



## Planning and Growth Briefing from Southern Water

*A high-level overview of our work on planning and growth and our recommendations to deliver better outcomes for customers, the environment and local economy.*

### About us

We provide water and wastewater services to around 4.6 million people across Kent, Sussex, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight. We play a crucial role providing the infrastructure necessary to unlock economic growth. Water infrastructure can also provide added value by encouraging investment, improving the environment, and supporting businesses to grow.

### Our role

We have a statutory duty to serve new developments with water and wastewater services – we cannot refuse new connections or object to planning applications. We also have a duty to ensure that the service we provide to our existing customers does not deteriorate because of new homes being built.

Water companies are not currently statutory consultees on individual applications in the way that local highways authorities are for new housing. This means that we often do not have the opportunity to provide information on known risks or risks arising from proposed developments. We can ask for planning conditions, but Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) are not required to adopt these.

It is vital that new homes are built in consultation with water companies. We can then ensure measures are put in place to ensure a high-quality service for our customers whilst protecting the environment.

### What do we need help with?

We support the Government's efforts to tackle the housing crisis where new homes are built in a sustainable way. We strongly support government's recent announcement to require Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) on new developments and plans to amend the automatic right to connect new housing to the sewer network. There should be a presumption that rainwater is kept separate from foul water to reduce pressure on the sewer network and reduce the use of storm overflows. To make faster progress on key challenges facing the region, we'd also like to see:

- Water companies included as statutory consultees in the planning process for major developments – we welcome government's recent commitment to consult on this
- Amendment of the automatic right to connect highway drainage to public sewers
- Government review options to manage unplanned increases in impermeable surfaces, and by 2024 decide whether policy changes are needed (National Infrastructure Commission recommendation)
- Water companies given powers to enforce private drain maintenance, or undertake work and recover costs from the pipe owners, to ensure the infrastructure runs efficiently
- On new nutrient pollution standards for certain wastewater treatment works proposed under the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill - water companies should be allowed to undertake accredited partnership schemes with landowners and local communities (nature- based solutions) as well as traditional engineering solutions

- A water neutrality requirement included in Building Regulations – providing an incentive for developers to adopt existing technologies to reduce water consumption such as rainwater capture, storage, re-use and recycling to encourage reductions in water demand
- LPAs actively promoting the Waterwise Water Neutrality approach which supports developers in adopting the principles of reducing consumption, reusing water and offsetting the added demand their development creates. This would support the uptake of the incentives we have developed
- Mandatory labelling for water using products should be connected to minimum water efficiency standards included in Building Regulations to also help to reduce water demand

## Why is this important?

The South East is an area of water stress. We're facing a climate emergency and by 2050 the region's population is predicted to grow by 19%-25%. We need integrated, holistic policies and approaches to manage future demand for water and the potential adverse impacts on the environment.

Where there is a clear local need, LPAs can set Local Plan policies requiring new houses to meet tighter water efficiency requirements based on the Building Regulations recommendation of 110 litres per person, per day. Positively, we are seeing some developers already submitting planning applications at 85 l/p/p/d.

Climate change and development place huge pressure on our sewer networks, and the in-built pressure release valves known as storm overflows are being used more often. Up to 95% of the flow in sewers during a storm is rainwater.

Water companies also have limited power to address water ingress from sections of the network which are privately owned. As well as increasing the risk of flooding and use of storm overflows, this also means we use more energy pumping and treating rainwater, increasing costs and carbon impact.

## What are we already doing?

We're investing £2 billion (c.£1,000 per household and more than our regulatory allowance) over 2020-25 to significantly improve our water and wastewater networks. But we need partnerships to safeguard the future of the network and help ensure development and growth is sustainable.

### *Water demand and resources*

We're working hard to reduce demand for water. Our ambitious Target 100 programme supports customers to save water and aims to reduce personal consumption to an average of 100 litres per day by 2040. Alongside this we are also working to reduce leakage by 15% by 2025 and 40% by 2040.

We recently published our draft Water Resources Management Plan for consultation on our [website](https://southernwater.co.uk/wrmp) at [southernwater.co.uk/wrmp](https://southernwater.co.uk/wrmp). This outlines the mix of options needed to secure water supplies into the future, including demand management and leakage reductions, alongside significant investment in new infrastructure.

### *Storm overflows and wastewater network capacity*

We've teamed up with local authorities and partners across the region to find new, innovative nature-based solutions to significantly reduce our use of storm overflows. We're tackling the issue at source and rather than digging up roads and replacing pipes, we're looking at how partnership approaches can slow the flow of rainwater and separate it from wastewater. If we work together to remove rainwater from our network, we can also create more capacity for future growth.

### *Working with developers and LPAs*

We've developed a Sustainable Development Policy which sets out our key priorities for new developments looking to connect to our water and wastewater systems. We work with developers and LPAs to develop a mutual understanding of the opportunities to work together towards a resilient water future, through active engagement with Local Plan consultations, inviting engagement with our Water Resource Management Plans and Drainage and Wastewater Management Plans, as well as regularly speaking with elected members and Council Officers. When local planning policies align with our plans, this means we can ensure developers are clear on what is required of them. We're also playing our part by proactively finding solutions to multi-sector challenges affecting new housing, such as water neutrality and nitrate neutrality.