

National Drought Group – EA Executive Director's statement

The NDG met on Thursday 25 July, chaired by Harvey Bradshaw, Executive Director of the Environment Agency.

Published 26 July 2019 From: [Environment Agency](#)



The NDG met on Thursday 25 July, chaired by Harvey Bradshaw, Executive Director of the Environment Agency, to assess the latest water resource situation and actions being taken to reduce the impact of drought conditions this summer. Harvey Bradshaw noted that the meeting was being held on the hottest day of the year so far.

The National Drought Group (NDG) brings together government departments, water companies, NFU, environmental groups and others to prepare for and mitigate the impacts of dry weather by coordinating action to maintain water supplies and protect the environment.

Current situation

Some parts of England have experienced a lack of rain since winter 2016/2017 which is now causing impacts for agriculture and the environment. Whilst June's rainfall provided some relief after a very dry spring, it hasn't replenished low groundwater levels in east and south east England. It could be some time before the water resources situation returns to normal ranges.

The group acknowledged the growing concern over the potential impacts of prolonged dry weather on the environment and the cumulative effect from last year. The National Drought Group urges water users to do all that is needed to sustain water supplies and ease pressure on the environment.

In parts of England, water supply concerns could affect the irrigation of

crops this summer. The Environment Agency continues to balance farmers' needs with those of wildlife and other water users.

Position of the water companies

Despite the lack of full recovery in the water resources position, most water companies have good reservoir storage for the remainder of this year. Further to this water companies set out the actions they are taking including: promoting customer campaigns, leakage reduction and collaborative actions to facilitate access to water for others.

Environment Agency

The Environment Agency confirmed that it will sustain its enhanced activity to ensure water users and the environment get the water they need and is:

- continuing to actively monitor the weather, water situation and the environment; manage down demand and protect the environment using regulatory powers as necessary.
- reviewing the groundwater and surface water position to consider if more water could be made available during peak demand by the means of flexible abstraction and rapid trading – wherever this can be done without damaging the environment and ensuring lawful abstraction is maintained.
- operating compensatory pumping schemes to support low river flows and protect the environment, for example the Gwash to Glenn transfer scheme which releases from Rutland water into south Lincolnshire and Trent-Witham Ancholme transfer scheme which moves water across parts of Lincolnshire.
- continuing its enforcement activity to ensure abstractors comply with their licences to help minimise the impact on the environment.
- circulating guidance to fishery managers on how to prepare and respond to incidents.
- worked with Waterwise on water efficiency guidance for irrigators to use this summer.
- working with all sectors to prepare resilience plans for autumn/winter should the dry weather continue.
- encouraging water companies to work with farmers to make more water available.

- challenged water companies to help protect and reduce the impact on environmentally sensitive water courses like chalk streams.

Agriculture

Despite the rain in June, flows have quickly receded due to the low base flows in rivers and streams resulting from the low groundwater levels in parts of East Anglia. Notice letters have been reissued this month warning of restrictions under Section 57 of the Water Resources Act 1991) on a number of surface water abstractions (watercourses) in some catchments from mid Norfolk (south of the Yare) through Suffolk and Essex from late-July. Section 57 gives the Environment Agency powers for “Emergency variation of licences for spray irrigation purposes” when there has been an exceptional shortage of rainfall or other emergency.

A continuing dry July and early August could mean a large number of abstraction licence controls which curtail the abstraction of water, will be in place in parts of England during the final weeks of the peak irrigation season finishing off crops such as potatoes and carrots. Extension of this dry weather further into the year could cause difficulties for growers trying to lift crops and present another significant demand for water.

The Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board (AHDB) has advice and guidance for farmers and growers on Section 57 Notices and those dealing with extreme weather like drought or heat on their [website](#).

Environment

Whilst the wet June has provided local and temporary respite the number and geographical distribution of incidents and impacts will increase with hot and dry weather. The number of fish and algal incidents in June was similar to 2018. Algal incidents are tracking slightly high, whilst fish incidents are relatively low. The number of fire incidents has plateaued.

The National Drought Group is an example of how the Environment Agency is working to increase resilience in the face of a climate emergency.

Advice to the public

There is enough water for all if water is managed properly and not wasted. Everyone has a role to play in ensuring that this happens. At present the average person in the UK uses 140 litres of water a day: long term water security will require all of us to reduce that figure to 100 litres of water a day.

Conclusions and next steps

The NDG confirmed that there is no threat to essential water supplies. However, a continuation of below average rainfall will prove challenging for farmers and increase environmental stress in areas where groundwater levels are lower than expected at this time of year. We urge everyone to use water wisely to help protect the environment and to conserve water supplies.

