Campaign to Protect Rural England Dorset

4th July 2026

Dorset CPRE response to Wessex Water's Drought Consultation

Recommendation 1: Wessex Water should continue with its water saving initiatives and by working with Government bodies, help to bring about change where initiatives to use water more efficiently are embodied in planning regulations.

The responses from companies and organisations to the consultation on Wessex Water's Drought Plan, Draft Plan, prior to public consultation, are on the whole, technically very detailed. In Dorset CPRE's response to the public consultation of the March 2026 report, we have focussed on commenting on issues where we believe Wessex Water can continue to play a major role in reducing the amount of water that is wasted, which in the longer term, will help to reduce the impact of any droughts that occur.

Extracts from CPRE's draft policy on "water" include the following:

- Reliable and clean water supply is essential to the wellbeing of people, yet we waste a significant of our precious water through leakage and inappropriate and preventable usage.
- A sustainable water system, which includes efficient use of water, reuse and adequate and well-maintained sewage treatment, is essential for the health of our rivers and security of water supply.
- Natural flood defences (now referred to as Nature based solution, NbS) bring multiple benefits of protection, biodiversity increase and improved water quality.
- CPRE, however, propose that some modifications to the planning system could have a significant impact on water usage and the safe disposal of waste across the country.
    - Regulators and companies need to improve leakage reduction and coordinate with local authorities on leakage.
    - Building Regulations should be updated to reflect climate change, future proof usage and aim to achieve water neutrality
        - A target water use of 100 lt/person/day should be mandatory[1].
        - Rainwater harvesting and usage should be mandatory.
        - Low use showers should be mandatory.
        - SUDS should be implemented on all new developments. Still not passed in England[2].

[1] As part of its new Strengthened Water Efficiency Standards, on the 23rd September 2025, the Government launched a consultation on measures to save water on new-build homes, including tightening mandatory water efficiency standards from 125 litres per person per day to 105 litres. DEFRA said that by alleviating water shortages, a reduction of 20 litres per person per day could lead to an additional 1,000 new homes being developed for every 5,250 homes built. If approved, the new water efficiency standards would be mandatory for planning applications. These proposals are part of DEFRA's wider ambitions to reduce water usage in England by 20% per person per day by 2038, which would put the UK "on track to use just 110 litres per head of the population by 2050". DEFRA has been working alongside the Ministry for Housing to develop the consultation.

[2] Despite new sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) standards being introduced by the government in July 2025, Schedule 3 of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010, which mandates sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) in new developments, has not fully become law in England

- CPRE supports large scale land use planning. Such planning must include planning for sustainable water, including planning for secure water supply, the protection of rivers, streams and water courses from pollution and the development of natural catchment-based solutions to flood protection.

We agree with much of what Mr Wheeldon, Director of Infrastructure Development , Wessex Water has written in his article published in "Building". Building Systems Thinking: Our water and wastewater systems need replumbing, by Matt Wheeldon 11 May 2026.

Key points from this article are summarised below:

- enough rain lands on every roof each year to meet all of that household's non-potable water needs, such as flushing toilets, washing cars and watering gardens.
- toilets flushed with rainwater reduce demand for new reservoirs and enable more new development.
- rainwater does not require treatment. It should not be allowed to run into the systems that carry sewage.
- Building Regulations Part G sets out functional and efficiency requirements for water supply.
- Building Regulations Part H, states that foul and surface water drainage systems should be kept separate "where there is no practical alternative".
- Capture rain locally and use it. Return excess rain to the environment as close as possible to where it lands, without ever mixing it with sewage.

"*If we want cleaner rivers, secure water supplies, lower emissions and homes fit for a changing climate, the answer is not the construction of more centralised infrastructure. It is learning to manage rain better where it lands."*

Source: https://www.building.co.uk/comment/building-systems-thinking-our-water-and-wastewater-systems-need-replumbing/5142120.article

In common with some other water companies, Wessex Water offers financial incentives which are specifically targeted at housebuilders and developers constructing new build properties, or community-led environmental projects (Wessex Water Environment Fund).

However, the company does not offer environmental grants to individual homeowners for installing rainwater or greywater harvesting systems. We would welcome Wessex Water giving serious consideration to extending the scheme to individual homeowners.

Recommendation 2: Wessex Water is heavily involved in supporting nature-based solutions (NbS) primarily to help reduce pollution of river catchment and coastal areas. Additional support would be welcomed to investigate the extent to which NbS can help to reduce localised drought occurring.

We have extracted key points from the Government report POSTnote 768 Nature-based flood and drought resilience, published in May 2026.

At the beginning of May 2025, the Government released a report examining the issue of "nature-based solutions (NbS)" to help combat flooding and **reduce the impact of possible localised droughts occurring**. Natural flood management measures such as wooden leaky dams are considered a subset of nature-based solutions that focus specifically on

reducing flood risk, by temporarily storing overland run-off and slowing flows to alter the timing and movement of water through the catchment.

Research suggests that in appropriate situations, NbS can reduce flood peaks, slow the flow of water and improve water storage, **reducing flood and drought risk**. They can also provide broader environmental and social benefits, such as enhanced biodiversity, improved water quality, and increased recreational and wellbeing opportunities for local communities.

However, contributors (to the report) emphasised this requires the evidence to determine which combinations of interventions are most effective at the catchment scale and where, why, and the projected cost.

Source: POSTnote 768 Nature-based flood and drought resilience, 1 May 2026
https://acrobat.adobe.com/id/urn:aaid:sc:EU:f281506f-a3c2-4a15-96c1-19540cc6d648