

## **Waterwise: All about our Water Supply**

On Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> February, 2026 at the monthly u3a meeting at St. Paul's we received a talk from Daniel Rodrigues and Tom Williams from Southern Water about the company's work to provide our clean water supply. They showed a map of Southern England, illustrating services provided in the areas they covered. In Medway they supply drinking water (563 million litres per day) and also deal with waste water/sewage. Drinking water is provided through a network of 81 treatment centres, 207 storage reservoirs and delivered through 14,000 kilometres of pipework.

Daniel then asked us to imagine how 1 cubic metre or 1,000 litres of water could be used. It is the equivalent of, on average, 12 baths, 27 showers, 166 loo flushes and 20 loads of washing. In Medway 70% of water comes from underground sources, 23% from rivers and only 7% from reservoirs. The underground source is naturally filtered by the chalk but all water is treated with UV (ultra violet) rays, a small amount of chlorine is added and it is then tested for cleanliness before being pumped to our taps.

South East England has been designated as an area of 'water scarcity' due to the growing population and the effects of climate change. When reserves are low, e.g. in summer, the Environment Agency may not permit further extraction from water sources to limit damage to wildlife etc. This is why storage reservoirs must be topped up in wetter periods of the year. There are 100 new projects of water recycling being trialled around the country. Waste water will be treated then used to 'top up' rivers and lakes. Our local site will be at Aylesford, on the Medway.

Water is lost (currently 17%) through leaks in the supply pipework beneath our streets and Southern Water fix on average 300 leaks per week but must obtain a permit from the Local Authority to dig up a road. Leaks are generally reported by the public but in future may be located using acoustic detectors, satellite technology and drones.

We can also help keep our bills down by using water wisely e.g. having a shorter shower instead of a bath. Leaking toilets can also waste 300 litres of water per day and 'Leaky Loo' detector strips were given out to anyone who suspected this was happening. Southern Water will also arrange a home visit by appointment to discuss water usage. There are plans to roll out 'smart water meters' which could alert the home owner to an undiscovered leak, before the bill arrives.

Southern Water provides support for vulnerable people such as the disabled, elderly and families with young children for times when the supply is cut off. Any of these can apply to the Priority Services Register. There is also help for those who cannot pay their bills – the Essentials Tariff for low income households and specialised bills e.g. Audio or Braille for those who find reading their bills difficult. For more information see contact details below.

The talk concluded with questions from the floor:

Q. Who owns Southern Water?

A. The major investor is McQuarry, an Australian company.

Q. Is industry water usage restricted?

A. High users such as Thanet Earth buy water in bulk and their supply is limited if there is a general shortage.

Q. Are new reservoirs being planned?

A. A major super-reservoir is planned by Affinity in Northamptonshire. It may sell water to other water suppliers, such as Southern Water.

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