The learning never stops
Our education advisers explain what we have to offer - pages 26 to 27

Winter tips for your home
How to protect your home and garden - pages 6 to 7

The hard facts of water
What causes limescale - pages 12 to 13

In your area
What’s been happening in your community - pages 14 to 21
E njoying countryside walks and exploring nature is a popular pastime for many and lots of us have taken to this during the coronavirus pandemic to see what our local areas have to offer. This autumn, walks through woodlands are set to be even more vibrant, with the National Trust suggesting good survey spells in the spring and summer followed by bursts of rain in September will result in leaves of wonderful colours.

As the seasons change, it’s that time of year when we need to prepare our homes so we’re not caught out during the wintry months. We have some great tips on what to do on pages 6 to 7.

When it comes to wet weather, there’s sometimes confusion among customers who experience localised flooding caused by blockages. You can see why because responsibilities are split between homeowners and Wessex Water. That’s why we’ve included a sewer ownership article in this edition to help explain things.

There’s no doubt that it’s a challenging time for many people and we realise that some may find it incredibly hard to afford their water bill. If you, or someone you know is struggling, it’s worth finding out more about the help we can provide – there are details on pages 8 to 9 and on the back cover.

With many community projects also struggling to raise funds they desperately need, we’re continuing to provide financial support through the Wessex Water Foundation. The recovery fund supports local organisations responding to the needs of people in their community and building resilience for the future.

I hope you enjoy the issue.

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Contact us

Billing enquiries
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Wessex Water supplies water and sewerage services to an area of the south west of England, covering 10,000 square kilometres including Dorset, Somerset, Bristol, most of Wiltshire and parts of Gloucestershire and Hampshire. Within our region Bristol supplies water to the city of Bristol and surrounding areas including some parts of Somerset. Bournemouth Water supplies water to Bournemouth and to just south of Salisbury.

Water supply or sewerage enquiries
• Loss of supply • Leak • Water quality problem • Sewage flooding • Blocked sewer

0345 600 4 600 (Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm; emergencies only at other times)

Submit an online enquiry via our website wessexwater.co.uk/contactus

Write to: Operational enquiries, Wessex Water, Claverton Down, Bath BA2 7WW

We welcome calls via the Next Generation Text service.

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Praise from customer watchdog

We have again been singled out as a top performer in the annual Consumer Council for Water (CCW) complaints report.

The number of written complaints received from customers in 2019/20 fell by 23% while there was a massive 40% reduction in 'stage 2' complaints, where issues with service or bills are not resolved at the first time of asking.

This year’s report – which also measured complaints made via social media, web chat, SMS and in person – saw us rated as one of four standout performers alongside Bournemouth Water, Bristol Water and United Utilities.

This was followed by news that water industry regulator Ofwat had placed us third of 17 companies in its new C-MeX table, which measures the quality of services delivered to customers.

“Wessex Water has again been recognised with a stage 1 award in the CCW report,” said Director of Customer Policy and Engagement Sue Lindsay. “We’re committed to going the extra mile for our customers and tailoring our support to their individual needs,” said Director of Customer Policy and Engagement Sue Lindsay.

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General foreman Gordon Langford and repair and maintenance team leader David Lane visited the pre-school with an excavator on a Saturday to help dig holes for tree planting, ensuring children from different social backgrounds could learn and play outdoors safely without having to rely on protective equipment.

Pre-school manager Alison Morris said: “We were so grateful to Gordon and Dave for giving up their own time to help us out. “They worked very hard and it wasn’t easy as the ground was horrendous to dig in some places, but they persevered and completed the job.

“I cannot thank them enough as it made such a difference to the project knowing we could plant the trees the following week.”

in the news

Pete Orchard provides a round-up of how we’ve made the headlines

Volunteers dig deep for Dorset pre-school

Panda Pre-school in Blandford, Dorset, created a new woodland learning area for children with help from two of our Water Force volunteers.

The trial, which was led by Devon Wildlife Trust, started in 2015 and has resulted in two family groups of beavers being successfully bred throughout the catchment.

Beavers migrated on to our land, which is connected to the river, and we’ve worked with the trust to make sure it’s a haven for them – while also ensuring we can continue to provide a safe and secure water supply.

We’ve also supported the University of Exeter with funding for monitoring equipment to help understand the beavers’ behaviour.

The government has since announced it will allow the wild breeding population of beavers to remain after the trial brought a wealth of benefits to the local area and ecology. Great news!

For news as it happens, or if you want to share news with us, follow us on Twitter @wessexwater

Helping to bring back the beloved beaver

A five-year beaver trial on the River Otter has been completed with support from a number of organisations, including us.

The climate emergency is changing the way we think about our rivers. As we adapt, we must extend our thinking and start to consider the role that rivers play in both nature and civil society.

E mbracing the natural world has never felt more important than in this difficult year, and we all have a responsibility to safeguard its future.

Wild river swimming is popular in parts of our region, such as the idyllic Warleigh Weir near Bath, and we understand that people want to know more about our treatment of sewage at nearby water recycling centres.

In September we joined volunteers and collaborators to monitor the water quality of the River Avon, taking samples from 22 sites between Warleigh and Melksham as well as five tributaries which meet the Avon between those sites.

There is a campaign to make Warleigh the UK’s first river with designated bathing water status, similar to coastal sites where we treat waste water with ultraviolet light. This process is costly and can have a massive environmental impact through carbon dioxide emissions.

Currently, the treated waste water released into rivers meets effluent standards. This means it has no adverse effect on the environment but may not meet bathing water standards.

We believe river bathing water status is achievable but it will require significant investment, collaboration and changes in government legislation.

Storm overflows

There has been some media focus recently on combined sewer overflows (CSOs), which release highly diluted sewage into rivers during extreme rainfall to prevent flooding.

CSOs are only one type of storm overflow, with others located at sewage pumping stations and water recycling centres. These can affect river water quality along with factors such as agriculture, septic tanks, road drainage, misconnected drains and sewer misuse.