[British Embassy Ashgabat supports human rights projects](#)

The British Embassy Ashgabat and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) sign two new agreements supporting human rights projects in Turkmenistan.

Published 26 July 2019 From: [British Embassy Ashgabat](#)



On 25 July, the British Embassy Ashgabat and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) signed two agreements to support the Office of the Human Rights Ombudswoman of Turkmenistan and to support people with disabilities by encouraging the private sector to offer them employment. These two initiatives build on the British Embassy's existing and successful partnership with the UNDP.

The project to promote opportunities for people with disabilities is a continuation of UNDP's 2018 initiative to support a career fair for the disabled. The fair was preceded by a three-day course on CV writing and interview skills and attracted over 80 participants, including representatives of commercial companies.

The new project will extend the programme to the Dashoguz and Lebap regions of Turkmenistan, again putting potential employees and employers in contact with each other. It will culminate with a Christmas bazaar in December in the UN Building, where people with disabilities will have the opportunity to showcase and sell their handmade artworks.



The second project is aimed at increasing the effectiveness of the Human Rights Ombudswoman's Office and helping it to qualify for accreditation from the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI). This will build on the success of earlier UNDP-British Embassy joint projects to assist the Turkmen government in implementing its National Human Rights Action Plan 2016-2020.

David Pert, Deputy Head of Mission, said:

we are proud to continue our cooperation with UNDP through these very important projects which aim to support human rights, prosperity and stability in Turkmenistan.

[All in a day's work for problem-solvers at Highways England](#)

Reuniting a concert violinist with his beloved instrument and helping a driver stranded at motorway services for three days – it's all in a day's work for our customer contact centre.



Last year the national Customer Contact Centre (CCC), which has recently been awarded an industry accolade, dealt with over 298,000 calls, 68,000 emails and 133,754 other correspondence such as letters as staff worked around the clock, 365 days of the year.

As well as managing 4,300 miles of motorways and major A roads across England, Highways England offers information and assistance for the four million road users who use the network every day.

If members of the public have to ring Highways England, the first contact is usually with the CCC based at the National Traffic Operations Centre in Quinton, near Birmingham. Advisors offer support on a diverse range of topics; from journey planning and real-time traffic queries, to emergency response and, very often, problem solving.

These problems have varied from such dilemmas as a mum desperate to get her lost son home, a confused pensioner trying to get his toenails cut to helping a Bulgarian lady who had broken down but spoke very little English – and was rescued by traffic officers with the aid of Google Translate.

The summer can be particularly busy for the centre as new figures released by Highways England have shown that more than 48,500 motorway breakdowns happened between the final week of June and the first weekend of September last year.

Highways England is expecting to respond to an extra 700 breakdowns a week over the 10 weeks this year and we are reaching the peak period.

The first weekend in August was the busiest weekend for breakdowns on England's motorways in 2018 shortly followed by the final weekend in July, with one breakdown reported every two minutes as drivers set off on day trips and holidays.

Highways England is running a new safety campaign encouraging drivers to remember the basics of motorway driving, including what to do if you break down. Adverts on radio, billboards and online are reminding drivers of simple driving rules to keep everyone moving.

In recognition of the dedication of staff and its customer service excellence, the CCC has now received a Silver Global Standard Award from the industry-recognised Contact Centre Association.

It was presented with the award for consistently achieving accreditation to the CCA Global Standard over 10 years. This is an independent assessment and endorsement of an organisation's customer service operation, designed by industry experts.



Highways England Customer Service Director Melanie Clarke said:

Our contact centre gives people access to expert and timely advice when they need it most, ensuring people remain safe on our roads and helping get them home.

We want people to have smooth and safe journeys and would urge drivers to ensure they carry out basic vehicle checks before setting off on journeys to avoid some of the many breakdowns we encounter, particularly at this time of year.

Highways England is always striving to improve our service. Over the past 10 years we have grown the capability of our contact centre to meet the needs of our diverse range of customers.

We're extremely proud that our customer contact centre has been recognised in the industry. It represents a fantastic and well-deserved achievement for our passionate and dedicated team of

advisors. It demonstrates our ongoing commitment to delivering customer service excellence.

