay, and the Ship Pub in New Road, [Leigh](#), affecting Bell Wharf.

Other properties found discharging raw sewage directly into the sea were several flats and businesses in London Road and High Street, Southend, and individual homes near Grosvenor Road, Westcliff.

[Jubilee Beach](#) by the pier was most affected with 90 misconnected toilets feeding it, around 40 in Audley Court and another 60 from the High Street and London Road.

Pollution concerns triggered the Southend Water Quality and Improvement Project, led by the Environment Agency, Anglian Water, Southend Council and the Thames Estuary Partnership.

It is illegal to discharge raw sewage into the sea without a permit, but the Environment Agency and Anglian Water chose not to prosecute as the majority of property owners concerned were oblivious to the problems or they were inherited from previous owners.

A spokesman for the Environment Agency said: "Beaches along the Southend coastline are crucial to the local economy and communities.

"Poor water quality can impact on shellfish businesses in the area. Re-connecting these properties back to the correct foul drainage has taken tens of thousands of litres of polluted water away from discharging onto the bathing beaches."

Southend is now one of the agency's top five priority bathing water locations for improvement in the South East.

OFFICIALS claim Southend's beaches now have a clean bill of health and could be close to winning back Blue Flags.

Following the work, the report said all eight beaches were now on course to at least get a "good" standard in the EU criteria.

Water quality has already improved following the work and Southend Council is keen to stress that the sea is safe in time for the summer season.

[Derek Jarvis](#), Southend councillor for tourism, said: "The sea is so important to Southend, for residents, businesses and visitors alike and we take the quality of our bathing water very seriously. Thanks to the partnership work that has taken place, we are predicted to meet the revised Bathing Water Directive."

Testing was carried out by Anglian Water from May 2013 on more than 23 outflow pipes into the estuary from Leigh to Shoebury.

Ammonia sampling was carried out at each to check for pollution levels and an extensive sewage pipe CCTV survey was carried out on 15 of them to check for misconnected pipes.

Nineteen other outflows were also tested using a cage to collect debris being flushed down the pipes, but all cages came back clean.

There are more than 50 outfalls along the shore in question and Anglian water accepts there could be further undetected misconnections, but is happy with the work that's been done.

Lucinda Gilfoyle, Anglian Water coastal strategy manager, said: "Over the next five years we will be investing heavily in Southend to tackle this and make sure the bathing waters and beaches that we know are so loved by Southend's residents and visitors remain open and a main attraction."

An Environment Agency spokesman added: "A greater understanding of surface water outfalls in the area has contributed to an improvement in the bathing water quality results across the beaches in Southend.

"Between 15 and 20 per cent of the Southend sewer network has been assessed and mapped for the project, and many of the 53 outfalls along the seafront have seen an improvement in water quality."

A YACHT club has finally got planning permission to connect to a sewer after it was found to be dumping raw material straight into the sea for more than 40 years.

The Essex Yacht Club had a permit from the Environment Agency to discharge its toilets and sinks from the Wilton, a former minehunter vessel in Leigh, where it has met since the Seventies.

However, it has now got permission from Southend Council to lay a 550-metre sewer pipe along the Cinder Path to connect waste to the system in a £100,000 project.

Alec Pell-Johnson, yacht club commodore, said he had wanted to do this for the past 20 years, but held off due to costs and because the council planned to develop a cycle path along the Cinder Path, which is yet to happen.

He said: "We've been planning to carry out this work for years as we are anxious to be as environmentally friendly as possible and have been liaising closely with all the relevant agencies, including Network Rail, the Council, the Environment Agency and Natural England."

Paul Gilson, joint chairman of Leigh and Southend Fisherman's Association, says the new pipe will improve the quality of marine life and his business.

"The Essex Yacht Club proposal will be a positive help in ruling out a potential negative outside influence on our industry, which is a significant local employer."

Fitting the new pipe will lead to the closure of the Cinder Path for up to four weeks in November, when work would begin.

A council report into the application said: “It would decrease the current levels of pollution as it will prevent waste water being discharged into the Thames.”

OWNERS of buildings found not to be connected to the sewer system may have had no idea, according to Anglian Water.

The water firm took the decision to, in many cases, not contact the owners of buildings and instead fix the sewers themselves to prevent more raw material being flushed into the sea.

A spokesman said: “In some cases these were historic problems and owners may have been unaware.”

Paul Smith, director of Forge Developments, which built Audley Court, had no idea of the problems. He said: “I have not been made aware of this but we are no longer the freeholder.

“But when the work was done we contracted drainage work to a specialist firm which would have had to have it signed off by Anglian Water.”

An Anglian Water spokeswoman said flats could be misconnected by individual appliances connected to the wrong private drain further up the building, which a water company would have no governance over and would not be looked at during building regulations checks.

Amy Pryor, project coordinator for the Thames Estuary Partnership, told the Echo a misconnection was found coming from the Thames Estuary Yacht Club system, but David Caten, club commodore, vehemently denied this and said no one had contacted it about any problems.

No one at Crowstone Christian Centre, St Peter’s Church or the Ship Pub were available for comment.