Pete Orchard provides a round-up of how we’ve made the headlines

Awards recognise environmental commitment

Our environment and planning services colleagues were named ‘best team from a large organisation’ at this year’s IEMA Sustainability Impact Awards.

These reward people and businesses who are tackling environmental issues in sustainable and innovative ways, such as our in-house new detection dog Freya.

Judges highlighted our collaborative approach with regulators and other organisations as key to our success.

Sarah Mukherjee, CEO of the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (IEMA), said: “Action to tackle the climate and environment crises we face requires business and industry, civil society and our politicians to step up and lead the transformation and change needed.”

Meanwhile, our engineering and sustainable delivery team were winners at the RoSPA Health and Safety Awards for the fourth time in five years.

And our major project to upgrade Durleigh water treatment centre in Somerset has been recognised with a nomination in Bentley’s Year in Infrastructure 2020 awards.

CSOs are a legacy of a time when most UK properties were misconnected drains and sewer misuse.

Understanding our rivers

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Matt Wheelton, our director of assets and compliance and a wild swimmer himself, said: “Storm overflows operate during heavy rainfall to protect homes and businesses from flooding and rarely cause a pollution – in fact, there were none in our region last year where overflows operated as designed.

“Four pollutions that came from overflows were due to blocked sewers downstream, caused by a combination of wet wipes that had been wrongly flushed and fat poured down drains.

“It’s predominantly rainwater that is released from CSOs due to the sewerage network reaching capacity, but we agree that they are unacceptable in 2020 and we support any ambition to reduce the number of times they operate.

“CSOs are a legacy of a time when most UK properties were built with only one pipe to drain both foul water and storm water. Even today, developers still have the ‘right to connect’ surface water to sewers that carry foul water.

“This has to change and be made illegal if we’re serious about getting rid of them.”

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Winter tips for your home

Ensure burst pipes and blocked gutters don’t dampen your Christmas spirit… or the interior of your home.

By making a few small changes and improvements in and around your home, you can make sure the cold weather doesn’t leave you without heating or water this winter. These are our top tips to help you keep the cold at bay.

**Lag your pipes**
Uncovered pipes in cold areas of your home and garage can become frozen, leading to potential bursts. Prevent this from happening by applying lagging to pipes which are exposed to the cold – remember to cover all joints and bends!

**Fix taps and check for leaks**
A dripping tap not only wastes water, but also makes your pipes more likely to freeze during winter. A trickle of water can become completely frozen, resulting in a block or even a burst. Prepare for winter by fixing any leaks before temperatures begin to drop. To spot a leak in your home, look out for a drop in water pressure or damp patches. If your property is metered and the meter dial is turning when you are not using any water, it is likely you have a leak. Turn off your internal stop tap and check the meter. If the meter dial has stopped turning you may have a leak inside your property. If the meter is still turning when the stop tap is off you should contact us.

**Locate your stop tap**
You should locate and test your stop tap before winter begins so that you know how to turn off your water supply just in case a burst occurs. They are usually located beneath the sink and can be switched off by being turned clockwise.

**Insulate your loft**
A lot of cold air can enter your home through your attic or loft if it isn’t insulated correctly. By taking the time to properly insulate, you can ensure your home stays warm while also reducing your heating bills.

**Bleed your radiators**
If your heating is on and the top of your radiator is cold, then it most likely needs bleeding. Use a key to release any trapped air in your radiators and keep a cloth nearby to catch any water that drips from the valve. Please be aware that depending on your type of central heating, once you’ve bled your radiators, your boiler pressure may drop, potentially resulting in it needing to be repressurised.

**Thawing frozen pipes**
If you experience a frozen pipe, here’s what to do.
- Turn off your internal stop tap to stop the flow of water.
- Partly turn on any affected taps to relieve any pressure.
- Thaw the frozen pipe using a hot water bottle or warm towels.
- Once thawed, turn your water supply back on.

**Draught proof your doors and windows**
Draughty doors and windows could be the reason your home feels so cold during winter. You can fix this problem by applying weatherstripping to your window and door frames, as well as using door sweeps to prevent cold air from sneaking in!

**Clear gutters and drains**
Gutters and drains play an important role in carrying water away from your house and preventing water damage. It’s a good idea to remove any leaves or debris from your gutters and drains to ensure you are prepared for future downpours.

**Install a water butt**
When winter begins, rainfall tends to increase. Take advantage of the wet weather by installing a water butt to collect rainwater. When summer comes around, you can then use this water to maintain your garden and wash your car.

**Cover your outdoor taps**
A frozen tap can be easily avoided by using an outdoor tap cover. You can pick these up from most hardware and DIY shops. They will help to ensure you have a constant flow of water, even when the weather is freezing!

**Secure your garden**
The UK’s weather is unpredictable to say the least, so you should prepare for all weather conditions. Make sure items in your garden that could be moved by strong winds are stored away securely to prevent damage to your home and vehicles.
During these testing times, many are worried about what the future holds for their finances. If you’re facing financial difficulty, either short-term or long-term, we are here for you.

The Covid-19 pandemic has created a whole host of uncertainties for us all. Perhaps one of the biggest worries for some people is the damage to the economy and what effect that might have on personal finances.

For many years here at Wessex Water, we have supported customers in financial difficulty to make sure their bill is affordable based on their individual circumstances or help them get back on track if they are in debt.

Now more than ever, with many on reduced incomes, and jobs across multiple sectors hanging in the balance, it’s vital that we help those in need.

We have made sure we have support available for all customers struggling to pay, including those directly affected by Covid-19.

Here is a full breakdown of the support on offer.

**Looking to save money?**

Be smart, switch to a meter – it’s free to switch to a meter and on average customers save £100 per year. And with our money back guarantee, switching to a meter is risk free.

Order a free water saving pack – with more people at home at the moment, people are using more water at different times of the day. Our free water saving pack has devices to help you save water in your home.

