

Water Scarcity Group

Thursday 21 August 14:30 – 16:30

1. South Levels Project Update (Homes England)

Homes England provided an update on the South Levels project (LRO20), which would utilise excess winter water supply, water pumped out of the Fens area, and storage opportunities to provide additional water supply. The next steps for the project were noted, these include further feasibility studies.

Action(s)

- **EA** to progress discussions on licence changes to enable increased abstraction and transfer into the CWRZ.
- **MHCLG and Defra** to explore options for longer-term licences (beyond 12 years) for the South Levels project, potentially as a Corry Sandbox measure.
- **South Levels Subgroup** to continue providing updates via the PMO dashboard and at future WSG meetings.

2. Wastewater Treatment Plant Relocation (MHCLG)

MHCLG provided an update on the relocation of the Cambridge Wastewater Treatment Plant. It was noted that due to the large increase in cost compared with the original 2017 estimate as a result of rising costs of materials and labour and disruption to global supply chains, the relocation of the Cambridge Wastewater Treatment Plant from the Cambridge Northern Fringe East site ('Hartree') has been removed from the MHCLG Housing Infrastructure Fund programme.

Action(s)

- Defra/MHCLG to agree next steps and report back to WSG.

3. Independent Water Commission (Defra)

Defra presented an overview of the Independent Water Commission report, which was published in July 2025. The report covers seven key areas of reform, including strategic direction, planning, legislative framework, regulators, regulation reform, water companies, and infrastructure and asset health. It was noted that the government intends to respond to the recommendations in a water white paper later this year.

4. Agriculture Workstream Update (EA)

EA provided an update on work to strengthen how agricultural water planning fits into regional water resource groups. Over the past two years, the EA has delivered several projects to improve understanding and resilience in this area.

5. Project Management Update

MHCLG provided a project management update, including updates on Cambridge Water's dry weather status, as well as project updates for Nature Based Solutions and Agriculture.

6. Cambridge Water Update

Cambridge Water provided an update on the Grafham Pipeline Transfer, including their ongoing work to engage landowners.

7. Any Other Business

The next WSG meeting is planned for 2 October, 14:30 to 16:30.

Action(s)

- Subgroups to reach out to Paul Leinster for support as/when needed.