10 unusual calls received by the CCC

1. A horrified violinist watched his instrument fall off his bike and onto the hard shoulder en route to his concert performance. The CCC was able to send traffic officers to pick up the undamaged violin and reunite it with its owner at the next junction – and he even got to the performance in time.
2. The manager of a motorway services rang after a driver ran out of fuel and had been living in her vehicle at the site for three days. She had no fixed address and staff at the services were buying food and toiletries for the woman who was very distressed. The CCC persuaded the National Vehicle Recovery Management department to get the woman off the services and motorway– and to forego its charges.
3. One Bulgarian lady stranded in a live lane on the network rang the CCC but had limited English. Using Google Translate to communicate with her, the operator was able to find out exactly where she was and send traffic officers to help.
4. A HGV driver diverted off the A14 found himself lost with all alternative routes seemingly via low bridges or restricted access. The CCC investigated and found one route was available, although this still required a u-turn. After 25 minutes on the call the grateful HGV driver was back on track.
5. A worried mum rang the CCC at 4am because her son was travelling from Manchester to London and had got lost. The tired driver pulled over and the CCC was able to track down where he was and direct him to a nearby services for a sleep. The operator rang his mum to explain he would be home later and she later let us know when he was home safe and well.
6. An elderly man rang the emergency breakdown line asking “when are you sending someone?”. It was quickly established he hadn’t broken down when he asked: “when are you sending someone to cut my toe nails”? The team were able to direct him to the correct agency he was supposed to direct his call to.
7. Another mature man called asking to speak to the parcel office. When told he had rung Highways England he asked for help as he had no internet access. We were able to provide a few numbers for parcel companies and also transferred the call through to the post office.
8. One nightshift saw a call from a man claiming he had seen a “huge block of ice” fall from the sky on the A5. The CCC flagged it up to the Regional Control Centre and police went to investigate but the ice seemed to have melted away and there was no sign of it.
9. A chatty HGV driver rang up asking for roadworks information and proceeded to give the CCC an indepth lesson on how to put up a curtain pole correctly – his task for the evening when he got home.
10. A deer wandered onto our road network – it was reported to the CCC by none other than a Mrs DEAR.

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.

June 2019 Price Paid Data

HM Land Registry Price Paid Data tracks land and property sales in England and Wales submitted to us for registration.

Published 26 July 2019 From: [HM Land Registry](#)



In June 2019:

- the most expensive property sold was in Kensington and Chelsea for £25,975,000
- the cheapest properties sold were in Burnley, Bishop Auckland, Ferryhill and Sunderland for £20,000
- the most expensive commercial sale was in Liverpool for £45,427,079
- the cheapest commercial sales were in Barking, Harlow and Kensington and Chelsea for £100
- there was a 25.4% increase in newbuilds compared to June 2018

Of the 81,742 sales received for registration 22,948 took place in June 2019

of which:

- 424 were of residential properties in England and Wales for £1 million and over
- 236 were of residential properties in Greater London for £1 million and over
- 3 were of residential properties in West Midlands for more than £1 million
- 2 were of residential properties in Greater Manchester for more than £1 million
- 2 were of residential properties in Wales for more than £1 million

The number of sales received for registration by property type and month

Of the 81,742 sales received for registration in June 2019:

- 62,331 were freehold, a 3% decrease on June 2018
- 10,952 were newly built, a 25.4% increase on June 2018

This month's Price Paid Data includes details of more than 81,500 sales of land and property in England and Wales that HM Land Registry received for registration in June 2019.

Property type	June 2019	May 2019	April 2019
Detached	18,523	18,783	16,137
Semi-detached	21,623	22,181	19,430
Terraced	21,721	22,734	20,041
Flat/maisonette	14,393	15,811	13,345
Other	5,482	6,158	5,730
Total	81,742	85,667	74,683

There is a time difference between the sale of a property and its registration at HM Land Registry.

[Access the full dataset](#)

In the dataset you can find the date of sale for each property, its full address and sale price, its category (residential or commercial) and type (detached, semi-detached, terraced, flat or maisonette and other), whether or not it is new build and whether it is freehold or leasehold.

Background

1. Price Paid Data is published at 11am on the 20th working day of each month. The next dataset will be published on 29 August 2019.
2. [Price Paid Data](#) is property price data for all residential and

commercial property sales in England and Wales that are lodged with HM Land Registry for registration in that month, [subject to exclusions](#).