**Need to lower your bill?**

If you have a water meter, receive benefits or tax credits and you need to use a large amount of water for reasons beyond your control, we can put a cap on your bill via our WaterSure Plus scheme.

If you’re unable to afford your ongoing water bill, our Assist scheme can offer you a low rate bill based on your ability to pay.

Depending on the reason you need a lower bill, we may ask you to seek free independent debt advice and complete a financial budget.

Free independent advice can help you to:

- boost your income - find out about extra benefits, tax credits and schemes
- manage your money - stay on top of essential bills and keep your spending on track
- deal with any debts - work out a realistic plan to repay your debts and ensure the most serious debts are dealt with first.

**Want to repay water debt and get back on track?**

We can work with you to reduce and clear your debt over a two-year period, allowing you to start again stress free with our Restart scheme.

All you have to do is pay an agreed amount and at the end of year one, we can reduce your debt by an amount equal to how much you have paid. Then if you keep up your payments to the end of year two, we will clear all your remaining water debt, putting you back on track.

To apply for any of the support we offer simply visit wessexwater.co.uk/helppay or call our friendly team on 0345 600 3 600 (Monday to Friday 8am to 8pm, Saturday 8am to 2pm).

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**Are you a pensioner on a low income and missing out?**

More than 21,000 of our low income pensioners are receiving a discount of around £60 a year off their water bill.

If all adults in your household receive pension credit, or state pension is your household’s only source of income, we can give you a discount of typically £60 a year off your water bill.

It’s free to apply, so give us a call on 0345 600 3 600 (Monday to Friday 8am to 8pm, Saturday 8am to 2pm) or visit wessexwater.co.uk/pensioncredit to fill in a form.

Remember to tell your friends and family as they may know someone who may benefit.

**Sign your loved ones up to Priority Services**

We’ve made some positive changes to our Priority Services scheme.

You can now sign someone up on their behalf. This is particularly useful for friends, family members or carers of people in vulnerable circumstances who may be unable to sign up themselves, perhaps due to mental ill health, language barriers, dementia or age.

Priority Services customers can benefit from:

- reliable access to water during emergencies or outages
- bills and other information in a different format, such as braille
- help locating and reading their meter
- a password scheme to protect them from bogus callers.

Sign up at wessexwater.co.uk/priorityservices
For many customers, discovering a blocked sewer pipe on their property can lead to confusion about who to call to clear it. Mark Cooper, sewerage manager for the west of our region, offers advice on pipework responsibility.

For many households, the ownership of sewer pipework is straightforward – the homeowner is responsible for internal pipes and the drainage pipe running from the home to their boundary or the street boundary, and Wessex Water is responsible for pipes in the street.

For some households, however, it can be more complicated, as they may have a section of Wessex Water-owned pipework running through their garden to connect to a neighbour.

So why is this sometimes the case? A lot of sewer pipework that runs through private property comprises public sewers owned by Wessex Water, but previously privately owned by the homeowner prior to new legislation in 2011 where we took ownership of sewer pipework that runs through their garden which does not connect to a neighbour’s boundary. The diagram below illustrates this further.

In the case of terraced or semi-detached houses, for example, if your neighbour’s pipework comes into your garden where it connects to your drainage, then this would be Wessex Water’s responsibility from the point where it leaves your neighbour’s boundary. The diagram below illustrates this further.

If you own a septic tank, private treatment works or any other system on your property which does not connect to the public sewer, then this is still your responsibility to look after. “It’s important to know what pipework you are responsible for before picking up the phone to a contractor if something goes wrong. If you’re unsure, it would be sensible get in touch with us first so we can come and visit free of charge to check if it is a public or private problem,” Mark advises.

“If it’s public (Wessex Water owned) we will deal with the problem at no cost to you. If it’s your private responsibility, we may offer a private clearance chargeable service if it can be achieved at the time.

“The two main priorities when there is a sewer blockage on private property is to get it cleared quickly so it doesn’t cause pollution and to make sure you don’t end up footing the bill for something you’re not responsible for.”

Report broken inspection covers
If you have a broken inspection cover on your property, or spot one in the street, please report it to us by calling 0345 600 4 600.

Whether on private property or out in the street, sewer blockages across our region caused by the wrong items being flushed or poured away are a real problem. On average we face around 13,000 blockages a year at a cost of £5 million to remove – and that’s just on the public sewer network, plenty more occur on private customer drains.

The majority of these blockages are caused by wet wipes (even those that are branded ‘flushable’) being incorrectly flushed down the toilet, as well as cooking fat, oil and grease being poured down the sink, which solidify over time and stick to other items to create ‘fatbergs’.

If sewage overflows from a manhole due to a blockage, there is a risk that the surrounding environment and any nearby rivers or streams could be polluted with sewage, which can have devastating consequences for wildlife.

For customers, blockages can sometimes cause sewage to back up into bathrooms and kitchens, leaving homeowners with internal floods and expensive plumbing costs.

By working together to dispose of items correctly, we can all help our local environment and each other. Here’s how you can do your bit to stop the block.

In the kitchen
Out of sight, out of mind – sometimes it’s easy to just pour oil or fat down the drain once you’ve finished cooking. But over time this can cause big problems for you or your neighbours. To avoid a fatberg fiasco, keep the following items out of the drains:

- fat, oil and grease – collect it in a container, leave it to cool and solidify then scrape it into your food waste recycling or household waste. Be sure to wipe any excess from pots and pans with kitchen roll before washing them
- food scraps – scrape as much as you can into your food waste recycling or household waste and consider getting a sink strainer to catch the really small bits
- coffee grounds – scrape as much as you can with a spoon or kitchen towel into your food waste recycling or household waste. Or you can add them to your compost heap if you have one.

Visit wessexwater.co.uk/stoptheblock for more information.

In the bathroom
Only flush the three Ps - paper, poo and pee - to keep your pipes blockage-free.

If you haven’t already, try placing a bin in your bathroom to easily dispose of items such as:

- wet wipes (even those which say they are ‘flushable’ do not break down in sewers)
- make-up removal pads
- plasters / bandages
- cotton buds
- dental floss
- nappies
- disposable razor blades.

