



Grand Union
Canal Transfer

Pre-Application Programme Document

February 2026

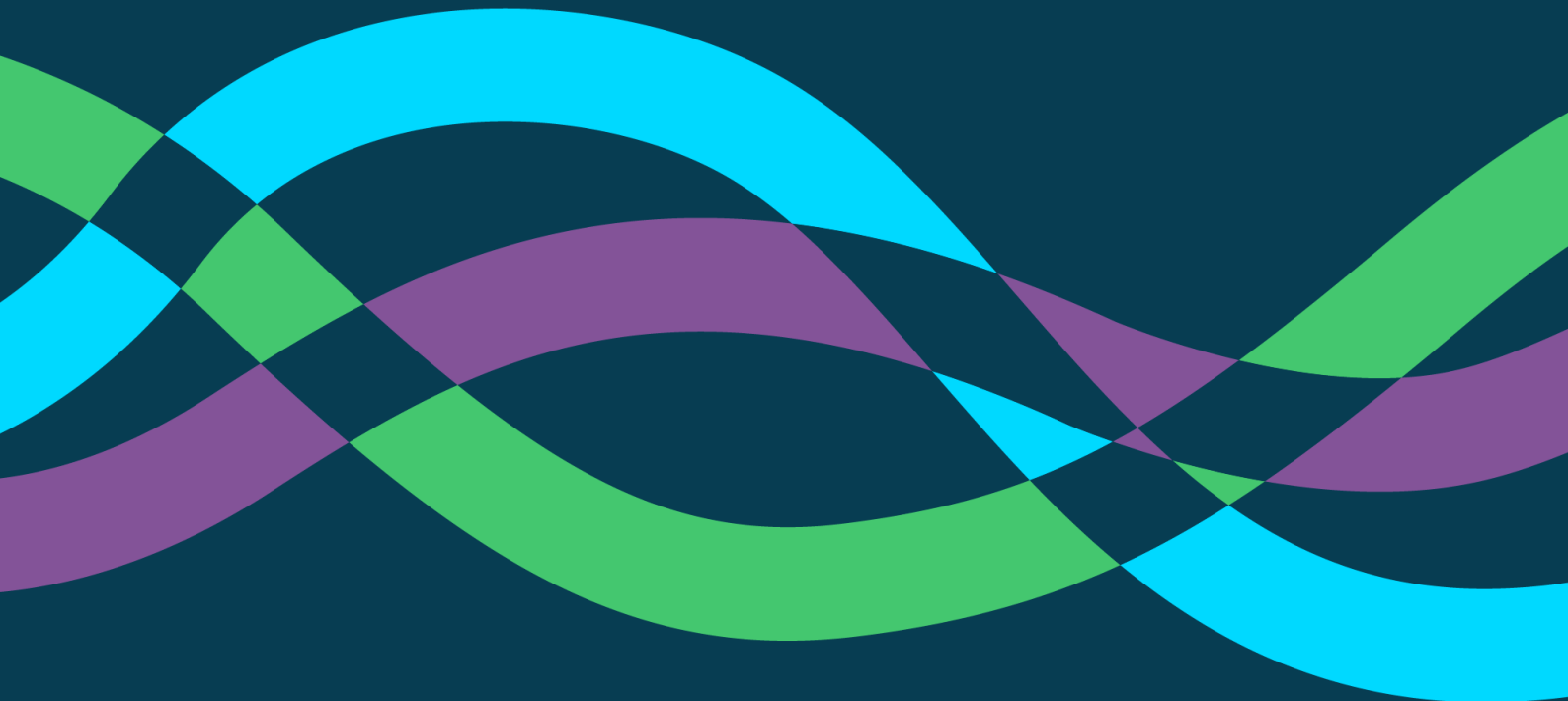


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1. Introduction

- 1.1.1 This programme document has been prepared for the Grand Union Canal Transfer project (hereafter referred to as ‘the Proposed Development’) as required by the Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects: 2024 Pre-application Prospectus.
- 1.1.2 The document has been produced to support primary service feature 1. Programme Document, which requires *“the production and maintenance, by the applicant, of a pre-application Programme Document setting out the main steps that the applicant anticipates taking during the preparation of the application”*.
- 1.1.3 By virtue of a direction of the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs under section 35 of the Planning Act 2008 (Ref.1) (issued in October 2024), the Proposed Development is to be treated as development for which development consent is required.
- 1.1.4 The Development Consent Order (DCO) application for the Proposed Development will be made by Affinity Water (AfW) and Severn Trent Water (ST) (hereafter referred to as ‘the Applicant’). As noted in the request for the section 35 direction, the Canal & River Trust (the Trust) may become one of the Applicants. The National Policy Statement for Water Resources Infrastructure (July 2025) (Ref.2) is the relevant national policy statement for the Proposed Development and its application.
- 1.1.5 The purpose of this document is to set out the main steps that the Applicant anticipates taking during the preparation of the application, to allow the Planning Inspectorate (PINS), relevant statutory bodies and consultees, local authorities, other stakeholders and members of the public to understand the likely timeframe for key pre-application steps and to, therefore, be able to resource and participate in pre-application activities effectively.
- 1.1.6 The document also sets out the standard tier of pre-application service accepted by PINS, in accordance with the requirements for a Programme Document set out in Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects: 2024 Pre-application Prospectus (May 2024). It is a requirement for the programme document to be published by the Applicant on its project website to support ongoing pre-application engagement.
- 1.1.7 This document reflects the current position of the Proposed Development. It will be updated as necessary with any changes communicated by the Applicant and requested by PINS throughout the pre-application process and forthcoming changes to the Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project consenting regime.

2. The Proposed Development

- 2.1.1 The Grand Union Canal Transfer project will transfer water from Severn Trent’s supply area to areas of water deficit in Affinity Water’s supply area, via a combination of treatment plants, pipelines and use of the Canal & River Trust’s historic canal network. Recycled water will be treated in a new Advanced Water Treatment Plant at Severn Trent’s existing Minworth Wastewater Recycling Centre before being transferred east via a new pipeline and discharged into the Coventry Canal near Atherstone. Thereafter, the existing Coventry, Oxford and Grand Union canals, in addition to their statutory navigation role, will convey the treated recycled water to an abstraction point on the Grand Union Canal south of Milton Keynes, where water will be stored and further treated to drinking water quality prior to its entry via a new pipeline

