Monthly water situation report: England

1 Summary - March 2023

It was the wettest March across England since 1981 with monthly rainfall totals above average in all catchments across England. Soil moisture deficits remain low across England at the end of March as is expected at this time of year. River flows increased at more than four-fifths of the indicator sites, and most sites were normal or higher for the time of year. Groundwater levels increased at more than half of the indicator sites, at the end of March groundwater levels were normal at the majority of sites. Reservoir stocks in March increased at all but two of the reservoir and reservoir groups we report on and almost two-thirds were either normal or higher for the time of year.

1.1 Rainfall

The March rainfall total for England was 119.2mm which represents 180% of the 1961 to 1990 long term average (LTA) for the time of year (204% of the 1991 to 2020 LTA). All catchments across England received above average rainfall during March. The wettest hydrological area (relative to its LTA) was the Lower Bedford Ouse catchment in eastern England which received 256% of LTA rainfall for March. The driest hydrological area was the Tweed catchment in north east England with 105% of LTA rainfall. (Figure 2.1)

March rainfall totals were classed as notably or exceptionally high at four fifths of catchments across England. Many catchments recorded their top ten wettest March on record since 1891 with Taw and North Devon and Lower Bristol Avon catchments in south west England and the Loddon catchment in south east England all recording their wettest March on records since 1891. At the regional scale, all areas across England received exceptionally high rainfall for the time of year with the exception of north west and north east England, which received notably high and above normal rainfall respectively. March rainfall across England as a whole was classed as exceptionally high and it was the wettest March since 1981. (Figure 2.2)

The 3 month cumulative rainfall totals show that over four-fifths of catchments in England were classed as normal or above normal. The 6 month cumulative rainfall totals show a similar pattern, with all catchments classed normal or higher with more than a third of catchments notably high. The 12 month cumulative rainfall totals show the majority of catchments were classed as normal. (Figure 2.3)

1.2 Soil moisture deficit

Soil moisture deficits (SMD) remain low across England at the end of March. Soil moisture deficits have decreased across central and eastern England and soils remain wet across the rest of the country for the time of year. (Figure 3.1)

March SMD values across the majority of the country were close to the LTA for the time of year. The differences from the LTA have reduced across central, eastern and south eastern

England with these areas now wetter than the LTA. At a regional scale, the end of March SMDs are lower than typical for the time of year. (Figure 3.2)

1.3 River flows

March monthly mean river flows increased at over four-fifths of indicator sites we report on. All but two sites were normal or higher for the time of year, with more than half of sites either above normal or notably high for the time of year. (Figure 4.1)

Monthly mean flows for all the regional index sites increased during March. Flows in, the Great Stour at Horton, the South Tyne at Haydon Bridge and the River Dove at Marston-on-Dove were above normal for the time of year. The Bedford Ouse at Offord and the River Lune at Caton were classed as notably high. Naturalised flows on the River Thames at Kingston was classed as normal and the River Exe at Thorverton in south west England recorded exceptionally high flows for the time of year. (Figure 4.2)

1.4 Groundwater levels

At the end of March, groundwater levels increased at more than half of the reported indicator sites with many aquifers likely to benefit from end of season recharge. Nearly three quarters of end of month groundwater levels were classed as normal for the time of year. Four sites were classed as being below normal or lower for the time of year. (Figure 5.1)

The major aquifer index sites showed a varied picture at the end of March, ranging from below normal to above normal levels. Normal groundwater levels were reported at Dalton Estate Well in the Hull and East Riding Chalk, at Redlands Hall in the Cam and Ely Ouse Chalk, at Skirwith in the Carlisle Basin and Eden Valley Sandstone and at Chilgrove in Chichester Chalk during March. Levels at Jackments Bottom in the Burford Jurassic Limestone increased to be classed normal. Stonor Park in the South West Chilterns Chalk remained at below normal levels. Little Bucket in the East Kent Stour Chalk decreased to normal levels in March and Weir Farm in the Bridgnorth Sandstone remained above normal for the time of year. (Figure 5.2)

1.5 Reservoir storage

Reservoir stocks at the end of March increased at all but two of the reservoirs and reservoir groups that we report on. Eight reservoirs saw a stock increase of 10% or more compared to the end of February. The largest stock increase, 18%, was recorded at Hanningfield in east England. Two-thirds of the reservoirs or reservoir groups were classed as normal or higher for the time of year. Four reservoirs across England are classed as notably low. (Figure 6.1)

At the regional scale, total reservoir stocks ranged from 81% in south-west England to 97% in south-east England. Total reservoir stocks for England were at 93% of total capacity at the end of March up 7% from the end of February. (Figure 6.2)

1.6 Forward look

April began with a mix of generally settled conditions across the country bringing sunny spells and the occasional rain band crossing the country. The second week is likely to be unsettled with spells of wind and widespread rainfall. Towards the middle of the month conditions are likely to become more settled, particularly in the south and east, with warm sunshine by day but nights may still be cold. Confidence is lower in forecasts for the second half of the month, but in general settled weather is likely to dominate although the chance for changeable spells remains.