To cut down on your plastic waste, you could even go one step further and try some reusable alternatives to these items.
This summer many of us opted for ‘staycations’ instead of going on holiday abroad. You might have noticed differences in the water supply in places you’ve visited across the UK, perhaps in how it tastes or how soap lathers up when you take a shower. These differences are mostly determined by where your water is sourced from. In the Wessex Water supply region, particularly in Bath, Wiltshire and Dorset, a lot of the water is naturally hard because it comes from groundwater sources. This means it has percolated underground through layers of limestone, chalk or rock before we treat it, giving it a high mineral content.

While this can give the water a fresher taste – as well as bone health benefits from higher levels of calcium and magnesium – when the water in your kettle or on your shower screen evaporates, the minerals stick around, solidifying over time to form limescale.

Can water hardness be reduced?
If you prefer softer water, you can have a water softener installed in your home, usually they are put out of the way in airing cupboards or wardrobes. If you get a softener installed, it is advisable to leave your kitchen tap unsoftened for drinking water and food preparation, as most softeners add high levels of sodium to the water to do their job, which can be bad for your health.

Unfortunately, we are unable to artificially soften your water during the treatment process, as it would be impossible to provide you with a separate unsoftened supply with lower sodium for drinking.

While there’s not much we can do to reduce water hardness, we realise that limescale can be a real pain. So we’ve put together some simple cleaning tips for appliances around the home where limescale can build up over time.

Kettles
Squeeze the juice of a lemon into the kettle, then chop up the lemon into small chunks and put them in too. Fill the kettle with enough water to cover the chunks of lemon, boil the water and then leave it to cool down for a few hours.
Once cooled, pour away the water and remove the lemon chunks before wiping the inside of the kettle with a soft sponge.

Washing machines
Spray the rubber gasket and detergent drawer with white vinegar and wipe them thoroughly with a microfibre cloth. Then pour two cups of white vinegar into the detergent draw and run the machine on the highest cycle at the hottest possible temperature.
Once the cycle is complete, pour half a cup of baking soda into the drum and repeat the same cycle on the hottest setting. Once finished, wipe down the drum, gasket and drawer with a damp cloth one final time to remove any loose bits of limescale.

Taps
Cut a lemon in half and rub it over the taps, making sure you avoid getting any juice inside the tap to prevent contamination. For extra stubborn bits of limescale, soak a cloth in white vinegar and place it over the affected area, leaving it to soak for an hour. Once done, wipe clean with a damp cloth.

Showerheads
Pour white vinegar into a plastic bag and cover the showerhead with the bag, making sure the areas with limescale are submerged in the vinegar. Tie the bag in place with an elastic band.
Leave for four to five hours before removing the bag and scrubbing the showerhead with a brush to catch any leftover bits of limescale. Finish by wiping the showerhead clean with a damp cloth.

Shower screens and doors
Cut a lemon in half and rub the whole shower screen with the inside of the lemon, allowing the juice to soak in.
Then get a clear spray bottle and fill it half with water and the other half with white vinegar. Spray the solution on the shower screen and leave it to soak for an hour. Wipe clean with a damp cloth and rinse.

TOP TIP: When using lemons for cleaning, try where possible to use ones that have already been chopped or squeezed for eating and drinking to get the most out of them. Bottled lemon juice could also be used as a more cost-effective alternative.

Visit wessexwater.co.uk/waterquality for more advice and to check the water hardness levels where you live.
We have provided funding to local organisations and charities in Dorset to help them support people in the area. Find out more about how we’ve been lending a helping hand.

Funding benefits young people in Purbeck
The Purbeck Youth and Community Foundation is a charity that provides emotional and practical support to young people and children in Purbeck. The start of lockdown saw some of the charity’s members struggle due to a lack of social interaction, including those with additional needs. We provided the charity with funding to help it hold virtual sessions and activities, which provided vital support to a range of young people and children in the area.

Supporting a food delivery service for people in Bournemouth
Through its Community Fridge project, the Townsend Community Association has been providing food parcels and hot meals to people who require support in Bournemouth. The current pandemic has affected the lives of many people in the area, so the charity is playing a vital role in ensuring families don’t go hungry. Earlier in the year, we provided the charity with funding to support this project, helping it to deliver more food parcels and hot meals to residents.

Do you need a helping hand?
Last year, more than 100 Wessex Water volunteers spent around 700 hours taking part in volunteering activities in Dorset, helping to clean beaches and more. If you know of a local project or organisation that could benefit from some help from our volunteers, get in contact at community@wessexwater.co.uk

Explore your area – Chesil Beach
Chesil Beach stretches 18 miles from West Bay to Portland, making it one of three major shingle beaches in the UK. While the beach attracts many visitors during the summer, you can also enjoy the brisk sea air by strolling along its shoreline during autumn and winter. You can also learn about the wildlife and history of the beach through interactive displays at the Chesil Beach Visitor Centre.

Replacing ageing water mains in Weymouth
We’ve replaced ageing water mains in the Westham area of Weymouth, using the latest ‘no-dig’ technology to avoid deep excavations and lay pipes more quickly and efficiently. This work will improve water quality, help to prevent leaks and ensure a reliable supply now and in the future.

WATER REFILL POINTS NEAR YOU
To keep people hydrated and reduce the use of single-use plastics, we’ve been working with local councils to install refill points throughout the area we serve. We will be installing them in Weymouth, Beaminster, Blandford Forum and Dorchester in the future. Download the Refill app to find water refill points near you www.refill.org.uk

Stay up to date with what’s happening in your area by signing up to our email newsletter at wessexwater.co.uk/sign-up
Learn about the work we’ve been carrying out to benefit local charities and improve our services in the area.