into Affinity Water's distribution system to the west of Luton. The project is linear in nature and extends to approximately 160km of which approximately 120km is canal network.

- 2.1.2 The principal components of the Proposed Development can be split into a number of parts as presented in Table 2.1 below:

Table 2.1: Principal components of the Proposed Development

Project Part	Principal Components
Part 1a – Minworth AWTP	Starting at the existing Minworth Wastewater Recycling Centre (WwRC) in the Royal Town of Sutton Coldfield, recycled water will be treated in a new AWTP located on ST owned land just to the south-east of the existing Minworth WwRC.
Part 1b – Minworth to Atherstone Pipeline	From the Minworth AWTP, the treated recycled water will be transferred east to the Coventry Canal at Atherstone, North Warwickshire, via a buried pipeline, approximately 15 kilometres (km) in length. A Break Pressure Tank (BPT), located south of Merevale, is required to manage the water pressure that will be generated in the pumped rising main section of the pipeline.
Part 2 – Works to the Coventry, Oxford and Grand Union canals	From the new outfall, the water will travel south through the Coventry Canal and Oxford Canal and then into the Grand Union Canal (approximately 120 km total length of canal network). To manage flow velocities and water level changes within the canal network resulting from the water transfer, a range of new infrastructure, along with improvements to existing equipment, will be required. The new infrastructure will include new pumping stations at locks (uphill), weir bypasses around locks (downhill) and some sections of bank raising. Three new locks, referred to as transfer locks, are also proposed to reduce some of the lengths of bank raising that would otherwise be required.
Part 3 – Works to Daventry and Drayton Reservoirs	The existing Daventry and Drayton Reservoirs will be utilised to provide storage to ensure water supply is maintained during periods when there may be less water in the canal network. This is in addition to their current purpose of supplying water to the canal for navigation. This will require some additional infrastructure and improvements to existing infrastructure at the reservoirs.
Part 4a – Abstraction, Storage and Treatment	Water will be abstracted from the Grand Union Canal at a location near Great Brickhill, southeast of Milton Keynes. Abstracted water will then be piped and pumped to the proposed Galley Water Treatment Works (WTW) where it will be stored and further treated to drinking water standards'.
Part 4b – Pipeline to an existing underground reservoir near Luton	From the Galley WTW site, the treated water will be transferred via a new buried pipeline approximately 28 km in length to an existing underground water supply reservoir (AfW owned) located near Luton for distribution to AfW customers.

