

Definition of Water Neutrality

Water Neutrality is not currently defined in legislation, but is drawn from the Gatwick Sub regional Water Cycle Study (2020)¹

total water use in the Sussex North Water Supply
Zone after the development must be ***equal to or less*** than the total water-use in the

New development is considered to be any relevant project requiring a public water supply
large planning applications. , but is likely to be dominated by

The concept of Water Neutrality has been developed to form what is intended to be a legally robust and proportionate route to consenting plans and projects where a site is in Unfavourable Conservation Status or in Favourable Conservation Status but exceeding the relevant thresholds.

However, whilst Natural England encourages the adoption of Water Neutrality by decision makers, this is only a tool to help ensure compliance with the 2017 Regulations, and does not preclude the consideration by local planning authorities of alternative methods to protect the Habitats Sites whilst enabling development, provided the Habitat Regulations Assessment tests are met.

Furthermore, each project will continue to require its own assessment. The Advice Note is not intended to pre-judge the outcome of individual applications, each of which will need to be considered on its individual merits and the findings of its accompanying assessment.

For the avoidance of doubt, since the 2017 Regulations cannot be applied retrospectively, the requirement for Water Neutrality will not apply to any projects with full planning permission prior to the Natural England Statement being published on 14 September 2021, in addition this would equally apply to not requiring future developments to mitigate the impact of those developments already granted full permission at that point.

ention that Water Neutrality is integrated into relevant Local Plans in partnership with local authorities. However, given the existing stresses on the sites and the need to engage with individual planning decisions, the Statement is considered the most effective interim approach to help ensure that any planning applications within the Sussex North Water Supply Zone can be determined in compliance with the 2017 Regulations whilst the Strategy is evolving.

Strategic long-term approach

Given existing pressures, both environmental and developmental, achieving Water Neutrality is likely to remain necessary for as long as the adverse effect risk from water supply abstraction continues, and may be required until the Habitats sites in question are restored to FCS. In practical terms, this is likely to require the delivery of an alternative water supply (estimated around 2030 with significant uncertainty).

The situation continues to evolve, and Natural England intends to update this Statement periodically as the evidence base on the Water Neutrality, the strategic solution and other material matters develops.