

5 August 2022

DROUGHT IS A WAKE-UP CALL TO RADICALLY CHANGE OUR ATTITUDES TO WATER

The current period of hot, dry weather in Wiltshire and Berkshire should serve as a warning sign that our use of water needs wholesale change.

July 2022 was England's driest since 1935, with South East England receiving just 9% of average rainfall for the month, and the South West not much better at 17%. The Climate Crisis means we can expect these drier, hotter summers to become the norm.

For some rivers, for instance the river Pang at Hampstead Norreys, this means that the whole river flow is made up of sewage effluent, whilst for others it means there is less water to support the abundant wildlife that lives in our chalk streams. River flows on the Kennet are below average for the time of year, and with the dry weather showing no sign of abating and water consumption rising things will only get worse. This summer we had the hottest day on record and the chalk streams, known for their constantly cool water have been warmer than we have seen before. This is bad news for species like trout, which need cool, oxygen rich water to survive.

Charlotte Hitchmough, Director at Action for the River Kennet, said:

'In the short term, hosepipe bans and voluntary actions to reduce water use are necessary to give our rivers a chance of surviving this summer. In this region we have one of the highest levels of water consumption per person in Europe. We all have the power to do better for our rivers and use less water. But in the longer term we need a strategic approach to water resource planning that does not rely on being able to abstract more water from rivers and aquifers in times of drought.'

To tackle this grave issue, ARK and other rivers trusts are calling for:

- **Water metering** for all households – smart meters for water will allow people to better understand their domestic water use and will help to identify leaks. A social tariff could be brought in to ease the burden on lower income households.
- An urgent, rapid **reduction in leaks** from water infrastructure – In 2021, Thames Water leaked a quarter of all the water they supplied. This needs to change.
- Support, incentives, and guidance for households to be **able reduce water usage permanently** – examples include the installation of water butts, grey water recycling, low-flush toilets, and water-wise gardening. Courses like ARK's Rain Garden UK training are part of this solution. The planning system should require all new homes to be water efficient.
- Widespread implementation of **sustainable drainage** – incorporating features such as rain gardens, wetlands, and permeable pavements as part of a large-scale green infrastructure to help to build up local stores of water underground which can gradually recharge watercourses over time, reducing strain on them during drier months. ARK has installed some great examples at schools in Wiltshire.

Richard Clarke, ARK's chairman said: 'Gone are the days we can treat water as an infinite resource. It's not viable to meet our current consumption patterns and enjoy flowing rivers without significant changes.'

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Notes to Editor

Action for the River Kennet is a charity dedicated to protecting and improving the rivers in the Kennet and Pang catchments, they are proud members of The Rivers Trust.

For more information: e. charlotte@riverkennet.org m. 07880 515859