

News story: National Drought Group – Chairman’s Statement – August

The National Drought Group (NDG), chaired by the Environment Agency’s Chief Executive, brings together government departments, water companies, environmental groups and others to coordinate action to maintain water supplies and manage the other risks associated with drought. The NDG convened on Wednesday 29 August to assess the present situation and coordinate plans for the weeks ahead.

The present situation and the prospects

Rainfall across England over three months from May to July was 54% of the long-term average (LTA). Farmers, the environment and water companies faced considerable pressures caused by the rapid deterioration in water resources.

At the end of July, a band of wet weather brought some respite as it moved across parts of the country. United Utilities called off a proposed hosepipe ban in early August but continued with applications for 4 drought permits, should they be needed later in the year. These have been approved by the Environment Agency. August has been unsettled with dry periods interrupted by wet weather. This has helped the situation.

The Met Office’s 3 month outlook for September to November forecasts that above average temperatures and slightly lower than average rainfall are likely.

As we move into autumn the Environment Agency, the water companies and the other members of the NDG will continue to work closely together to reduce the risk of water restrictions and balance the needs of the public, businesses and the environment.

Action we are taking

Water Companies

Water companies have taken and will continue to take a range of actions to maintain water supplies for customers, including:

- Operational interventions such as installing new pumping stations, reconfiguring networks to reduce reliance on specific water treatment works, and accelerating work to bring sites back into operation.
- Tackling leakage by providing extra funding and resource to fix leaks, alongside use of technology such as satellite imaging and drones to find leaks.

- Implementing contingency drought plans as appropriate.
- Promoting water efficiency messages to customers through increased media activity, roadshows and community engagement.

Environment Agency

The Environment Agency has:

- Responded to a 330% increase in dry-weather related incidents compared with this time last year.
- [Introduced flexible abstraction for farmers](#) in emergency cases in order to safeguard food production and animal welfare, where it is satisfied there will be no adverse effects on the environment.
- Allowed farmers to trade water allowances – as set out in their abstraction licence – on a short-term basis, without the need to change their licences.
- Granted United Utilities 4 drought permits at locations in Cumbria, to enable them to be deployed quickly should they be needed.
- Used our powers to protect the environment by applying for a drought order. This is the first time we have used these powers due to the extraordinary dry weather this summer.

Other partners

Defra, the National Farmers' Union, Canal & River Trust, the Angling Trust and other NDG members are working actively to manage down the risks and support the needs of water users and the environment.

Advice to the public

Although we have received some rainfall during August, the overall outlook for the next 3 months remains drier than average. We encourage everyone to follow the advice of their water company and use water wisely. This will help protect the environment and the economy, and reduce the risk of further water restrictions.

Next NDG meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for 20 September where we will focus on preparing for next summer as the drought may continue through the winter.

[Press release: Minister for the Middle East visits Iran](#)

This is the first visit by a UK minister to Iran since the United States withdrew from the Iran Nuclear deal in May, and Minister Burt's third visit to the country. The Minister will have two days of meetings with Iranian Ministers, politicians and NGOs. On Saturday he will meet his counterpart, Abbas Araghchi.

Speaking ahead of the visit, Minister Burt said:

This is a crucial moment for Iran's relationship with the UK, and the wider world. Since the US withdrew from the nuclear deal we, along with European and international partners, have reiterated our support for the deal and have underscored this support through mechanisms such as EU blocking legislation. As long as Iran meets its commitments under the deal, we remain committed to it as we believe it is the best way to ensure a safe, secure future for the region.

Our support for the nuclear deal, though, does not prevent us strongly challenging Iran on issues where we disagree. During my visit this week I will stress that Iran's ballistic missile programme and its destabilising activities in the Middle East must be addressed. I will also use the opportunity of my visit to push for the resolution we all want to see in the cases of the British dual nationals detained in Iran.

Further information

[Press release: Innovative technique to install two bridges in one weekend on A14 upgrade](#)

How do you build two 1,000 tonne bridges over a very busy road while (nearly) keeping the road open throughout? You build them at the side of the road and wheel them into place at the end!