Animal Therapy Sessions Reduce Social Isolation
EAQ Manor Farm is an outdoor and equine-assisted learning centre located in the Somerset countryside. The charity has been working with a wide range of children and adults who have been experiencing social isolation and exclusion. With the help of our funding, as well as support from a number of other organisations, the charity was able to hold virtual and in-person therapy sessions to ease the impact of lockdown on its members. The sessions, which involved interacting with horses, enabled those who were struggling to improve their confidence and emotional wellbeing.

Funding Supports Essential Education Programme
Based in the heart of Somerset, Ups and Downs Southwest is a charity that supports children and young people with Down’s Syndrome. The coronavirus pandemic led to the charity’s workers having concerns about the education, employment, housing and mental health of the families and young people they work with. Funding enabled Ups and Downs Southwest to expand and improve its education programme, which has provided vital support to young people in the area.

Do You Need A Helping Hand?
Last year, 90 Wessex Water volunteers spent around 500 hours taking part in volunteering activities in Somerset, helping to support schools, wildlife centres and other community groups. If you know of a local project or organisation that could benefit from some help from our volunteers, get in contact at community@wessexwater.co.uk

Explore Your Area - Clatworthy Reservoir
Set in the Brendon Hills, Clatworthy reservoir isn’t short of things to do, whether you’re a keen angler or looking for somewhere to go for a walk. With the array of wildlife the scenic reservoir has to offer, walking around it you can come across a range of rare wildflowers, birds and butterflies. You can even fish from a boat while you relax and enjoy the view!

Water Refill Points Near You
We’ve been working with local councils to install refill points throughout the area we serve to keep people hydrated and reduce the use of single-use plastics. We will be installing refill points in Taunton and at our Clatworthy and Sutton Bingham reservoirs soon. Download the Refill app to find water refill points near you www.refill.org.uk

Stay up to date with what’s happening in your area by signing up to our email newsletter at wessexwater.co.uk/sign-up

Refurbishment Work in Bridgwater
Throughout the year, we have been carrying out essential refurbishment work at our abstraction site on Albert Street in Bridgwater. The work is being done to ensure we continue to deliver high-quality water to our customers while minimising our potential impact on the surrounding environment.

Find out more about what’s happening in your area at wessexwater.co.uk/community
As part of our initiative to better support the communities we serve, we’ve been working with local charities, improving water and sewerage services and installing water refill points. Find out more about what we’ve been up to across Wiltshire.

Virtual Counselling Sessions Provide Vital Support
Based in Trowbridge, Help Counselling Service is a charity that provides affordable therapy to hundreds of people every year in west and north Wiltshire. When the coronavirus pandemic began, the charity saw its caseload start to increase. We contributed to a grant which was provided to the charity to help fund training sessions for its counsellors. As face-to-face counselling sessions were no longer possible, the training taught them how to provide support through online and phone sessions.

Do You Need a Helping Hand?
In 2019, more than 150 Wessex Water volunteers spent around 1,000 hours taking part in volunteering activities in Wiltshire, helping to maintain nature reserves and support local charities. If you know of a project or organisation that could benefit from some help from our volunteers, get in contact at community@wessexwater.co.uk

Financial Advice Made Available to People in Wiltshire
The Swan Advocacy Network has been provided with funding to set up a Community Money Advice service in South Wiltshire. The new service aims to support those who may be experiencing financial hardship during the coronavirus pandemic. The charity recognises this is a time when incomes may start to decline due to job loss and furlough coming to an end. To support these people, the charity is offering debt and personal budgeting advice, while also acting as a money mentor to anyone who needs support.

Water Refill Points Near You
We’ve been working with local councils to install refill points throughout the area we serve to keep people hydrated and reduce the use of single-use plastics. We have installed them in Salisbury, Trowbridge, Warminster and Devizes, with another set to be installed in Melksham soon. Download the Refill app to find water refill points near you www.refill.org.uk

Explore Your Area - Caen Hill Locks
Walking along the Kennet and Avon Canal between Rowde and Devizes will see you come across the famous Caen Hill Locks. The 29 locks were built so that boats could climb and descend the steep hill. Visit the 200-year-old locks while also taking in the array of wildlife present along the canal.

Improving Water Supply in East Knoyle
Earlier in the year, we replaced more than 1,000 metres of old pipework and connected over 100 homes to a new water main, in East Knoyle. Using innovative pipe bursting and open cut techniques, we were able to install the main, which will provide a large number of people in the village with a more reliable supply for the future.

Stay up to date with what’s happening in your area by signing up to our email newsletter at wessexwater.co.uk/sign-up

Find out more about what’s happening in your area at wessexwater.co.uk/community
From providing vital funding to carrying out essential work, we’ve been lending a helping hand to the communities that need our support in Bath, Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire. Read about what we’ve been doing to support local people and charities.

**Activity packs for isolated families in North Somerset**

Based in Weston-super-Mare, Our Way Our Say is a charity that holds activity sessions for people of all ages. Lockdown prevented the charity from holding these sessions which meant it had to come up with new ways to support its members. With the help of funding, the charity was able to produce and distribute activity packs to isolated families with children. The packs made a real difference to kids in the area, with one child saying they were like a ‘weekly birthday present’.

**Walking programme benefits families across Bath**

Funding helped Sporting Family Change to implement a regular walking programme throughout summer to improve the wellbeing of families in Twerton, Whiteway, Odd Down and Foxhill. When the coronavirus pandemic began, the charity recognised it had to adapt its work in order to provide continued support to local families, particularly those who had become isolated due to lockdown. The charity’s walking programme enabled local people to get outdoors and take part in physical activity safely.

**Do you need a helping hand?**

Last year, almost 150 Wessex Water volunteers spent around 1,000 hours taking part in volunteering activities in and around Bath and Bristol, helping to support community farms, youth centres and more. If you know of a local project or organisation that could benefit from some help from our volunteers, get in contact at community@wessexwater.co.uk

**Explore your area - The Royal Crescent**

Built between 1767 and 1775, The Royal Crescent is one of the most famous pieces of architecture in Bath. The 500-foot crescent, consisting of 30 terraced houses, makes for great viewing – even during the winter months. You can also walk along the stunning lawn outside the iconic landmark which overlooks Royal Victoria Park.