For the 3 month period for the UK from April to June there is an increased chance of warm conditions. There is an increased likelihood of the period being drier than usual but wet periods are still possible.

1.7 Projections for river flows at key sites

By the end of September 2023 river flows have a greater likelihood of being above normal or higher in all regions except the east of England. By the end of March 2024 river flows have a greater likelihood of being above normal or higher in south east, south west and north west England. In central England river flows have a greater chance of being below normal or lower.

For scenario based projections of cumulative river flows at key sites by September 2023 and March 2024 see Figure 7.1 and Figure 7.2.

For probabilistic ensemble projections of cumulative river flows at key sites by September 2023 and March 2024 see Figure 7.3 and Figure 7.4.

1.8 Projections for groundwater levels in key aquifers

By the end of September 2023 groundwater levels have a greater likelihood of being above normal or higher in south west, central and east England. In the north east groundwater levels have a greater likelihood of being below normal or lower. By the end of March 2024 groundwater levels have a greater likelihood of being above normal or higher in south east, central and north west England.

For scenario based projections of groundwater levels in key aquifers in September 2023 and March 2024 see Figure 7.5 and Figure 7.6.

For probabilistic ensemble projections of groundwater levels in key aquifers in September 2023 and March 2024 see Figure 7.7 and Figure 7.8.

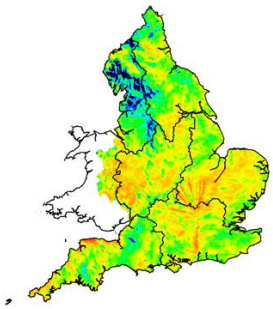
Author: National Water Resources Hydrology Team, Nationalhydrology@environment-agency.gov.uk

2 Rainfall

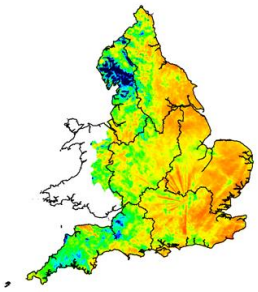
2.1 Rainfall map

Figure 2.1: Monthly rainfall across England and Wales for the past 11 months. UKPP radar data Note: Radar beam blockages in some regions may give anomalous totals in some areas.

