Thames Water must wake up to climate change and fix its creaking infrastructure

Author : lewis

Date : 6 November, 2023

River Action call for Thames Water to wake up to climate change and fix its creaking infrastructure, after water treatment failure in Surrey leaves customers needing bottled water

Responding to the major incident declared by Thames Water following the Shalford wastewater treatment works failed on Saturday 4th Nov, CEO of River Action James Wallace says, “By its own admission, Thames Water has been forced to distribute nearly 500,000 litres of bottled water to support thousands of customers. It is a disgrace that a UK water company must resort to handing out even one bottle of water. This is not Haiti, this is one of the wealthiest parts of the UK.

“To blame Storm Ciaran is unacceptable. We are witnessing the water industry’s systemic lack of investment in its infrastructure and services. It can’t cope with climate breakdown, despite decades of warning to mitigate the impacts of weather-related events, forecast to get more severe.

“This water treatment failure is a consequence of decades of underinvestment by Thames Water. At the same time the company has handed out dividends to its shareholder and loaded the company with $14bn in debt. It is a failure of water quality. It is a failure of water security.

“Thames Water leaks 600 million litres of drinking water per day. It has opened no new reservoirs in decades. When will Thames Water stand up and be accountable, and invest in their infrastructure to fix leaky pipes, to reduce abstraction, to upgrade sewage systems?

Figures show that 661 hours of sewage discharge has occurred on the River Wey at Guildford and upstream of the Shalford wastewater treatment works since 1st November. Mr Wallace says, “This is a predictable and avoidable risk to people’s health and to wildlife.

“Thames Water must stop making excuses and come clean about its lack of investment, and the regulators, the Environment Agency and Ofwat, must too. Thames Water provide an essential service, like a health service coping with a pandemic. It must be climate shock proof. That means it must perform well during both storms and droughts.”