3. The amount of time between the sale of a property and the registration of this information with HM Land Registry varies. It typically ranges between 2 weeks and 2 months. Data for the 2 most recent months is therefore incomplete and does not give an indication of final monthly volumes. Occasionally the interval between sale and registration is longer than two months. The small number of sales affected cannot be updated for publication until the sales are lodged for registration.
4. Price Paid Data categories are either Category A (Standard entries) which includes single residential properties sold for full market value or Category B (Additional entries) for example sales to a company, buy-to-lets where they can be identified by a mortgage and repossessions.
5. HM Land Registry has been collecting information on Category A sales from January 1995 and on Category B sales from October 2013.
6. Price Paid Data can be downloaded in text, CSV format and in a machine readable format as [linked data](#) and is released under [Open Government Licence \(OGL\)](#). Under the OGL, HM Land Registry permits the use of Price Paid Data for commercial or non-commercial purposes. However, the OGL does not cover the use of [third party rights](#), which HM Land Registry is not authorised to license.
7. The [Price Paid Data report builder](#) allows users to build bespoke reports using the data. Reports can be based on location, estate type, price paid or property type over a defined period of time.
8. HM Land Registry's mission is to guarantee and protect property rights in England and Wales.
9. HM Land Registry is a government department created in 1862. It operates as an executive agency and a trading fund and its running costs are covered by the fees paid by the users of its services. Its ambition is to become the world's leading land registry for speed, simplicity and an open approach to data.
10. HM Land Registry safeguards land and property ownership valued at £7 trillion, enabling more than £1 trillion worth of personal and commercial lending to be secured against property across England and Wales.
11. For further information about HM Land Registry visit

www.gov.uk/land-registry.

12. Follow us on [Twitter](#), our [blog](#), [LinkedIn](#) and [Facebook](#).

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[M25 Junction 10/A3 Wisley interchange improvement – People interested in the proposal can register to give their views](#)

The application submitted by Highways England is for proposed improvements to M25 J10/A3 Wisley Interchange to allow free-flowing movement in all directions located in the M25 Junction 10, near Wisley, Surrey and A3 between Cobham/Byfleet and Ripley/Ockham.

Further information about the project can be found in the development consent application documents which are available on [the Planning Inspectorate website](#)

The public and those interested in the proposal [can register with the Planning Inspectorate](#) until midnight on 6 September 2019.

Alternatively, they may call The Planning Inspectorate's helpline: 0303 444 5000 for a printed registration form.

Sarah Richards, Chief Executive of The Planning Inspectorate said. "This is an opportunity for people to play a part in the planning process and influence the outcome. We encourage people to get involved by registering as an interested party. By doing so, people will be able to participate fully in the examination of this proposal".

Those who register will be entitled to provide evidence in writing to support their representation, to attend the Preliminary Meeting, to request an open floor hearing and to speak at other hearings where appropriate.

A copy of the application together with further information about the proposal and how to register to make a relevant representation is available on [the Planning Inspectorate website](#).

Journalists wanting further information should contact the Planning Inspectorate's Press Office, on: 0303 444 5004 or 0303 444 5005 or email: press.office@planninginspectorate.gov.uk.

More information on this application, including details of the developer's website, is available in National Infrastructure's Programme of Projects. Visit: [the Projects page](#).

Notes to editors:

- The Planning Inspectorate is an agency of the Ministry for Housing, communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and operates within the policy framework prescribed in the Planning Act 2008, secondary legislation and the National Policy Statements.

The process in a snapshot

There are six key stages within the process. The summary below provides examples of when and how people have an opportunity to provide evidence to the Planning Inspectorate.

Pre-application

Key activities:

- Project development / developer's pre-application consultation and publicity.
- Environmental impact assessment preparation and scoping, where required.

Public involvement:

- Have their say on the proposal to the developer through their pre application consultation

Acceptance by the Planning Inspectorate on behalf of the Secretary of State

Key activities:

- The Secretary of State has 28 days from the day after receipt to decide

whether or not an application should be accepted for examination

Public involvement:

- Details will be posted at the Planning Inspectorate's website on how to register as an interested party – if an application has been accepted for examination and publicised by the developer.
- Opportunity to legally challenge a decision not to accept an application.

Pre-examination

Key activities:

- Single Inspector or a Panel of Inspectors appointed.
- Preliminary Meeting called and held.
- Procedure and timetable set for examination.

Public involvement:

- Register to say what you agree or disagree with in the application
- Submit your representation
- View application documents submitted by the developer on the Planning Inspectorate website
- Attend the Preliminary Meeting
- Say how the examination should be conducted.

Examination

Key activities:

- A maximum of six months to carry out the examination

Public involvement:

- Submit more detailed comments in writing
- Comment on what other people have said
- Request and attend an open-floor hearing
- If being held, request to speak at open-floor and / or issue specific hearing(s)
- Comment on the local authority's Local Impact Report – detailing the impact of the scheme on the local area.

Decision

Key activities:

- A maximum of three months for Planning Inspectorate to issue a recommendation to the relevant Secretary of State, with a statement of reasons.
- The relevant Secretary of State then has a further three months from

receiving the recommendation in which to issue the decision.

Post decision

Key activities:

- Six weeks for any legal challenge.

Public involvement: Opportunity to challenge.