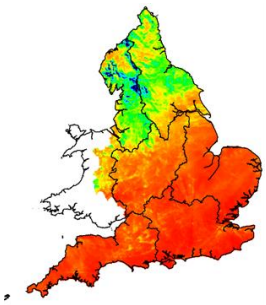
May 2022



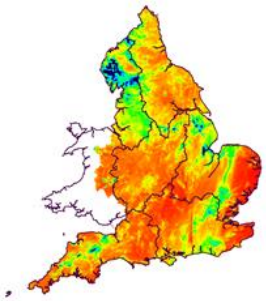
June 2022



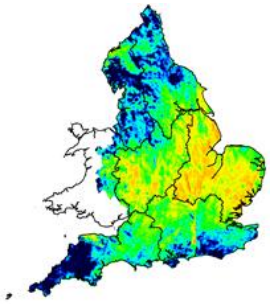
July 2022



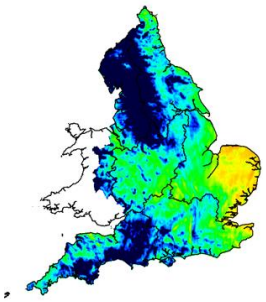
August 2022



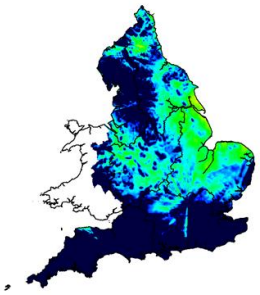
September 2022



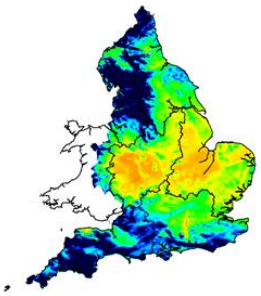
October 2022



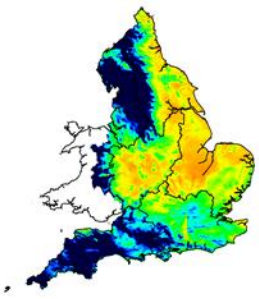
November 2022



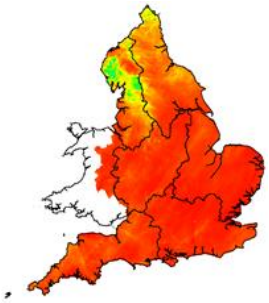
December 2022



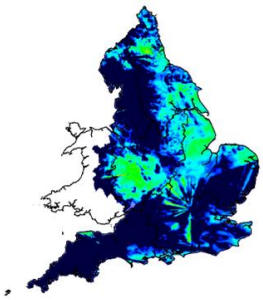
January 2023



February 2023



March 2023



Map Legend

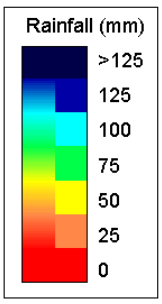
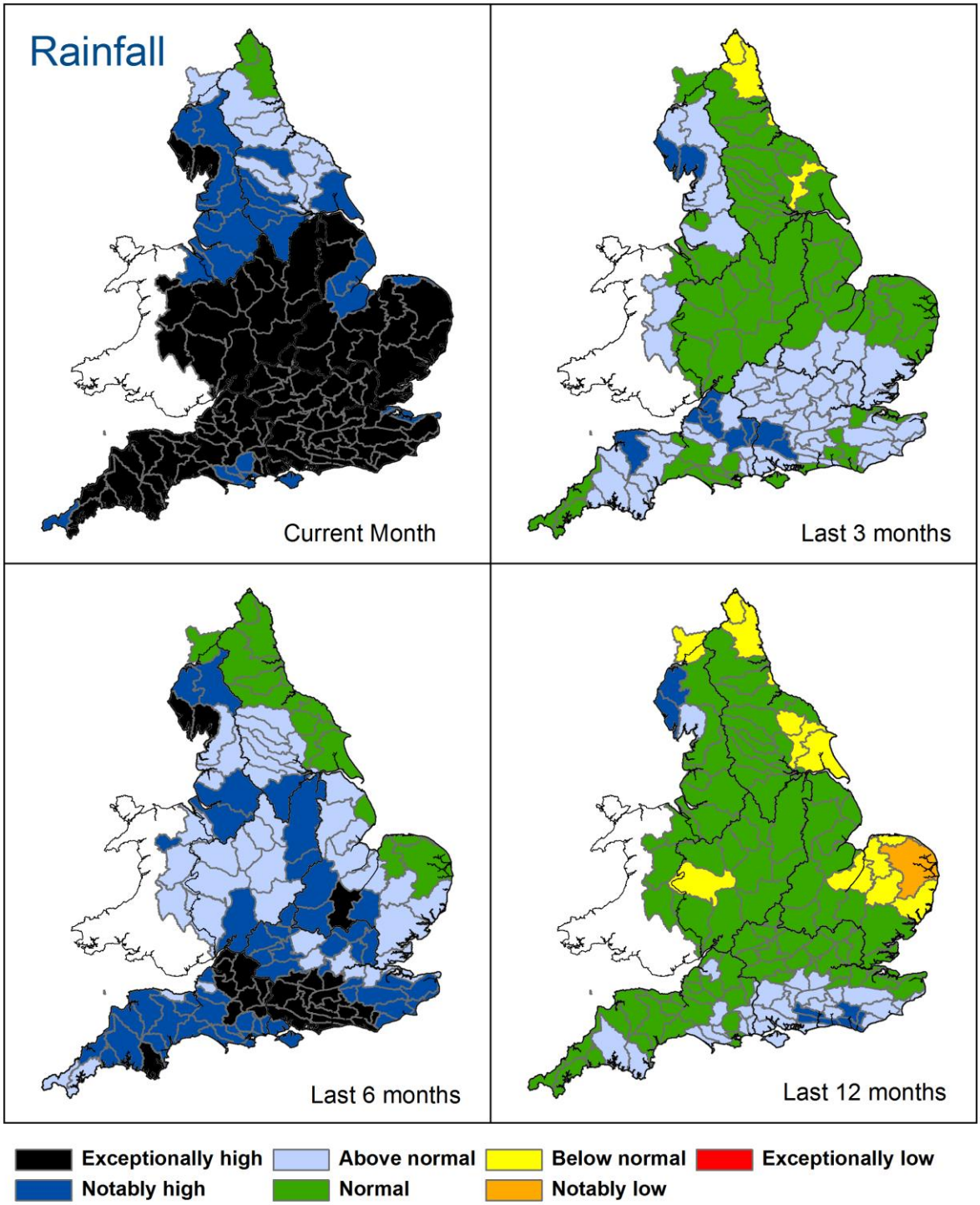