This is exactly what the A14 Cambridge to Huntingdon upgrade team has been doing over the past few months. They have built four abutments to support the new bridges as well as two bridge decks at the side of the live carriageway, and are now ready to wheel the bridges decks, each measuring 44 metres, into place on top of the abutments.

Now the team has released an engineering video to show exactly how they plan to tackle the challenge – and it involves a very big, remote controlled platform on wheels.

[Animation – Bar Hill junction bridge replacement September 2018](#)

The new bridges, which are being built as part of the £1.5 billion major improvement scheme and will be located at Bar Hill, will be installed during the weekend of 14 September. They will form a new, improved Bar Hill junction which will connect the A14 to the future local access road between Cambridge and Huntingdon, as well as to the existing local road between Bar Hill and Longstanton (B1050).

David Bray, project director for the A14 Cambridge to Huntingdon upgrade at Highways England, said:

Redesigning and building the Bar Hill junction was identified from the start of the project as one of the main challenges we would have to tackle. I am delighted that we've found a way to build the two bridges while keeping the A14 open as much as possible and disruption for people locally and road users to a minimum. And I am also excited that we're using such an innovative solution to our challenge – that's what makes my job so interesting.



The abutments for the two new bridges can be seen just south of the existing bridge and further down on the right of the road, the bridge decks are under construction

To carry out the bridge deck installation work safely, the A14 will need to be closed between Friday 14 September, 9pm, and Monday 17 September, 6am.

During the closure, clearly signed diversions will be in place as traffic not needing to enter or exit the A14 at Bar Hill will not be able to travel through the junction along the A14 in either direction.

Through traffic travelling eastbound toward Cambridge will be diverted to leave the A14 at Godmanchester (junction 24), follow the diversion via the A1198, and A428. Through traffic travelling westbound toward Huntingdon will follow the same diversion in reverse.

The team will also need to make some temporary changes to the slip road during the closure.

Traffic wishing to travel westbound from Bar Hill will be able to access the A14 towards Huntingdon but it won't be possible to travel eastbound on the A14 from Bar Hill. Traffic wishing to travel eastbound will be diverted via the westbound A14 to Godmanchester and join the through traffic diversion towards Cambridge.

The new bridges will ultimately replace the old bridge which will be demolished in 2019.

To help people find out more about this work and the closures, the A14

upgrade team will be available with their Mobile Visitor Centre at Tesco Bar Hill on Monday 3 September, 4pm to 8pm and Thursday 6 September, 4pm to 8pm.

There is no space to safely watch the work taking place, during the weekend but people can find out more about the work and closure details, and watch the work via a live stream online by visiting the A14 Cambridge to Huntingdon social media channels and website.

Highways England is upgrading a 21-mile stretch of the A14 between Cambridge and Huntingdon to three lanes in each direction including a brand new 17-mile bypass south of Huntingdon, with four lanes in each direction between Bar Hill and Girton. The project, which includes 34 bridges and main structures, will add additional capacity, boost the local and national economy and cut up to 20 minutes off journeys.

To check the latest traffic information for the A14 and other roads, listen to traffic bulletins on local and national radio stations, visit <http://www.trafficengland.com/> and follow Highways England on Twitter via @HighwaysEAST.

For the latest information about the A14 Cambridge to Huntingdon improvement scheme, visit <https://highwaysengland.co.uk/A14C2H> follow @A14C2H on Twitter and like the scheme Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/A14C2H/>.

General enquiries

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

Media enquiries

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.

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[World news story: Why would I like to meet my neighbours in the Falkland Islands?](#)

This regional competition offers winners the chance to visit the Falklands for a week with all the costs covered. To participate, contestants should send a one minute video answering the question: "Why would I like to meet my

neighbours from the Falkland Islands?" in English.

Winners will be staying with a local family, to experience first-hand the life in the Falkland Islands.

The ideal winner should be active in social media and willing to share his/her experience about the Falkland Islands through these channels.

The contest is meant to promote the cultural exchange between the Falklands and the region, and to spread the knowledge about the Falkland Island and its people.

Find out more about the competition here:

[Regional Student Competition regulations](#)

(PDF, 108KB, 4 pages)