



south east water



Important information: Drought Order applied for to maintain drinking water supplies in Sussex

Good morning,

I am writing to provide you with an important update regarding drinking water supplies in Sussex and the potential impact on communities across the county.

Today we have requested the Secretary of State grants a Drought Order on the River Ouse. I will explain what this is in more detail later within this email.

We have applied for this Order because we have experienced extremely low rainfall this year which has resulted in the water level within Ardingly Reservoir approaching a critically low level.

The reservoir, which supplies 228,000 customers in Sussex, is currently at 27.6 per cent full.

The impact on customers and communities of Ardingly Reservoir going empty can not be underestimated as it could limit the amount of water we can supply to taps.



Customer and business restrictions

To conserve as much water as possible, from today, 10 October, we have removed some of the exemptions currently in place as part of our Temporary Use Ban, or hosepipe ban.

These exemptions include:

- Watering new lawns at domestic premises
- Watering trees, whips, saplings and hedges planted before the ban and within the last three years
- Watering food crops at domestic premises or private allotments

If we previously wrote to customers to explain they were exempt from the hosepipe restrictions, this has ended and they are no longer able to use their hosepipe.

If they were not exempt but activities they were doing were covered by an exemption, this has also now ended.

This means the only time where a hosepipe can now be used is for health and safety purposes.

Alongside this, we've fast-tracked several projects to:

- Make sure water can move more easily around our network
- Take the pressure off existing supply sources
- Transfer more water into Sussex

For example, a new pipeline connecting treated water from Bewl in Kent to the East Sussex network will soon be active. This will move water between the counties for the first time, giving us greater resilience and flexibility and allows us to move water from areas with a good supply to those that need it more.

While all this will help, as mentioned previously if we do not apply for this Drought Order, there is likely to be a severe impact to the public water supply meaning we will not have the water available to supply to customer

taps.

We do not take applying for a Drought Order lightly, and the actions we are taking will help us to carefully and responsibly manage these vital resources for the benefit of both our customers and the environment.

Find out more

Further down this email you will find details of two webinars we're holding where we'll explain a Drought Order further, why we're applying for it and answer any questions you may have.

You will also see details of how to respond to our Drought Order application.

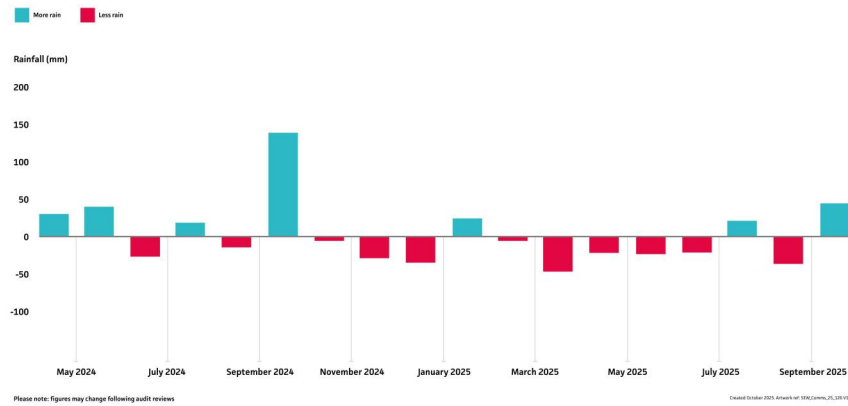


The decline of Ardingly Reservoir

You can see the decline of Ardingly Reservoir since March 2025 [here](#), but since mid-June the reservoir has been dropping rapidly and, as mentioned, is currently at 27.6 per cent full.

Although we experienced high rainfall at the beginning of September, average rainfall between March 2025 and August 2025 in that area of Sussex has been around 63 per cent. That's the ninth driest it's been in the last 150 years.

Rainfall compared to the long term average across the River Ouse

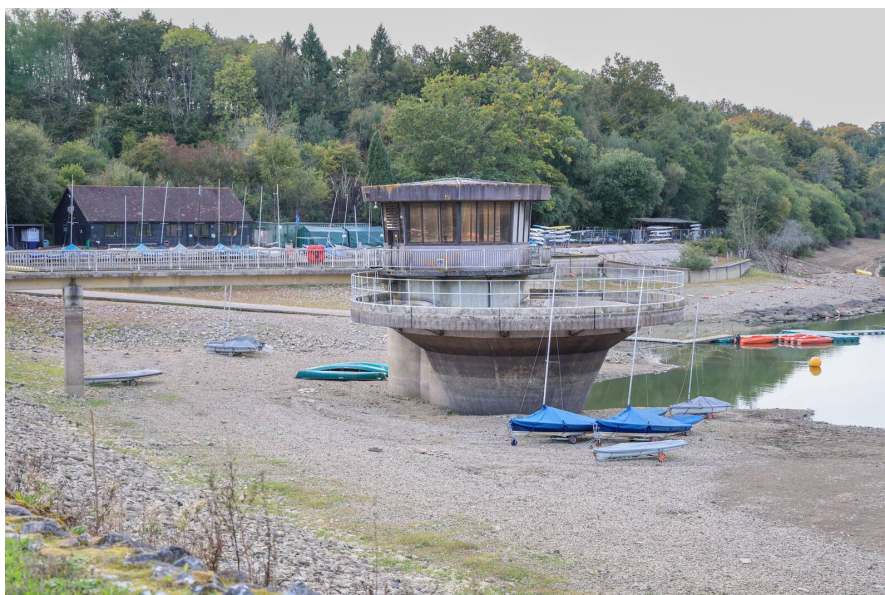


Weather forecasts currently suggest the level of rain needed to fill Ardingly Reservoir will not be coming any time soon.