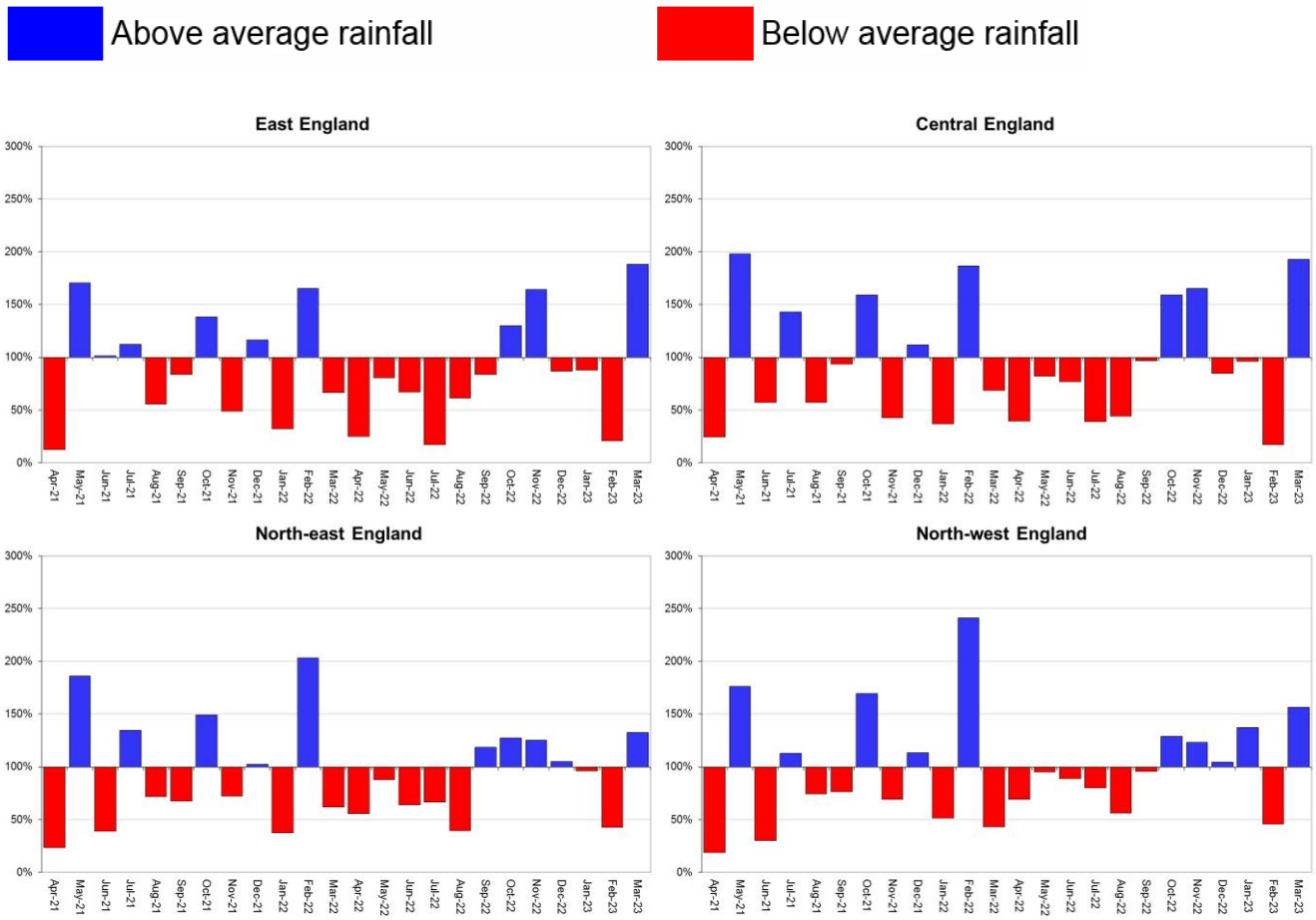
Figure 2.2: Total rainfall for hydrological areas across England for the current month (up to 31 March 2023), the last 3 months, the last 6 months, and the last 12 months, classed relative to an analysis of respective historic totals.

