



## **A New Campaign to Eliminate Sewage Pollution in the Axe Rivers**

Despite recent changes to legislation, and well-publicised promises of investment, untreated sewage and treated effluent, both containing pathogenic bacteria, continues to pour into the River Axe and its tributaries. For example, Tatworth Sewage Treatment Works spilled untreated sewage into the river for 4137 hours in 2024. That is the equivalent of sewage flowing out for 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for nearly 6 months. And yet, of the 34 sewerage assets in the catchment, only 5 will be upgraded in the near future, and the upgrades will make little difference to the amount of sewage entering our rivers.

### **Why This Matters**

Cleaner rivers are achievable, but only when decision-makers are held to account. Sewage pollution damages aquatic life, threatens protected species, undermines local livelihoods, threatens public health, and erodes public trust. We should not have to accept polluted rivers and beaches as the price of modern living.



Pollution in Forton Brook, downstream from Tatworth Sewage Treatment Works which had been spilling untreated sewage for weeks in December 2025

## Our Approach

The SPEAR campaign, launched by FORA in January 2026, demands urgent action. It will initially gather evidence to illustrate the scale of the problem and then call on South West Water, elected representatives, and industry regulators to take immediate, measurable action, including to:

- End the routine discharge from storm overflows.
- Re-prioritise the River Axe catchment for investment.
- Strengthen environmental permits (for treated and untreated effluent) and enforce compliance with them.

FORA will work constructively with all those willing to act, while holding to account those who fail to do so. Our work will be grounded in evidence, transparency, and the voices of local people who care deeply about the river.

Join us!



Water quality monitoring

A screenshot of the Office for Environmental Protection (OEP) website. The top navigation bar includes the OEP logo, 'Home', 'About', 'Publications', 'News', 'Careers', 'Investigations', 'Complain to us', 'Contact', and a search icon. Below the navigation is a breadcrumb trail: 'Home &gt; News &gt; OEP confirms possible failures to comply with key laws in place to protect and improve water quality'. The main content area features a large teal banner with the headline 'OEP confirms possible failures to comply with key laws in place to protect and improve water quality'. Below the banner, the date '08.01.2026' is displayed on the left, and 'Share: X in' is on the right. A category tag 'Investigations' is located at the bottom left of the article content area.