

Dear [REDACTED]

Thank you for your request for environmental information. We appreciate your interest, and we want to let you know that your request has been carefully considered in accordance with the Environmental Information Regulations (EIR). As your request contained a number of specific questions, this response, restates each part of the request (in bold) and then follows this with our response.

I am writing to request information and clarification regarding what appears to be an ongoing and systemic issue affecting potable water supply resilience across Macclesfield, Congleton and Chelford. This concern is not limited to a single outage or operational incident. Residents across these areas have experienced recurring low pressure, intermittent supply issues and tanker support activity over at least the past 12–24 months.

During this period, United Utilities tankers have become a regular and visible presence in the area. Their repeated deployment raises legitimate questions as to whether tanker use has become part of routine operational support rather than an exceptional response to isolated incidents.

Recently, I raised these concerns publicly on Twitter/X. In response, a United Utilities representative stated that tankers were present “to support the reservoirs.” When I queried this further, the representative later returned and suggested words to the effect that “some might say there have been too many new builds.” While informal, this response reflects a wider and increasingly common concern amongst residents: namely, whether rapid housing growth is placing pressure on existing supply and distribution infrastructure.

I would therefore be grateful if United Utilities could provide a substantive response to the following:

1. Tanker Operations and Reservoir Support

- Why have water tankers been required so frequently across Macclesfield, Congleton and Chelford over the past 24 months?**

Over the past 24 months, there have been a number of planned and reactive instances in the Macclesfield, Congleton and Chelford areas which have led to us to deploy our fleet of alternative supply vehicles (ASVs). These include:

- Maintenance work on our service reservoirs (SR), which store treated drinking water, or water treatment works (WTW).
- Completing planned work, such as connecting new properties to the network.
- Installing new apparatus on the water network or at the WTWs.
- Repairing leaks/bursts or supporting any temporary reductions in pressure.

- **What does the phrase “supporting the reservoirs” mean operationally?**

The term ‘supporting the reservoirs’ can have multiple meanings, dependent on the operational situation under which the ASVs have been deployed.

Our ASVs are typically deployed reactively to assist with an operational incident or to support planned work, they are not deployed as a long-term solution to any additional demand on our infrastructure due to housing growth. For example, at times of high demand during spells of hot weather, our ASVs can be used to support our service reservoirs (enclosed storage tanks that hold fully treated water before it is piped to homes and business) by injecting water into the local network, which helps to ensure customer supplies remain stable and also allows the service reservoirs to recover.

- **How often have tankers been deployed in these areas during the period from 1 January 2024 to 26 May 2026, and under what circumstances?**

For each tanker deployment during this period, please provide:

- a. the date and duration of deployment;
- b. the volume of water introduced into the network;
- c. whether the deployment was categorised as planned, reactive, emergency, resilience support or routine operational support;
- d. whether tankers were supplying reservoirs, maintaining network pressure, injecting directly into the distribution network, or supporting customers by another method;
- e. the operational cause recorded for the deployment, including whether it related to pump failure, treatment works reduction, burst mains, reservoir cleaning, new connections, network reinforcement, demand pressures or any other category.

The attached Appendix A shows the ASV deployment records for the Macclesfield, Congleton and Chelford areas over the periods January 2024 to April 2024 and February 2025 to May 2026. The data from the intervening period was submitted to you under your internal review (EIR-488).

The dataset shown in Appendix A shows the date, job category (planned or reactive), the district metering zone (DMZ), job reason and injection volume (in litres). We do not measure the duration that ASVs are used for, and as such are unable to provide you with a copy of this information in line with Regulation 12(4)(a) of the EIR, as this is not held.

2. Pump Failures and Infrastructure Constraints

United Utilities has repeatedly referred publicly to “pump issues” when explaining supply problems.

Please therefore confirm:

- **Whether United Utilities’ position is that recurring supply issues in these areas are solely**

attributable to isolated pump failures.

If so, please identify:

- a. the pumps or pumping stations involved;**
- b. the dates and duration of failures;**
- c. the cause of each failure;**
- d. repair and reinstatement timescales;**
- e. whether failures were repeat occurrences;**
- f. whether any underlying capacity, resilience or demand-related constraints were also identified.**

As explained in our response to question 1, there have been numerous events within the local area over the last 12 to 24 months. Whilst there have recently been some instances involving a pump, this is not the sole cause of the issues seen in the area. Whilst the pump issues were ongoing, we engaged our ASVs as a precautionary measure to ensure that water supplies to customers in the area remained unaffected.

- **Whether United Utilities has undertaken any review into whether existing infrastructure is operating close to practical or designed capacity during peak demand periods.**

In 2020, we undertook a study to evaluate existing network constraints alongside local development plans. This assessment involved mapping projected areas of growth against sections of the network identified as having limited capacity, enabling us to prioritise locations requiring more detailed modelling.

As a result of this initial analysis, areas within South Cheshire (including Congleton) were selected for further, more detailed modelling. In addition, a Hydraulic Needs Assessment was carried out using anticipated development data obtained from the Cheshire East Council local plan to determine expected system requirements and to develop preliminary solution options.

