

SNWCS Applicant User Guide

July 2025

This document provides guidance to applicants seeking to use the Sussex North Water Certification Scheme (SNWCS), formerly the Sussex North Offsetting Water Scheme (SNOWS), to meet the water neutrality requirements for their development imposed by [Natural England's Water Neutrality Position Statement](#). It provides an overview of which developments can request SNWCS certification and how these will be prioritised, how to apply for SNWCS certification, information requirements for planning applications and SNWCS applications, how the SNWCS process works and associated deadlines, and the one-off cost for SNWCS certification.

Further information and guidance about SNWCS is available via the [SNWCS web page](#). You can also contact the SNWCS team via SNWCS@horsham.gov.uk.

This guidance relates only to the SNWCS application process. If you have any queries related to the planning application process and water neutrality, we recommend that you refer to [FAQs on Horsham District Council's website](#) and/or contact your local planning department directly.

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Applications eligible to access SNWCS

Our definition for the applications that are eligible to access SNWCS is provided below.

If your application meets this definition, you are open to requesting SNWCS certification during the planning application process.

If your application does not meet this definition, you cannot request SNWCS certification and will need to find an alternative solution to meet your application's water neutrality requirements.

If you are unsure whether your application meets the SNWCS eligibility criteria, please contact the local authority Development Management team relevant to your application, who will be able to provide you with further advice.

Applications submitted via West Sussex County Council's (WSCC) Regulation 3 process (for infrastructure related development) will follow a different SNWCS process offering secured access. If your application will be submitted as Regulation 3, please discuss SNWCS access with the Development Management team at WSCC.

SNWCS eligibility criteria

Applicants will be able to request Sussex North Water Certification Scheme (SNWCS) certification for their development's water offsetting needs, unless it is:

1. Development where the principle is not in accordance with:
 - a) an adopted or a post-submission local plan; or
 - b) a made or post-examination neighbourhood plan

All of the documents/sites referred to in a) & b) above have informed the preparation of Southern Water's Water Resources Management Plan 2024 calculations of water demand.

Non-qualifying development includes:

- housing development outside settlement boundaries on unallocated sites;
- employment development on unallocated sites and/or outside of existing employment sites (unless supported by economic planning policies); or
- development not otherwise accepted in-principle by way of specific development plan policies – such policies include:
 - retirement and specialist care,
 - gypsy and traveller sites,
 - tourism,
 - and some minerals and waste development

and/or

2. Development permitted by virtue of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (or as subsequently amended) (GPDO) *

** Excluding applications submitted to SNWCS for development by a local authority (as defined in Schedule 2, Part 12 of the GPDO)*

Outline planning applications

Applications will only be allocated to available capacity in SNWCS following Full or Reserved Matters approval. Applications will not be allocated to available SNWCS capacity following approval of Outline planning applications.

Outline sites intending to use SNWCS will need to request access at the Outline application stage, as long as they meet the [SNWCS eligibility criteria](#), but SNWCS capacity will not be allocated until Reserved Matters applications linked to the Outline application are submitted.

When to apply for SNWCS certification

Currently, you can only request access to SNWCS at the planning application stage by indicating in your Water Neutrality Statement that you wish to access SNWCS to cover your application's planned water use. Your application must meet the [SNWCS eligibility criteria](#).

Once the SNWCS team is consulted with your application by the relevant local authority Development Management team, we will contact you directly to discuss your SNWCS access.

SNWCS information to submit with planning applications

Any information to support your SNWCS application should be included in the Water Neutrality Statement (WNS) submitted with your planning application. Any requirements listed below are in addition to any requirements set by the relevant Development Management team for information to be included in any WNS.

You will need to provide a value in litres per day (l/d) for the planned water use of the application, which includes all internal and external water use. The SNWCS team will round this value up to the nearest litre for SNWCS certification. This will allow us to determine the SNWCS allocation you require and your one-off cost for SNWCS certification. Development Management case officers will not consult SNWCS until these planned water use figures are finalised.

We will also require the contact details, at least a contact name and e-mail address, of the person we should contact to initiate the SNWCS application process.

To support the prioritisation of your application for SNWCS access, you should also make the information below readily available for SNWCS your WNS. Further details can be found in the [application prioritisation](#) section of this guide.

- The water efficiency achieved on-site for your development (in litres per person per day for residential applications and BREEAM WAT01 category credits for non-residential applications, where possible).
- The policy compliance of any affordable housing element of the proposal, including delivery of affordable housing or a financial contribution towards affordable housing (where applicable) (*for residential applications only*).
- If your application provides community services or other infrastructure supporting development (*for non-residential applications only*).

SNWCS application process and deadlines

The SNWCS application process works in the following way:

1. A planning application is submitted to the relevant local authority Development Management (DM) team, including a Water Neutrality Statement (WNS) that indicates an intention to use SNWCS to cover the application's planned water use. To support the SNWCS application process, the WNS should include the information identified in the [previous section](#) of this guide.
2. Your DM case officer will assess and validate the information submitted in your application and WNS. Once the case officer is satisfied with the water neutrality information submitted, they will

prepare an Appropriate Assessment (AA) as part of the Habitats Regulations requirements. The case officer will consult Natural England and SNWCS with the AA.