**Water refill points near you**

To keep people hydrated and reduce the use of single-use plastics, we’ve been working with local councils to install refill points throughout the area we serve. We will be installing a number of them in Bath soon - keep an eye out for them if you live in or regularly visit the area. Download the Refill app to find water refill points near you www.refill.org.uk

**Improving sewerage services in North Bristol**

Since 2019, we’ve been constructing a 6.5km pipeline to connect Bristol’s existing trunk sewer in Lawrence Weston to the Frome Valley relief sewer near Cribbs Causeway. The pipeline will direct waste water more efficiently around North Bristol to our water recycling centre in Avonmouth, which will ensure our systems can cope with future development in North Bristol and South Gloucestershire.

Stay up to date with what’s happening in your area by signing up to our email newsletter at wessexwater.co.uk/sign-up

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Find out more about what’s happening in your area at wessexwater.co.uk/community
lushing the toilet more often, washing dishes and even using the washing machine more frequently is resulting in some people’s water usage increasing. If you’re on a water meter, it means you could see an increase in your bill – despite the fact Wessex Water lowered the average bill this year for customers.

Director of customer services Oliver Jerrome explained: “With more people at home, water bills for customers on a meter, are likely to go up. People may also see an increase in their energy bill too. Earlier in the year, we saw water consumption also increase due to garden watering and paddling pool use during the prolonged dry spell. “We want to ensure people prepare themselves for their next bill, which may be slightly higher than expected due to the increase in water used.”

Customers on a water meter normally receive two bills a year as Wessex Water normally read their meter every six months, as long as it’s accessible.

Find out how much water you use, pick up FREE water saving devices and earn money for charity.

Have you ever wondered just how much water you use every day? Without information about how you use water – by each fixture and appliance – it’s really hard to know. That’s where GetWaterFit comes in handy. It’s an easy-to-use online calculator which helps you understand how much hot and cold water you use. Within a few minutes you can create a personalised dashboard which gives you tips on how to save water and energy around your home.

GetWaterFit

How does it work?

• Build a picture of your water use through simple-to-answer questions.
• Order free water saving devices suitable for your home.
• Set yourself water-saving challenges.

Every completed challenge adds up to a huge amount of water saved across our region, which helps support the local environment.

And in return you can earn virtual coins which you can donate to one of six charities.

Start saving today at www.wessexwater.co.uk/getwaterfit

Win a Bosch washing machine

Have the chance to win a Bosch washing machine in white – with a 9kg capacity and an A+++ efficiency rating it will help you save water and energy. To enter set up your free GetWaterFit dashboard before 31 January 2021 by visiting www.wessexwater.co.uk/getwaterfit

Open to supply customers only. For terms and conditions visit www.wessexwater.co.uk/washingmachinecompetition

All about your bill

With people spending more time at home, many households are using more water than they normally would.

What should you do?

Take your own meter reading

If you are able to provide us with the most up to date meter reading we can ensure your bill is up to date and we can get in touch to adjust your payment arrangements. This will help ensure that regular payments you make will cover your bill. Visit: wessexwater.co.uk/meter

Consider reducing your water use

If you have a water meter, reducing how much water you use will help lower your bill. Through our online calculator Get Water Fit you can identify where you use most water in your home and request free water saving devices – see opposite.

Struggling to pay?

For customers struggling to afford their water bill, there’s help available through our affordability schemes - see pages 8-9. We can also help if you have a loss of income as a direct result of Covid-19 - see back page.

Talk to us

If you’d rather speak to a friendly member of our billing team, please call us on 0345 600 3 600 (Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm; Saturday, 8am to 2pm).
Any households may have already had oil delivered for the winter to keep their homes warm as temperatures fall. But few are probably aware of the immense damage to the environment and risk to water sources should their oil tank or pipework leak. For households who use heating oil, ensuring oil tanks and pipework are in good working order is crucial. Leaking tanks or pipework means oil can end up in drains and leach into the soil, leading to the pollution of rivers, streams and lakes. It can also be extremely costly and disruptive to clean up and involves contaminated land being dug up or buildings demolished.

**Protecting you and your home**

If you store oil it’s important that you play your part in preventing oil leaks – by keeping your tank and pipework in good condition. It’s also important to know your legal obligations and your insurance company’s requirements. You, or your insurer, will be held responsible for the effects and cost of any oil that spills from your tank.

Arranging for an Oftec-registered technician to undertake a risk assessment is recommended. And fitting a tank level monitor that alerts you when the tank is getting low is worth considering as it might help you identify when there is a leak.

**Useful oil tank tips**

- Check oil tank and associated pipework is in good condition.
- Get it inspected annually by a qualified engineer.
- Contact your home insurance company to clarify they are aware that you have an oil tank and your policy covers all possible risks related to the oil tank.
- Ensure the tank is locked and secure from theft.
- Check the tank is located away from water sources (eg, ditches, soakaways, groundwater, streams, rivers, lakes), to minimise the possibility of contamination in the event of a leak.

Oftec believes most oil tanks have a maximum working life of around 15 years and when it comes to replacing an oil tank, those that are bunded provide better protection.

We provide essential services that can’t stop just because the weather is bad. In the run-up to winter, preparations get underway so we can cope with potentially long periods of heavy rain and plummeting temperatures. To help us plan as far ahead as possible we receive specialist weather forecasting from the Met Office.

We have robust plans and plenty of experience to help us manage issues and incidents. We have teams from all over the company on standby ready to spring into action 24/7 – and we have a fleet of 4x4 vehicles that we can deploy to help get our teams out to issues in some of our more remote areas. We were one of the few water companies that was able to maintain water supplies during the infamous Beast from the East in 2018.

Burst mains and leaks can be caused and exacerbated by cold weather, but our focus on leakage happens year round. We’re always out looking for leaks, and we’ve been working harder than ever to find them – you may have spotted our teams out and about where you live. It’s worth checking for leaks in your home too, as a significant amount of water is lost on private customer supply pipes and through internal plumbing – see page 6.