Unfortunately, we are unable to share copies of the reports with you in line with Regulation 12(5)(e) of the EIR, as these contain commercially sensitive information relating to our infrastructure. Additionally, some of the information within these documents form part of Critical National Infrastructure, and therefore disclosure of this could potentially pose a threat to security. As such, Regulation 12(5)(a) of the EIR is also applicable in the prevention of sharing this information. Despite this, useful information on our network growth planning prioritisation process can be found in our response to question 5.

3. Impact of Housing Growth

Please provide details of any assessment undertaken by United Utilities regarding the impact of approximately 4,250 additional dwellings across Macclesfield, Congleton and Chelford on:

- **potable water supply;**



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- **network pressure;**
- **peak demand;**
- **system resilience;**
- **pumping capacity;**
- **treatment throughput; and**
- **distribution infrastructure capacity.**

Whilst we have not completed any assessments specifically for 4,250 additional dwellings across Macclesfield, Congleton and Chelford, we have completed a number of smaller, localised reviews for new developments. Whilst we are unable to share copies of each assessment in line with Regulations 12(5)(a) (as these documents form part of Critical National Infrastructure, and therefore disclosure of this could potentially pose a threat to security) and 12(5)(e) of the EIR (as they contain commercially sensitive information relating to our infrastructure), I have summarised these below:

Congleton:

For your information, Congleton Town is predominantly located in our water supply zone (WSZ) 162. This WSZ is supplied from a combination of Hugbridge WTW and Smallwood SR and has seen approximately 2,500 new properties connected since 2018.

We completed modelling for this area in 2021 and identified two projects for completion between 2020-2025. These were:

- the installation of approximately 1.8km of polyethylene main to improve system pressures. This work was completed in 2024 and was sized to accommodate significant potential future growth on the west side of Congleton.
- a set of pumps were upgraded to accommodate additional demand and provide additional resilience to Pedley SR.

We will continue to monitor development plans in the Congleton area and complete modelling as and when required to understand what is needed to meet future demands.

Chelford:

Chelford is located in our WSZ 273 and is supplied via Alderley Edge SR. This WSZ has seen approximately 93 new properties connected since 2018.

We are currently in the process of modelling for potential growth and have requested that additional data loggers are installed to understand whether there are any restrictions or capacity issues on this network. As this modelling is currently still taking place, and potential upgrades are not yet finalised, we are not currently able to share this information (in line with Regulation 12(4)(d) of the EIR). This regulation states that public authorities may refuse to disclose information to the extent that the information is still within the course of completion, to unfinished documents or incomplete data.

Macclesfield:

Macclesfield is located across WSZ 307, WSZ 308 and WSZ 309. Since 2018, property counts in Macclesfield have increased by approximately 5,000. Modelling was undertaken in 2021, and it was identified that one of our pumping stations may need to be upgraded to accommodate growth identified. This assessment also identified network 'head loss' (a reduction in water pressure as water flows through the supply network), which was addressed via two interventions between 2020-2025. These were:

- work to clear the strainer on one of our DMA meters, where significant head loss was recorded. A strainer is an in-line mechanical filter that traps and removes debris like sand, gravel and rust.
- Undertook network optimisation and pressure management activities. Since this work, the network pressures have been more stable.

Whilst these two interventions addressed the immediate head loss issue, we expect that additional modelling will be required to fully assess network options due to further potential growth. We are keeping a close watch on this issue and will undertake this modelling when the growth plans become known. As this work has not yet started, we are unable to share any further details at this time. Regulation 12(4)(a) is therefore applicable as this information is not currently held.

Please also confirm:

- **Whether United Utilities has identified any areas where demand growth is approaching or exceeding planned operational capacity.**

We have not identified any areas where demand growth is approaching or exceeding planned operational capacity.

- **Whether housing growth has materially contributed to the need for tanker support or other operational interventions.**

Housing growth has not materially contributed to the need for tanker support. As explained above, as part of ongoing reviews of the network we have completed improvement works to accommodate new growth in the Congleton, Chelford and Macclesfield areas.

- **Whether cumulative development pressure has been identified internally as a resilience concern within these supply areas.**

Based on our internal assessments, we have not identified cumulative development pressure within these supply areas as a resilience concern. While individual developments are reviewed through our standard planning and modelling processes, the combined impact of growth across the area has not, at this stage, been assessed as posing a material risk to network resilience. Should future development projections indicate a change in this position, we will undertake further analysis as part of our ongoing

strategic planning activities.

4. Distribution and Pressure Issues

Residents frequently report low pressure or trickling taps even during periods where local service reservoirs reportedly remain full.

Please therefore clarify:

- Why customers can experience reduced supply despite reservoir storage apparently being available.

