

Thames Water has demonstrated its inability to adequately manage existing levels of sewage without causing substantial harm to the environment and cannot be trusted to manage the increased sewage that would be generated by the Gatwick expansion.

Thames Water has been placed in special measures for a catalogue of failures including routine, illegal sewage discharges into rivers and the sea. On 6th August 2024, Thames Water received a record fine of £104 million from Ofwat, for illegal spills that caused considerable harm to the environment and customers. Ofwat found that Thames Water had failed to upgrade assets; failed to understand the scope of their obligations; failed to obtain adequate information, and failed to institute adequate processes and oversight.

Thames Water has also failed to engage with the Gatwick Expansion DCO examination process. Thames Water did not attend the hearings and has not been responding to requests from the applicant or Interested Parties. It has been demonstratively proven that Thames Water are incapable of adequately coping with existing levels of sewage from Gatwick airport.

Given the failure to deal with the waste water and sewage, significant investment will be required from Gatwick to ensure that there is adequate capability to cope with an effective doubling of passenger numbers; the associated increase in staff; and the additional waste water which runs off from the second runway which will be contaminated with waste such as de-icing chemicals.

The DCO should not be granted until either Thames Water or Gatwick Airport can demonstrate that it can safely and satisfactorily manage existing levels of waste water, without causing significant harm to the environment and can clearly demonstrate the additional capacity to manage increased levels of sewage and chemically contaminated water.

Gatwick exists in a severely water stressed region, where millions depend on limited supplies for drinking water. Our watercourses - and the ecosystems that they depend upon - are in desperate need of protection and there is huge public support for this. It is vital that assurances of adequate water treatment and management are in place before the DCO can be recommended for approval.