

Horsham District Council and West Chiltington Parish Council Joint Statement: Update on Water Neutrality and West Chiltington Neighbourhood Plan Examination

19 December 2025

This note has been prepared by Horsham District Council and endorsed by West Chiltington Parish Council. It confirms that both parties support modifications to the West Chiltington Neighbourhood Plan to remove its policy requirements for water neutrality. The remainder of this note explains the reasons for that recommendation.

Summary of water neutrality position

In September 2021, Natural England issued a Water Neutrality Position Statement for the Sussex North Water Supply Zone (including West Chiltington). It required new development to demonstrate “water neutrality” to protect the Arun Valley habitats. This requirement extended to plan making to ensure all plans and programmes were compliant with the Habitat Regulations 2017. On 31 October 2025, Natural England formally withdrew its Water Neutrality Position Statement, following an agreement with Southern Water and the Environment Agency. In the Withdrawal Statement, Natural England advises that local authorities are no longer required to consider water neutrality measures when determining relevant plans or projects. The Natural England Withdrawal Statement is published on the Council’s website¹.

The Withdrawal Statement relies on a licence cap on water abstraction being agreed by the Environment Agency which will mitigate adverse impacts on the Arun Valley SAC/RAMSAR sites. The new licence is expected to apply from March 2026 from which point water neutrality will cease to be a requirement. As an interim measure, from 1 November 2025, all new developments in Horsham District are deemed water neutral using Southern Water’s 2024/25 water efficiency savings. No bespoke condition or Section 106 clause is any longer required to demonstrate water neutrality and no payment is required into an offsetting scheme.

What This Means for the West Chiltington Neighbourhood Plan

The Withdrawal Statement removes the need for the development plan (including neighbourhood plans) to include any policy requiring water neutrality.

Recommendation to Examiner

Given the changed circumstances explained above, West Chiltington Parish Council and Horsham District Council request that the Examiner recommends the removal of water neutrality-related policies and requirements in his eventual report from the emerging West Chiltington Neighbourhood Plan.

¹ https://www.horsham.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0019/153037/Arun-Valley-Withdrawal-Statement-31.10.25.pdf

The above statement is endorsed by:

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Norman Kwan'.

Norman Kwan – Senior Neighbourhood Planning Officer, HDC

Signed on behalf of Horsham District Council:

Date: 06/01/2025

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R Gustar'.

Cllr Robert Gustar – Chair of West Chiltington Parish Council

Signed on behalf of West Chiltington Parish Council:

Date: 06/01/2025