As explained above, this local area has experienced a number of issues in the last 12 to 24 months, which we are looking to address alongside longer term actions to improve local water supply resilience. An overview of some of the work that is currently underway, alongside other work that has recently been completed, is shown in the table below:

Planned improvement	Benefit	Timescale
Installation of pressure management valve on Windmill Lane	Allows us to balance pressure and reduce bursts.	Complete - November 2025
1.7 km replacement of Kerridge water main	Renewed water main – reduced burst frequency so fewer supply interruptions.	650m complete. The remainder completes by December 2026.
9.0 km replacement of Poynton water main	Renewed water main – reduced burst frequency so fewer supply interruptions.	Expected by March 2027
Resilience improvements at Lamaload WTW and Ridgigate WTW	We have strengthened site resilience through the installation of battery backup systems. This installation was necessary due to the continued sub-optimal power supplies in the area from the local electricity network.	Complete - February 2026
Upgrade scheme at Lamaload WTW and Ridgigate WTW	Improved resilience to fluctuations in raw water quality (removing naturally occurring compounds that can impact the taste and odour of water). Scheme includes new technology trial	Starts 2027, completes 2028.
Investigation and modernisation work at Tytherington Borehole WTW	Will be confirmed upon resolution of the investigation	Timescale still being confirmed

- **Whether the issue relates to treatment throughput, pumping capability, pressure management, pipe capacity, distribution constraints or other operational limitations.**

As explained, there have been a number of complex issues within the network and treatment sites that have contributed to supply issues.

5. Planning and Development Responses

- **On what basis does United Utilities continue to raise no objection, or limited objection, to large-scale housing developments within these areas?**

The location of specific new development proposals is a matter for the local planning authority, and while United Utilities is not a statutory consultee on these applications, we do work closely with local authorities to provide comments on applications for planning permission, where we think it is necessary to protect the impact on our assets and customers.

Where risk is identified, we review planning applications to assess the risk to our assets and/or services and to provide advice on how to mitigate the risk through the planning application process.

Our comments must, however, reflect our statutory obligations as a regulated water company, one of which is that we have a domestic supply duty for water connections to our network. Whilst we have limited power to influence development, we do review local plans and applications for planning permission and provide comments where necessary such as recommending water efficiency measures where this can be justified.

The local authority is ultimately the decision maker for planning applications, and it does not have to reflect our comments or recommended conditions in its determinations. In almost all cases, our responses will be published on the local authority's planning portal. In this case, information would be made available via [Cheshire East Council - Viewing planning applications](#).

- **What criteria are used to determine whether existing infrastructure can sustainably support additional demand?**

We use our Network Growth Planning Prioritisation Process to determine whether existing infrastructure can sustainably support additional demand. This consists of:

- **A network capacity assessment**, whereby we look at hydraulic modelling, current capacity, asset performance and condition and water quality considerations. Once completed, this will show whether the existing network can support growth and, if not, what reinforcements or upgrades are required.
- **A development assessment**, which focuses on specific developments being proposed and how they would interact with our water network. Within these, we look at demand forecasting, possible connection points, growth alignment, infrastructure requirements, and

regulatory and environmental considerations. This development specific assessment determines whether the development can be supported, what upgrades are needed and who is responsible for funding them.

Collectively, these two assessments provide a full picture of system capability, growth pressures and investment needs.

- **What hydraulic modelling, forecasting or resilience assessments underpin those planning responses?**

As explained in response to your previous question, we complete two detailed assessments which look at network capacity and development. Once these are complete, we carry out detailed impact assessments which look at the performance, capacity and resilience of our network, including:

- **Potable Water Hydraulic Modelling**, which shows us how drinking water moves through our supply network. This assesses capacity, performance and resilience under different conditions. These models underpin strategic and operational decision making in water supply planning.
- **Baseline assessments**, which provides us with a structured evaluation of the current performance, condition and resilience of the water network. These assessments usually include analysis of current hydraulic performance, asset condition, supply and demand balance, and operational resilience. The baseline position provides the reference point against which future scenarios such as development or growth are tested to determine their impact capacity, service levels, and regulatory compliance
- **Growth impact assessments**, which is an evaluation of how planned or proposed development will affect the performance, capacity and resilience of the existing water supply system.
- **AMP specific solution development**, which is the process all water and sewerage companies follow to design, justify and refine the investment solutions that will be delivered in a particular Asset Management Period (AMP). During this stage, we take identified needs such as growth, resilience risks, water quality issues or asset deterioration and develop detailed, deliverable solutions for the upcoming AMP.

As United Utilities is not a statutory consultee on these applications, we do work closely with local authorities to provide comments on applications for planning permission, where we think it is necessary to protect the impact on our assets and on customers.

We hope that this response above answers your request. However, if you're not satisfied with how we've handled it, you can request an internal review. To do this, please write to us at Environmental Information Office, Haweswater House, Lingley Mere, Warrington, WA5 3LP or email us at EIRRequests@uuplc.co.uk, addressing your request to [REDACTED], and explaining why you're unhappy with our response. We'll be very happy to review your request and ensure we've done everything we can to assist you.



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Any request for an internal review should be made within 40 working days of receipt of this response, and we will reply within 40 working days from receipt of the request for internal review.

Many thanks



We'd love to hear your feedback on how we handled your request! If you have a moment, please complete our short survey [here](#) – your input helps us improve our service.