As you may know, Ardingly Reservoir provides a release of water, called the compensation release, into the Shell Brook (which flows into the River Ouse) to compensate for the dam that was built to store water in the reservoir. Under our normal abstraction licence we are required to release more water than would flow in the river naturally at this time of the year, than if the reservoir was not there.

Under our Drought Permit, which has already been granted, we have decreased the compensation release from four million litres a day, to one million litres a day, closer to the flow that would be there naturally at this time of the year.

As well as the compensation release, we also release additional water from Ardingly Reservoir into the Shell Brook, which we abstract at Barcombe to then treat for drinking water. This currently ranges between 10 and 30 million litres a day depending on the demand for water and the natural flow in the river.

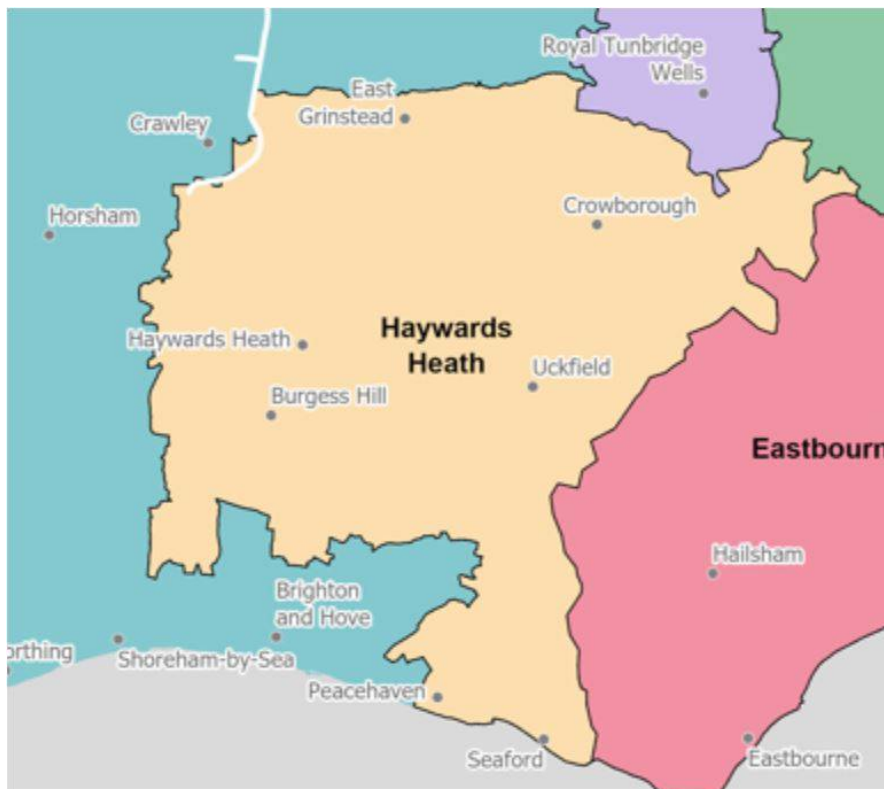


The Drought Order

As mentioned previously, due to the reduced amount of water remaining in the reservoir we need to act now to protect customer drinking water supplies for as long as possible. Therefore we will soon be applying to the Secretary of State for Defra for a Drought Order to help conserve the remaining water that is stored within Ardingly Reservoir.

We're at this point because we've hit a number of key triggers outlined in our [Drought Plan 2022](#).

The yellow area in the map below is the part of our supply area that will benefit from the Order.



A Drought Order is similar to a Drought Permit in that it allows changes to be made to abstraction licences when there has been an exceptional shortage of rain. Both water companies and the Environment Agency (in England) can apply to the Secretary of State for a Drought Order to manage water resources for water supply and environmental benefit.

On a normal day, we must leave 20 million litres of water in the Lower Ouse below where we extract and treat water at Barcombe. If granted, the Drought Order would allow us to reduce the amount of water we leave in the River Ouse below Barcombe to 15 million litres a day, and if necessary, 10 million litres a day.

While it's a reduction, it will have a number of benefits:

- Preserving water resources for longer
- Enabling the water within the reservoir to replenish faster before next summer
- Ensure a baseline flow continues to be released into the upper reaches of the river, benefitting the whole river system.

We have worked closely with Defra, the Environment Agency and Natural England on this Drought Order application, which retains the measures already in place within our [Drought Permit](#), which was granted by the Environment Agency on 22 September 2025.