- 2.1.3 The Proposed Development (illustratively shown in Figure 2.1) is located within the administrative areas of Birmingham City Council, North Warwickshire Borough Council, Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council, Coventry City Council, Rugby Borough Council, Warwickshire County Council, West Northamptonshire Council, Milton Keynes City Council, Buckinghamshire Council and Central Bedfordshire Council.

- 2.1.4 The Proposed Development is a central component of AfW's Water Resources Management Plan 2024 (WRMP24) (Ref.4). This plan establishes the need for an increase in water resilience and identifies an inter-regional water transfer scheme using the Grand Union Canal to transfer water from the Midlands to the South-East as a key element of the overall water supply solution. The Proposed Development is also part of the Regulators' Alliance for Progressing Infrastructure Development's (RAPID) programme of Strategic Resource Options (SROs) to meet the water needs set out in the Environment Agency's National Framework for Water Resources (Ref.5).

Figure 2.1: The Grand Union Canal Transfer Project

GUCT scheme route overview



3. The level of pre-application service

- 3.1.1 The Inception Meeting with the Planning Inspectorate was held on 14 February 2025. Minutes of this meeting are available on the Planning Inspectorate Project pages, under Section 51 advice: <https://national-infrastructure-consenting.planninginspectorate.gov.uk/projects/WA0210001/s51advice/100000109>. A Project Update Meeting was held on 3 December 2025. Minutes of this meeting are available under Section 51 advice: [Pre-application s51 Advice Log-Grand Union Canal Transfer](#).
- 3.1.2 The Planning Inspectorate have confirmed that the requested standard pre application service tier (Tier 2) is the appropriate service tier for the Proposed Development. The Applicant intends to utilise the project update meetings with PINS at key milestones in the pre-application process, the draft documents review service, and an embedded risk review process included within the Tier 2 service.
- 3.1.3 The Applicant does not currently envisage applying for any of the supplementary pre-application components included in the Annex of the Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects: 2024 Pre-application prospectus. However, in the event complexities cannot be resolved through the pre-application services approach, the Applicant would welcome the opportunity to consider whether to do so in the future.

4. Programme of pre-application activities

4.1 Background

4.1.1 In accordance with the consultation requirements set out within the Planning Act 2008 (Ref. 1), the Infrastructure Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017 (as amended) (the EIA Regulations) (Ref. 3) and good practice, the following consultation has or will be undertaken to inform the ongoing design of the Proposed Development including in respect of location, siting, routing and associated works, and the final form of the application prior to the submission of the DCO application:

- (a) Phase One Public Consultation (11 September to 25 October 2024);
- (b) EIA Scoping consultation; (31 March to 9 May 2025);
- (c) Phase Two Public Consultation (11 February to 2 April 2026);
- (d) Ongoing technical engagement; and
- (e) Ongoing engagement and consultation with potentially affected landowners and local communities.

4.2 Phase One Public Consultation

4.2.1 The Applicant has already undertaken consultation in the form of a non-statutory Phase One public consultation, which ran for six weeks from 11 September to 25 October 2024. A series of consultation events (9) and pop-up events (6) were held at various locations along the route of the Proposed Development to maximise stakeholder engagement and accommodate varied interests across the project. Engagement included sending over 14,000 postcards to local residents; posters across local communities; press releases; 250 stakeholders emailed; and over 7000 boating customers contacted. The 15 in person consultation events were visited by 780 people. In total 475 written responses were received to the non-statutory consultation and over 200 phone and email enquiries.

4.3 Environmental Impact Assessment Scoping Consultation

4.3.1 The Project EIA Scoping Report:

<https://nsip-documents.planninginspectorate.gov.uk/published-documents/WA0210001-000003-GUCT%20EIA%20Scoping%20Report%20Volume%201%20Main%20Report.pdf>

was submitted to PINS on 28 March 2025, building on the work completed since the Phase One Public Consultation and ongoing technical engagement with statutory consultees.

4.3.2 The Planning Inspectorate (on behalf of the Secretary of State (SoS)) consulted on the Scoping Report in accordance with the EIA Regulations (Ref. 3) and the EIA Scoping Opinion was issued on 8 May 2025 [WA0210001-000017-Grand Union Canal Transfer Scoping Opinion.pdf](#).

4.3.3 Work since the Inception Meeting has focused on the further development of the project design and preparation of materials required for the Phase Two Public Consultation and production of the Project's Preliminary Environmental Information Report. This work will continue until the Phase Two Public Consultation in February 2026.