**Be a leak or pollution spotter**

You can help us this winter by being a leak spotter. Please report any leaks to us so we can quickly fix them. Report leaks online at: wessexwater.co.uk/report-a-problem

If you spot a pollution please call us immediately on 0345 600 4 600.

**Wet, wet wet**

It’s not just cold weather that can be challenging. Intense storms can put immense pressure on the sewerage network. Our priority is to prevent any sewage flooding, but that can sometimes occur when items such as wet wipes stop waste water flowing freely through pipes.

There’s ongoing maintenance every day to keep sewers clear, but we do ask customers not to pour fat, oil and grease down the sink and only flush the three Ps – pee, poo and paper.

As well as constantly monitoring our own network, we also welcome customers getting in touch to let us know if something doesn’t look right. So if you see anything unusual or even a potential pollution incident, please call us immediately on 0345 600 4 600.
It’s true when they say learning is a never-ending journey, and this year has been an example of that. We learnt how to make banana bread, became video conferencing experts and many of us also adapted to home learning of children.

Our education advisers have also been working on ways to develop our free education service and adapt it to the ‘new normal’ as children get back to the classrooms.

“We know that 2020 has been a difficult time for everyone in the education sector, and ever since the UK went into lockdown we’ve been putting a great amount of time and effort into creating our new online resources to help support learning from home and in the classroom,” explains Gillian, one of the four education advisers we have in our region.

“Education has always been a core part of who we are as a business, so it was important we continue to help educate people on water, waste and how they can care for the environment.”

**Hands-on learning**

We first launched our education service back in 1996 and have been evolving it ever since. We now have eight education centres located around our region where schools and community groups can visit us for a hands-on learning experience, where you can see how we supply drinking water and treat sewage so it can be safely returned to the environment.

Education adviser Sue added: “There’s nothing better than getting close to the natural world, so this summer we’ve been working in partnership with local wildlife trusts to hold outdoor education sessions to teach children about the importance of saving water and only flushing poo, paper and pee.

“We’re also now offering site tours at four of our education centres where we have social distancing and extra measures in place, so check online to book a visit.”

**Discover our online resources**

The team can support your learning goals virtually as well – either through an online workshop at your school or college, or even in the comfort of your living room.

“Our service is all about designing an education programme that ties in with teaching plans and class objectives. To help with lesson planning we’ve also created an array of KS1 and KS2 resources and videos that parents, teachers and children can download for free,” explains Meghan.

“We have produced science investigations, fact files, joke poo recipes, information about the water cycle and sewage treatment, plus loads more.”

Tim, our education adviser in Dorset, added: “We are also looking to expand our resources to ensure they are relevant to the latest curriculums at schools. These resources will cover a range of topics, such as climate change, flood alleviation and biodiversity. Additionally, we are busy making KS3 and KS4 resources.”

Our education team are ready to assist in a range of online and offline learning.

**Book a free visit**

You can download our free education resources and register your interest in a free visit or future site tour by visiting wessexwater.co.uk/education

**“Educating people about water, waste and how to care for the environment”**
Have Yourself an Eco-Friendly Christmas

Christmas is right around the corner and finding the perfect gifts for your friends and family can prove to be a difficult task. If you’re struggling to choose, here is a range of sustainable products that would make great stocking fillers for your loved ones.

1. A reusable face mask
   Masks are being worn when performing a number of day-to-day tasks to protect yourself and others. This has led to disposable ones increasingly washing up on shorelines and causing harm to wildlife. A reusable face covering could make a great gift for someone who has been using single-use versions.

2. A refillable water bottle
   A refillable bottle is a simple, yet very practical gift – everyone could do with one in their cupboard. Using a refillable bottle can prevent the use of more than 100 disposable plastic bottles every year, reducing the number that end up in landfill and the ocean. There are loads to choose from, so you can get one that is just right for the person you’re shopping for.

3. Eco-friendly toiletries
   A lot of the items people use in the bathroom are single use, but there is actually a range of reusable alternatives available. Reusable face pads can be used instead of makeup wipes and toilet paper spray can prevent the need for wet wipes. Create an eco-friendly toiletries gift basket for a friend or family member – you could even add in some organic shampoo and soap or a bamboo toothbrush.

4. Reusable straws
   In the UK, an estimated 8.5 million straws are thrown away every year, creating a huge amount of plastic waste. If you know someone who uses them constantly, gift them a pack of reusable straws. You can get them in metal, glass silicone and bamboo from most eco-friendly shops.

5. Eco-friendly gift-wrapping tips
   An extra 30% of rubbish is produced during the festive period. Follow our gift-wrapping tips to help create less waste this Christmas:
   • reuse old wrapping paper and gift bags – don’t throw them away
   • wrap gifts with recycled brown paper or old newspapers
   • use eco-friendly paper tape instead of sticky plastic tape
   • wrap presents in a shirt or scarf which can act as a bonus gift.

Supporting stronger communities

People hit hardest by the Covid-19 crisis were the first to benefit from the new Wessex Water Foundation launched in June this year.

The Wessex Water Foundation is a dedicated funding scheme for community projects across the Wessex Water region, run in partnership with the Somerset, Wiltshire, Dorset and Quartet Community Foundations.

As lockdown got underway, region-wide emergency funding was awarded to groups on the frontline, from local volunteer groups to foodbanks. To support communities now responding to the challenging social and economic situation the Wessex Water Recovery Fund has opened for local applications, helping to build resilience for the future.

And from 2021 the Wessex Water Foundation will provide at least half a million pounds of funding every year to support community projects, debt advice projects and charities dealing with those suffering the consequences of poverty through low income or unemployment.

The Wessex Water Foundation will also continue to support local environmental projects, encouraging communities to look at ways they can protect and engage with their local environment.

Wessex Water chief executive Colin Skelett said: “We’re thrilled to be able to launch the Wessex Water Foundation alongside our friends in the community foundations in our patch.