Monitoring the River Ouse

Working with the Environment Agency, Natural England and environmental experts, we have extensively monitored river flows and water quality on the River Ouse for more than 20 years. This monitoring is continuing to this day and all the results are being shared with the Environment Agency.

As part of our Drought Permit, we are undertaking weekly surveys of the whole length of the River Ouse.

We're focusing on water quality and fish movement, checking that the water is sufficiently oxygenated and that there is still sufficient flow across the many weirs along the Ouse.

We work closely with the Environment Agency and Natural England, reporting our findings from the environmental monitoring weekly, and if certain triggers are exceeded, we increase the frequency of monitoring to ensure that fish are not becoming stranded or distressed.

We have also discussed actions to be taken if our monitoring does show environmental impacts, for example narrowing the channel in certain places to ensure that a depth of water and flow is maintained.

We are also aware that with a changing climate and increased demand we need to take a pro-active approach to the river too. We are carrying out a

number of environmental investigations under the Water Industry National Environment Programme (WINEP).

Since the Drought Permit was introduced last month, our monitoring so far has shown the River Ouse is flowing as expected and we've not seen any environmental impacts.

Talk to us about the Drought Order

If you would like to find out more about the Drought Order, why we have applied for it and what it will mean, join one of our two webinars being held on:

- Tuesday 14 October, 18:30 to 20:00
- Wednesday 15 October, 10:30 to 12:00

To sign up email community@southeastwater.co.uk with details of which webinar you would like to attend and the link will be shared with you.

How to comment on the Drought Order

Anyone may inspect the Drought Order proposals free of charge at the addresses below during normal working hours (9am to 4pm), between **Friday 10 October and Friday 17 October**:

- Ardingly Activity Centre, Ardingly Reservoir, Ardingly, West Sussex RH17 6SQ
- South East Water Limited, Rocfort Road, Snodland, Kent, ME6 5AH

A copy of the application documents are also available to view on [our website](#).

Anyone who wishes to comment can do so in writing to:

Water Resources Policy

Seacole Ground Floor

2 Marsham Street

London

SW1P 4DF

Or by emailing: water.resources@defra.gov.uk.

Comments must be submitted by **Friday 17 October**.



Our Drought Plan

Our Drought Plan sets out the steps we would take during periods of low rainfall and high demand to ensure we can deliver a reliable water supply for the essential needs of drinking, washing, cooking and cleaning.

Our latest Drought Plan was published in 2022 and was consulted upon at the time. You can read that Drought Plan [here](#).

It details what actions we'd take to conserve water and secure customers' supplies, while balancing the needs of the environment.

These actions include:

- Moving water around our network
- Fast-tracking schemes to increase water resources
- Working even harder to fix leaks
- Promoting sensible water use
- The introduction of temporary water use restrictions (commonly known as hosepipe bans)

To ensure our plans are up-to-date we review them every five years and publish a draft document for consultation.

[Click here to read our Drought Plan 2022 - 2027](#)



Boosting resilience in Sussex

We're in the final stages of a multi-million-pound investment project to create a more resilient water supply network within Wealden, Sussex.

In a direct response to recent incidents, we've invested more than £12 million installing approximately 17 kilometres of new pipeline between our water treatment works at Bewl and our drinking water storage tanks at Wadhurst and Rotherfield. The new pipeline has been laid and is currently being tested before we bring it into service in October.

Along with upgrades to our Bewl Water Treatment Works, this project will enable us to move water between Kent and Sussex for the first time, giving us greater resilience and flexibility in the future, which will allow us to maintain customer supplies more readily during unexpected disruptions.



Driving down leakage

Since April in Sussex we have repaired 2,354 leaks, an increase of 14 per cent on last year. During August and September, across the county, we have repaired 787 leaks, and are fixing leaks 21 per cent quicker than this

time last year. .

We are making Sussex our priority and have also increased the number of staff out finding and fixing leaks in Sussex to the highest number we have ever had.

Our latest business plan, PR24 sets out how we will improve network resilience, making the most efficient connections in our network, enabling us to move water around more effectively and flexibly.

[Read more about our business plan here](#)

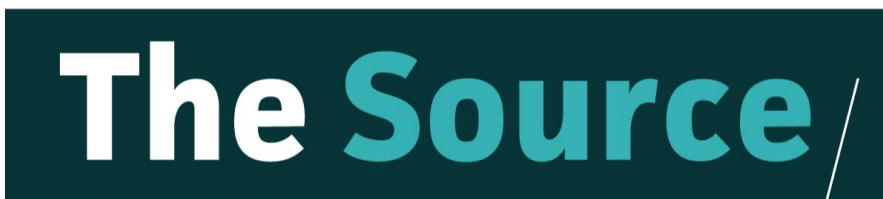


Watch our video which compares the current water levels at Ardingly Reservoir to previous years.

From

Nick Price

Head of Water Resources



We're working hard to make sure we meet the needs of our customers, now and in the future.

To do this, it's really important we keep in touch with our key stakeholders, like you. We want to share important updates and find out what you think about the work we're doing. Your feedback helps us make the right decisions for the future.

We know it's helpful for you to know about the important work we're doing, and we'd like to keep you updated via our quarterly newsletter, The Source.

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