4.4 Ongoing engagement/consultation

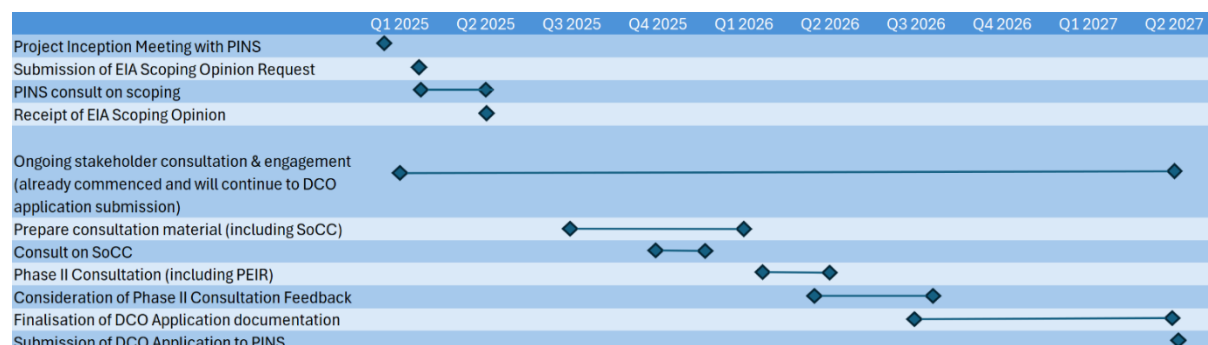
Phase Two Public Consultation

- 4.4.1 Prior to the submission of the DCO application, the Applicant will undertake further consultation in accordance with the requirements of the Planning Act 2008 (Ref. 1) and the EIA Regulations (Ref. 3).
- 4.4.2 In accordance with Section 47(1) of the Planning Act 2008 (Ref. 1), the Applicant has prepared a draft Statement of Community Consultation (SoCC). This outlines how the Applicant intends to formally consult with the local community about the Proposed Development, in accordance with Regulation 12 of the EIA Regulations (Ref. 3), and how they intend to publicise and consult on the Preliminary Environmental Information Report (PEIR). The Applicant is required to consult the local authorities identified pursuant to section 43 of the Planning Act 2008 on the draft SoCC and they will have a period of at least 28 days following receipt of the request to comment on the draft SoCC prior to publication for inspection by the public.
- 4.4.3 The Applicant carried out informal engagement on the approach to Phase Two Public Consultation with local authorities in August 2025. Following this, formal consultation (as required by Section 47) on the draft SoCC took place between 24 October and 25 November. The applicant has taken into account any comments received from local authorities on the draft SoCC in the preparation of the published SoCC. The Applicant will undertake Phase Two Public Consultation, in accordance with the published SoCC, in February 2026.
- 4.4.4 Following the Phase Two Public Consultation, the Applicant will review the responses received. The Applicant would look to prepare a statement relating to the adequacy of consultation milestone as set out in the Planning Act 2008 Guidance: Pre-application stage for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects. A summary of how consultation feedback has informed the scheme design will also be included as part of the DCO application.
- 4.4.5 The applicant will continue to engage with statutory bodies as the scheme is refined between Phase Two Public Consultation and submission of the DCO application. The applicant will continue to monitor the implications of forthcoming legislative and policy changes to the consultation requirements for the project.

4.5 Current pre-application programme (February 2026)

- 4.5.1 The project programme is driven by a number of different factors. The current programme presented below (Figure 4.1) focuses on the activities that enable consultees, stakeholders and interested parties to engage with the development of the Project as well as covering the pre-application requirements.

Figure 4.1: The Grand Union Canal Transfer Project Pre-application Programme



- 4.5.2 It has been confirmed that this Project will follow the standard pre-application service tier as set out in the PINS pre-application service prospectus (2024). As such, a maximum of six project meetings per annum could be arranged. The schedule of future meetings at key project milestones will be agreed with PINS. An indicative meeting schedule is provided in the Table 4.1 below:

Table 4.1: Pre-application Engagement with PINS

Indicative meeting	Proposed Timing
Post-Scoping, pre-section 42 consultation	December 2025
Post-section 42 consultation	June 2026
General Update Meeting	October 2026
Draft documents feedback meeting	December 2026
Pre-Adequacy of Consultation Milestone	Q1 2027
Pre-submission meeting	Q1 2027

- 4.5.3 The programme shown in Figure 4.1 will be updated as necessary during the pre-application period to publicise completion of significant stages of the process and to demonstrate progress in the preparation of the application for development consent. It should be noted that the programme is subject to change and will be reviewed on a regular and ongoing basis. Updates to key milestones in the pre-application programme will be communicated to key stakeholders and published on the Project website: <https://guctransfer.co.uk/>

5. Engagement

- 5.1.1 The engagement undertaken to date has been proportionate and effective for the current stage of the application preparation process. The following table (Table 5.1) provides a high-level summary of the engagement that has taken place to date with various different consultees and stakeholders.

