Western Sussex Rivers Trust

Working with Water Companies - Our Approach

Our purpose as a charitable organisation is to protect, restore and improve the health of rivers and streams. Unfortunately, not one single river or stream in the catchments we work across in Western Sussex and East Hampshire has yet achieved *good* ecological status. Whilst the operations of water and sewage companies are not the only reason for this, their activities including discharge of treated effluent, storm overflows, groundwater abstraction and surface water abstraction have a very significant negative impact.

The water companies often, and rightly, face criticism: the sector has much work to do to regain public trust and deliver effectively for communities and the environment. As an independent charity we do not hesitate to raise concerns with water companies or relevant regulatory bodies, or to challenge activities that cause harm to the environment or create risks for public health.

We agree with the 2021 conclusion of the Parliamentary Environmental Audit Committee that the dire state of waterways in England is in part due to poor operational management and underinvestment in infrastructure, and that much stronger and more effective regulation of water companies is needed. https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5802/cmselect/cmenvaud/74/report.html. We look forward to the implementation of the Government White Paper A New Vision for Water published in February 2026 following the Cunliffe Review of the water sector.

Our approach is focused on finding solutions to the complex and grave problems facing our rivers. In line with our umbrella organisation The Rivers Trust we believe that such solutions can only be found with the involvement and cooperation of the water companies. We therefore engage with these companies both critically and constructively. We cooperate with them as we do with local authorities, farmers, landowners, communities and other environmental organisations to improve the health of our rivers and riverscapes.

Water companies are required by law to invest in and deliver environmental improvement. Although this includes upgrading their own infrastructure, they also contribute funding to partnership projects including river restoration. The Western Sussex Rivers Trust receives or has received financial support from Southern Water, Portsmouth Water and United

Utilities, amongst diverse funding sources that also include local authorities and grant awarding bodies.

The Trustees of the Western Sussex Rivers Trust are clear that whilst we should engage and cooperate with the water companies on practical action for our rivers, and welcome their support for our work, this does not in any way lessen our commitment to greater transparency, or demands for better environmental performance from the water companies and more effective regulation of the industry. We recognise that many people working within the industry and regulatory bodies share that commitment.

This policy will remain under review, taking account of significant regulatory or industry change.

The Trustees of the Western Sussex Rivers Trust