“Being at the heart of the communities we serve is nothing new for us, but the Wessex Water Foundation is a new way of making sure we’re helping the people who need it most.

“It’s been an incredibly tough time for everyone in our region and supporting emergency coronavirus projects is a fitting place to start.”

Rosemary Macdonald, chief executive officer of UK Community Foundations, said: “We at UKCF would like to thank Wessex Water Foundation for all their help with the emergency coronavirus appeal.

“It is great to see the Community Foundations in the Wessex region come together and work so successfully with one of our key employers. The Wiltshire, Somerset, Dorset and Quartet foundations are working hard to distribute the funding provided by the Wessex Water Foundation to those most affected by Covid-19.

“It’s wonderful to see such a great partnership helping those in need at this challenging time.”

For nearly three decades Wessex Water has been working with the wider community to help local causes and projects, both through volunteering and various funding projects.

To find out more about the Wessex Water Foundation visit wessexwater.co.uk/funding

Wessex Water Recovery Fund

Applications for the Wessex Water Recovery Fund opened on 5 October for the four Community Foundation partners.

The Wessex Water Recovery Fund aims to strengthen communities following the Covid-19 outbreak, with an emphasis on local rather than national projects.

It is run in partnership with the Somerset, Wiltshire, Dorset and Quartet Community Foundations and has already been prioritising those most affected by the coronavirus pandemic.

Kirsty Scarlett, Wessex Water’s head of community engagement, said: “For this year only, as a response to the challenges faced by local communities, the recovery fund has been set up to provide support that will both address priority needs and help build resilience for the future.

“Applications for the fund will open with our four regional Community Foundation partners from Monday 5 October. We particularly welcome applications from BAME groups.

“The fund will close on 4 December with decisions made at local community panels in January 2022.”

Visit wessexwater.co.uk/funding to find the link for your area and how to apply.
Investing in the future

Every year we welcome a new group of apprentices and university placement students to our company, and this year is no exception.

Back in September we welcomed our latest new recruits who have taken on a range of apprenticeships and filled a variety of placement roles.

Becca Thurston, early careers manager, said: “As a company, we see our community as our wider family - and supporting people in those communities is one of our top priorities.

“I think we all know that this year has been especially tough for lots of people, and that’s why we’ve remained committed to our promise to keep recruiting apprentices and investing in our people.

“This year we’re so proud to be taking on 25 brand new apprentices, bringing our total for the last 10 years to 330.”

As well as taking on brand new apprentices, every year Wessex Water also hosts placements for university students, and offers technical apprenticeships and courses to existing colleagues.

Our apprenticeship programme will soon be reopening for applications - with a planned start date of September 2021. If you or someone you know is interested in joining team Wessex Water please contact our friendly early careers team earlycareers@wessexwater.co.uk to register your interest.

Becca adds: “We currently have 24 different types of apprenticeships running. We like to think we have something to offer for everyone! Our apprenticeships are open to everyone - no matter your previous qualifications or age. So, if you’ve got enthusiasm and desire to learn, we’d love to hear from you.”

Giving a kickstart

We’re really proud to be part of the government’s ‘plan for jobs’ and offering placements through the Kickstart Scheme. We’ll be working with agencies to identify local people aged 16-25 who are currently on Universal Credit and at risk of long-term unemployment.

“We will be offering 40 young people six month paid placements.

“New careers webpage

If you’re interested in a career at Wessex Water, take a look at our new careers webpage. You’ll find the latest opportunities as well as stories from staff and information about our varied roles and departments.

wessexwater.co.uk/careers

Create a wildlife-friendly garden this winter

Let your garden go wild

Don’t cut your bushes, trees or plants, and leave fallen leaves and twigs on your garden floor. An overgrown patch in your garden can provide much-needed shelter and food for animals and insects. You could take this a step further by collecting fallen leaves and branches or even building a shelter for small animals and insects.

Feed your visitors

Cold weather can cause food supplies to become scarce. You could set up a bird feeder, filled with nuts, seeds and berries, to make sure your feathered friends don’t go hungry. Leaving out pots of food and water will help to keep other visitors, such as hedgehogs, fed and hydrated too. Fill the pots with hedgehog food, leftover meat or tinned dog or cat food.

Maintain your pond

Does your garden pond freeze over during winter? If so, gasses can build up and harm the fish and frogs living there. Allow these gasses to escape by melting a hole into a section of your pond using a hot saucepan.

Don’t smash the ice or pour boiling water on to it as this could harm the wildlife too. You may be able to avoid a frozen pond by putting a tennis ball in it - the ball’s movement can prevent ice from forming.

Grow winter-flowering plants

Pollen and nectar are essential foods for a range of insects, including bees and butterflies. However, these plants are often in short supply during the colder months. You can give a number of insects the chance of living through winter by planting one or two winter-flowering nectar and pollen-rich plants in your garden, such as primrose, aconite, oregon grape, willow and evergreen clematis.

Weakened shelters, dwindling food supplies and frozen ponds are the harsh realities many creatures have to face when temperatures begin to plummet.

A lack of food and shelter can leave animals and insects cold and hungry throughout winter, unless action is taken to prepare for the cold weather.

Follow our top tips to make sure your garden is wildlife friendly this winter:

Weakened shelters, dwindling food supplies and frozen ponds are the harsh realities many creatures have to face when temperatures begin to plummet.

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Follow our top tips to make sure your garden is wildlife friendly this winter:
Support for you... during challenging times

Are you worried about being able to pay your water bill due to Covid-19?

We’re here to help.

If you have a loss of income directly due to Covid-19 our **Assist** scheme is available for you during these challenging times.

We can **lower your water bill** based on your ability to pay until you’re back on track.

For more information and to apply for free, visit [wessexwater.co.uk/helptopay](http://wessexwater.co.uk/helptopay) or call our friendly team on 0345 600 3 600 (Monday to Friday 8am to 8pm, Saturday 8am to 2pm).