

Anglian Water Storm Overflows Briefing

What are storm overflows and why do we have them?

Most of the UK has a combined sewerage system made up of hundreds of thousands of kilometres of sewers, mostly built by the Victorians. Combined sewers mean that rainwater (aka storm water) and waste water from toilets, bathrooms and kitchens (aka sewage) is conveyed in the same pipe to a Water Recycling Centre (WRC).

During heavy rainfall combined sewers can become full and WRCs can't treat the water quick enough. This can potentially lead to sewage backing up and flooding homes, roads and open spaces. Storm overflows were developed as overflow valves to reduce that risk. Therefore, overflows of diluted sewage during heavy rainfall are not a sign that the system is faulty, just that the storage in the sewer network is temporarily over capacity.

Sewerage systems are not built like this anymore and we've been investing in dealing with storm overflows for many years, prioritising investment where it will have the most benefit to the environment and removing storm overflows where we can. Since privatisation we have removed 13% of them from our network.

We aim to reduce discharges from storm overflows by 17% in the next five years, in line with the government approved Storm Overflows Discharge Reduction Plan.

From 2025, we're proposing a further £1 billion investment which will go directly into reducing storm overflow spills by creating new storage and ways to prevent surface water from entering the sewer network, installing additional monitoring and increasing the capacity of our treatment sites to deal with more rainfall as a result of unpredictable weather. This is subject to approval from Ofwat in December 2024.

How are storm overflows regulated?

Intermittent discharges from storm overflows and WRCs in England are permitted and regulated by the Environment Agency (EA). The EA provides specific guidance on water company permits for storm overflows and emergency overflows, of which there are approximately 14,500 in England.

What is an Event Duration Monitor (EDM)?

All of our storm overflows are now monitored by an Event Duration Monitor (EDM). Knowing how frequently they discharge gives insight into the performance of the network and sewage treatment works.

EDMs use sensors to monitor the level of flow in a tank or sewer and are installed on storm overflows. The sensor triggers an alert when a certain level is reached, indicating a storm discharge is happening. The monitors measure the start and end time of any flow. They don't measure the volume of the flow itself or the quality of the water being discharged – this is currently not a regulatory requirement. EDMs are sensitive and sometimes weeds growing in front of the monitor or other obstructions, such as wet wipes, could trigger it to register a spill when there isn't one. This is why all EDM activations are investigated so that they can be confirmed as actual spill events, or discarded if not, in our reporting.

Where is EDM data published?

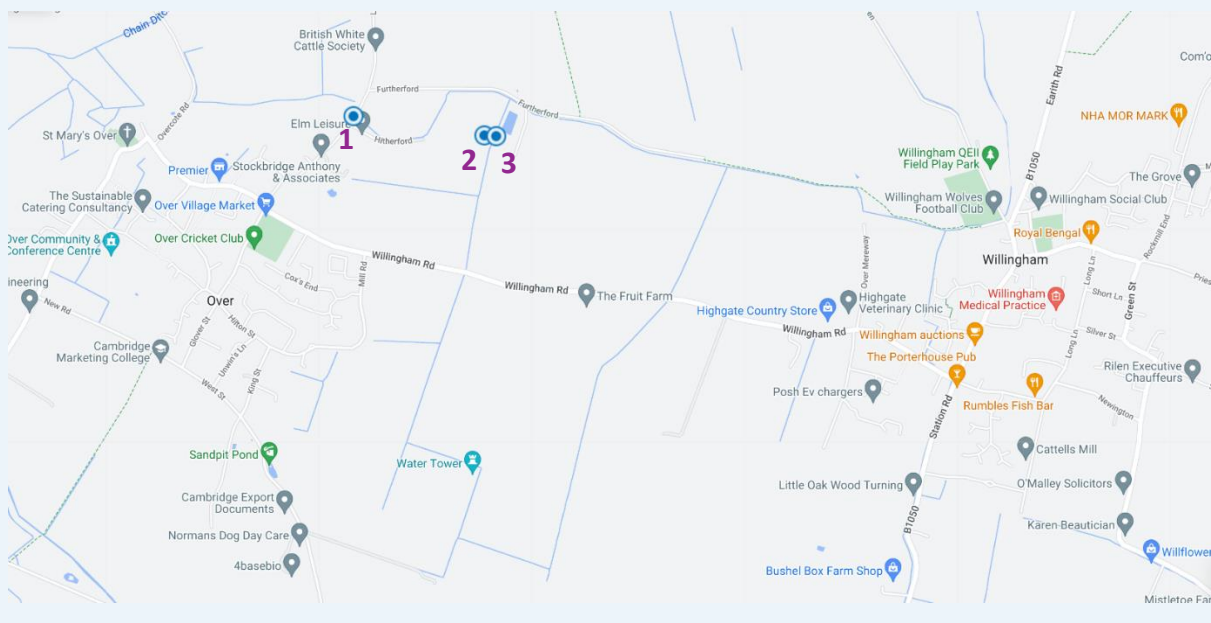
Anglian Water report this data to the EA, who publish it on their website. We also publish it on our website – <https://www.anglianwater.co.uk/environment/storm-overflows/>.

We have also launched our real time reporting map on our website. This shows the locations of all our storm overflows and when a spill has commenced within an hour of activation of the monitor – <https://www.anglianwater.co.uk/environment/storm-overflows/storm-overflow-map/>.

What about storm overflows in Willingham and Over?

As you can see from the below map, there aren't any overflows in the village of Willingham, but there are a few in Over:

- 1: Over – Fen Road
- 2: Over Water Recycling Centre
- 3: Over Water Recycling Centre



What investments are being made by Anglian Water in Willingham and Over?

Our business plan for 2025-2030 is currently with our regulator Ofwat for approval. In the South Cambridgeshire district, we have proposed investing £63 million over the 5 years.

Within this we have proposed some improvement works at Over WRC:

- Install additional monitoring
- Make improvements to the way we store Biosolids to reduce odours
- Increase the amount of phosphorus removed in the treatment process.

To caveat, all of this investment is currently proposed and so may change through the approval process, with final determination of our next business plan due by mid-December 2024.

A wider look at River Health

What is the water sector impact on river health?

It is important to note that river health is affected by many different sources and sectors. According to [Water UK's 21 Century Report](#) the water industry is responsible for 24% of the reasons for rivers in England not achieving good ecological status (RNAGs) with the rest being made up by other industries and sectors. In the Anglian Water region, we are responsible for 17.9% of the reasons rivers are not achieving good ecological status - a number that's reducing as we continue our investment and improvements. Other factors include agriculture and rural management, urban development and transport.

To help target investment, we're developing a detailed regionwide picture. We are also working in partnership with many landowners and the farming community to address the issues collectively, to achieve maximum impact.

What has Anglian Water invested to improve river health?

Our overarching environmental programme, called WINEP (Water Industry National Environment Programme) saw us invest £93m last year and deliver 224 schemes, bringing the total since 2020 to 1,411. In total, we're investing £811m in environmental protection and improvements between 2020 and 2025, the biggest environmental programme in the water industry. This includes £200m of direct investment to reduce storm overflow spills, with £39m invested last year alone.

We are also in partnership with Severn Trent Water on [Get River Positive](#) our firm commitment to act now to protect and revitalise rivers.

We have proposed in our 2025-2030 business plan to double our environmental investment to £4 billion, with £1 billion of this directly targeting storm overflows. These investments are subject to approval from Ofwat.