3. Once SNWCS receives the consultation from the relevant DM team, we will log the application details into our central SNWCS register. We will then score your application using our [prioritisation system](#). This score will determine your application's place in our prioritisation queue. We will assess whether your application can secure SNWCS certification depending on the current capacity within SNWCS.
4. If your application can access SNWCS, we will write to you setting out our access offer and we will advise your DM case officer that your application is able to access SNWCS. If your application cannot access SNWCS at the current time, we will write to you and your DM case officer to advise. Your application will remain in the prioritisation queue as long as the planning application remains live and should the access availability position change, we will notify you and your DM case officer.
5. Our offer letter for SNWCS access will include the SNWCS allocation required for your application (your on-site water usage in litres per day) and the one-off cost for SNWCS certification. The letter will set out the next steps of the application process and our terms & conditions will be included. The letter will also detail the documentation you will be required to send to SNWCS to comply with money laundering checks (see also the [money laundering information for SNWCS applications](#) section below). You are required to confirm your acceptance of the terms set out to secure your access to SNWCS – we must receive this within **14 days** of the date of the offer letter, otherwise your access request will be forfeited, and your access allocation will be offered to another application.
6. Once you have confirmed your SNWCS access, we will send you a letter to confirm your access. This will include an invoice for the payment for your SNWCS certification charge, which will be a one-off payment for your application's certification. This invoice must only be paid after you have received planning permission for your application.
7. The confirmation letter will also advise that you must secure your planning permission within **6 months** from the date of confirming your SNWCS access. If this time limit is approaching and you have not secured your permission, we recommend you speak to your DM case officer to liaise with the SNWCS team. However, in most cases, if you have not secured planning permission within 6 months, your access request will be forfeited, and your access allocation will be offered to another application.
8. Once you have secured planning permission for your application, you must pay the invoice for your SNWCS certification charge within **12 weeks**. Failure to pay the invoice in time risks your access request being forfeited and your access allocation offered to another application.
9. After we receive the payment for your SNWCS certification, we will send you a Final SNWCS Certificate which will indicate that your application can be constructed in line with Habitats Regulations requirements. You can use this final certificate to discharge the SNWCS (or SNOWS) obligations of a water neutrality condition on a planning permission.

SNWCS certification charge

To secure access to SNWCS to meet your application's planned water use, you will need to pay a one-off SNWCS certification charge, calculated at £0.80 (80p) per litre per day for the planned water use of the development.

For example, for an application for a single dwelling constructed with a water efficiency standard of 85 litres per person per day, at an average occupancy rate of 2.5, the total cost for SNWCS certification would be a one-off payment of £170.

Water use per person per day	x	Occupancy	x	Cost per litre	=	Total cost
85	x	2.5	x	0.80	=	£170.00

Money laundering checks – information to be provided

As part of your SNWCS application, you will need to provide the information below prior to or at the same time as paying your SNWCS certification charge invoice to enable us to carry out necessary money laundering checks, unless you have previously used SNWCS in the last 5 years. We recommend providing this information to us as soon as possible in the SNWCS application process to minimise any delays. This information can be sent to us, or we can be reached for further queries, via SNWCS@horsham.gov.uk. We strongly recommend sending any personal or sensitive information to us in an encrypted format. For further information about how we use your information, please refer to [Horsham DC's Strategic Planning Privacy Notice](#).

- **Public sector body:** Signed, written instructions on headed paper.
- **Non-public sector business:** We will undertake our own checks but may request further information from you if necessary.
- **Individual:** Identification/s showing your name, permanent address, and date and place of birth, for example a passport, driving licence, utility bill etc.

Application prioritisation for SNWCS access

Below is a summary of the criteria that will be used as part of the SNWCS application prioritisation scoring.

- **Criteria 1:** Whether the application is affected by the *C G Fry* court decision. Applications that are affected may receive greater weighting.
- **Criteria 2:** Whether the application is a local authority 'corporate priority', which includes schemes in council plans or those approved by the council's political leadership. These will be given greater weighting.
- **Criteria 3:** The extent to which water efficiency measures have been included in the application to maximise on-site water savings and minimise on-site water usage. Applications that minimise their on-site water use will be given greater weighting.
- **Criteria 4 (residential applications only):** Whether the application is delivering affordable housing units, or where applicable a financial contribution towards affordable housing. Applications delivering 100% affordable schemes made by registered or approved affordable housing providers will be given greatest weighting. Applications must deliver affordable housing units, or make a financial contribution towards affordable housing, to achieve any weighting.
- **Criteria 5 (non-residential applications only):** Whether the application provides community services or other infrastructure supporting development*. These applications will be given a greater weighting.

** Applications exclusively or primarily providing development essential for community services or contributing to the construction of essential infrastructure, such as educational facilities, medical facilities, community facilities, or minerals & waste development.*