Table 5.1: Summary of Engagement to date

Consultee Category	Key Groups	Engagement approach
Government & Local Authority	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), MPs and Local Councillors along the route of the Proposed Development.	Letter was sent at the launch of the Proposed Development and follow-up sent for consultation. Meetings and written briefings for MPs and local councillors as requested.
		Invitation to consultation launch event (held on 11 September 2024) sent and bespoke meeting as requested.
		Introductory engagement with councillors elected after May 2025 local elections.
	Local Authorities (County Council, District Council, Town and Parish Council)	Information letter about the consultation and one-to-one meetings as requested.

Further targeting through Local Authority Liaison group. Planning performance agreements (PPAs) being considered for individual authorities where required.

Regulators and Statutory Bodies	Environment Agency (EA)	Regular engagement through National Appraisal Unit (NAU) and National Infrastructure Team (NIT) meetings and specific one-to-one sessions as required.
	Natural England (NE)	
	Drinking Water Inspectorate (DWI)	
	Office of Water Services (OFWAT)	
	Historic England (HE)	Invited to consultation launch. Briefings on the Proposed Development and agreement in place to comment on scheme specifics
	Consumer Council for Water (CCW)	Update on consultation via water company updates
Non Regulators	Regulators' Alliance for Progressing Infrastructure (RAPID)	Formal check-in meetings quarterly supplemented by informal catch-ups on specific topics, issues and clarifications as needed
Community		Information letter about the consultation. Targeted briefings and presentations.
	Landowners	Letters sent to request access for surveys, one-to-one calls and meetings as required. Information letter sent about the consultation.
	Canal User Groups Towpath users Boating customers	Email notification of consultation. Targeted pop-up consultation events. Further targeting via Canal User Working Group .
	Residents close to scheme	Notified of consultation directly by letter within consultation zone boundary. Posters sent to local community hubs
Environmental	Wildlife Trust	Targeted briefing through Public Value Working Group.
	Rivers Trust	
	Woodland Trust	Additional engagement with National Trust relating to land ownership in the Dunstable Downs.
	National Trust	
	Local environmental NGOs (non-governmental orgs)	Email notification of consultation.
	Chilterns Conservation Board	
	RSPB (Royal Society for the Protection of Birds)	
Business	Small & large businesses along route (including canal businesses) – potentially impacted by construction	Notified directly of consultation within consultation zone boundary
Emergency Services	Fire and Rescue Service	Notified as part of consultation
	Police Service	
	Ambulance Service	

5.1.2 As indicated in the above table, in addition to the Phase One Public Consultation that has been undertaken, technical engagement on the Proposed Development has also been undertaken and is ongoing as part of the Regulatory Alliance for Progressing Infrastructure Development (RAPID) gated process – a process which is separate to the DCO process. RAPID is comprised of representatives from Ofwat, the Environment Agency and the Drinking Water Inspectorate. Engagement with the Environment Agency's National Appraisal Unit (NAU) and Natural England, has been undertaken throughout the RAPID process and has

included bi-monthly meetings to provide comprehensive updates and receive feedback on environmental assessments and monitoring.

- 5.1.3 Engagement with MPs and Local Councilors along the potential route of the Proposed Development commenced at the launch of the scheme. These stakeholders were invited to the consultation launch and meetings have been organised where requested.
- 5.1.4 Town and Parish Councils have been engaged through in-person briefings, and ten [10] responded to the non-statutory consultation. A Local Authority Liaison Group has been established, which brings together the ten local authorities along the route and meetings on a quarterly basis.
- 5.1.5 During 2022, the Applicant held two Canal User Workshops (January and July). Attendance at these included representatives of boating, fishing, canoeing and wider environmental groups. A Canal User Working Group was started at non-statutory consultation with a session held in November 2024 and further sessions are delivered on a quarterly basis. Emails were also sent out to people living along the canal route and boaters.
- 5.1.6 In addition to the regulatory engagement completed as part of the RAPID process, ongoing technical engagement with all stakeholders, including prescribed consultees, is being and will continue to be undertaken.

6. Issues identified for resolution

- 6.1.1 During the Phase One Public Consultation (11 September to 25 October 2024), a number of different issues were raised, these are summarised in Table 6.1 below. The applicant will continue to work proactively with all stakeholders prior to, during and after the Phase Two Public Consultation to address these issues and any others raised.

Table 6.1 Summary of Main Issues

Issue	Tracking
Views on the southern pipeline options and the impact on the environment, local communities and roads.	To be addressed by ongoing design work, assessment and development of any necessary mitigation measures.
Northern section – identification of considerations to identify a preferred option for the outfall location, refine the visual impact of new infrastructure and limit any construction impacts, particularly on local roads.	Addressed by ongoing design work and assessment which has led to the identification of a preferred outfall location at Atherstone.
Potential impact of pipeline routing near Atherstone on Coleshill Road, the golf course and existing green space.	To be addressed by consideration of Phase Two public consultation feedback, ongoing design work, assessment and development of any necessary mitigation measures.
Consideration of pipeline route in the northern section, where it runs close to villages or other developments.	To be addressed by ongoing design work, assessment and development of any necessary mitigation measures.
The impact of the proposed advanced treatment works at Minworth.	To be addressed by ongoing design work, assessment and development of any necessary mitigation measures.
Need for further scheme definition and detail.	To be addressed by ongoing design work, assessment and development of any necessary

	mitigation measures. Further detail of scheme to be clarified at Phase Two Public Consultation.
The potential impact on canal water flows, quality and levels and the impact on users of the canal network.	To be addressed by ongoing design work, assessment and development of any necessary mitigation measures and assessment including extensive flow modelling.
The importance of the canal as a leisure and recreation asset and its industrial heritage.	To be addressed by ongoing development of design principles for the scheme and the development of a social value approach.
Southern water treatment and storage site options and impact on people, interests and communities.	To be addressed by ongoing design and assessment work which helped inform the proposal for the southern site being consulted on at Phase Two Public Consultation.
Alternative southern sites for water treatment and storage suggested.	Fed into further design and assessment work and helped inform proposal for the southern site being consulted on at Phase Two Public Consultation

- 6.1.2 The Applicant will continue to keep these issues under review, and where appropriate engage with PINS, affected statutory bodies, local authorities, prescribed consultees and other stakeholders in relation to them.

7. Management of pre-application process

- 7.1.1 Progress through the pre-application process will be reviewed on a regular basis and where any risks are identified to achieving the milestones identified within the project programme, these will be managed as far as possible to mitigate the need to revise the pre-application programme set out.

Appendix A References

- Ref. 1. His Majesty's Stationary Office (HMSO) (2008) The Planning Act 2008. Available at: [Planning Act 2008](#) [Accessed 12/10/2025].
- Ref. 2. HMSO (2025) National Policy Statement for Water Resources Infrastructure. Available at: [National Policy Statement for water resources infrastructure](#)
- Ref. 3. HMSO (2017) The Infrastructure Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017 (as amended). Available at: [The Infrastructure Planning \(Environmental Impact Assessment\) Regulations 2017](#) [Accessed 12/10/2025]
- Ref. 4. Affinity Water (2024) Water Resources Management Plan October 2024. Available at: [Water Resources Management Plan | Affinity Water Have your say](#) [Accessed 12/10/2025].
- Ref. 5. Environment Agency (2025)] [National Framework for Water Resources 2025: water for growth, nature and a resilient future - GOV.UK](#) - GOV.UK

Glossary

AfW	Affinity Water
AWTP	Advanced Water Treatment Plant
DCO	Development Consent Order
GUC	Grand Union Canal
MP	Member of Parliament
NAU	National Appraisal Unit
Ofwat	The Water Services Regulation Authority
PEIR	Preliminary Environmental Information Report
PINS	The Planning Inspectorate
RAPID	Regulatory Alliance for Progressing Infrastructure Development
SoCC	Statement of Community Consultation
SoS	Secretary of State
SRO	Strategic Resource Option
ST	Severn Trent Water
the Trust	The Canal & River Trust
WRMP	Water Resources Management Plan
WTW	Water Treatment Works
WwRC	Wastewater Recycling Centre