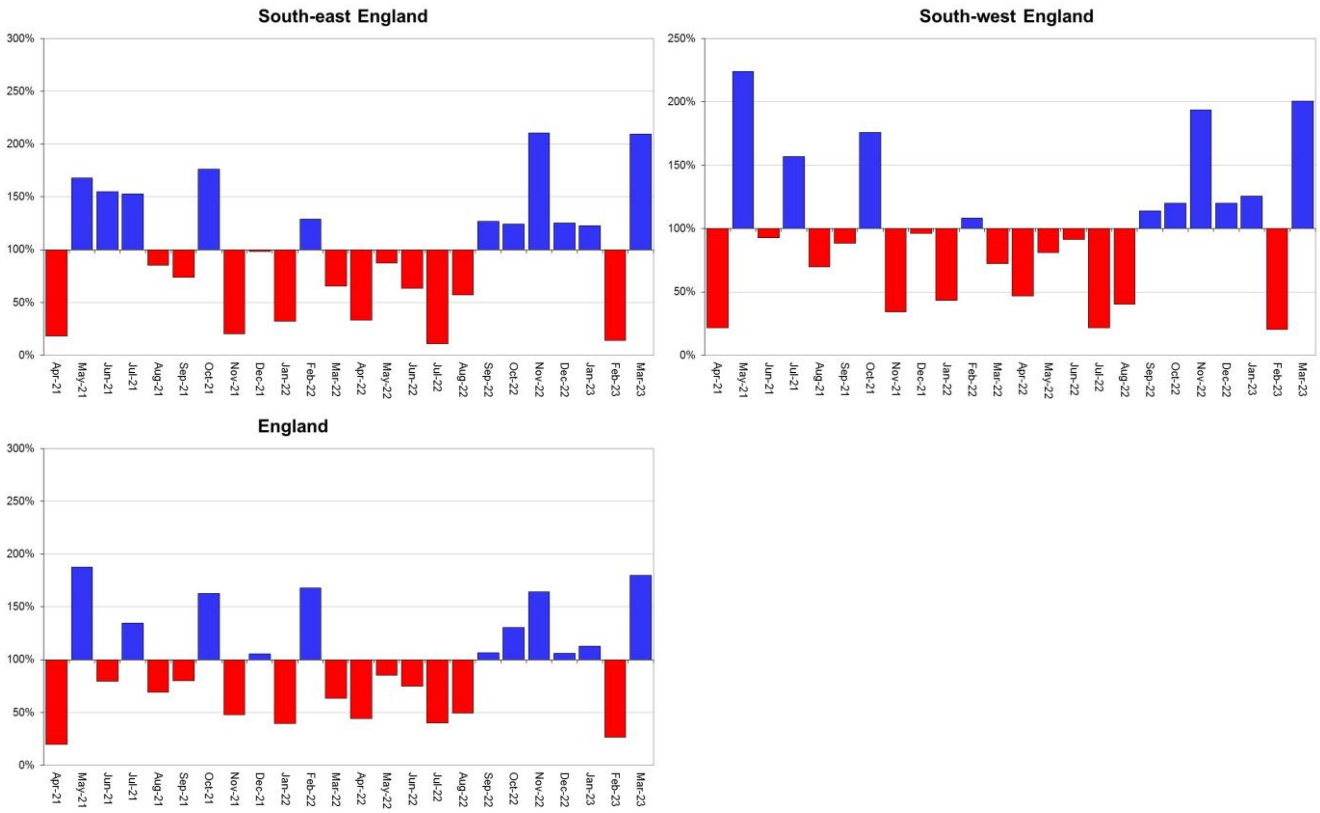


HadUK data based on the Met Office 1km gridded rainfall dataset derived from rain gauges (Source: Met Office. Crown copyright, 2023). Provisional data based on Environment Agency 1km gridded rainfall dataset derived from Environment Agency intensity rain gauges. Crown copyright. All rights reserved. Environment Agency, 100024198, 2023.

2.2 Rainfall charts

Figure 2.3: Monthly rainfall totals for the past 24 months as a percentage of the 1961 to 1990 long term average for each region and for England.





HadUK rainfall data. (Source: Met Office. Crown copyright, 2023).

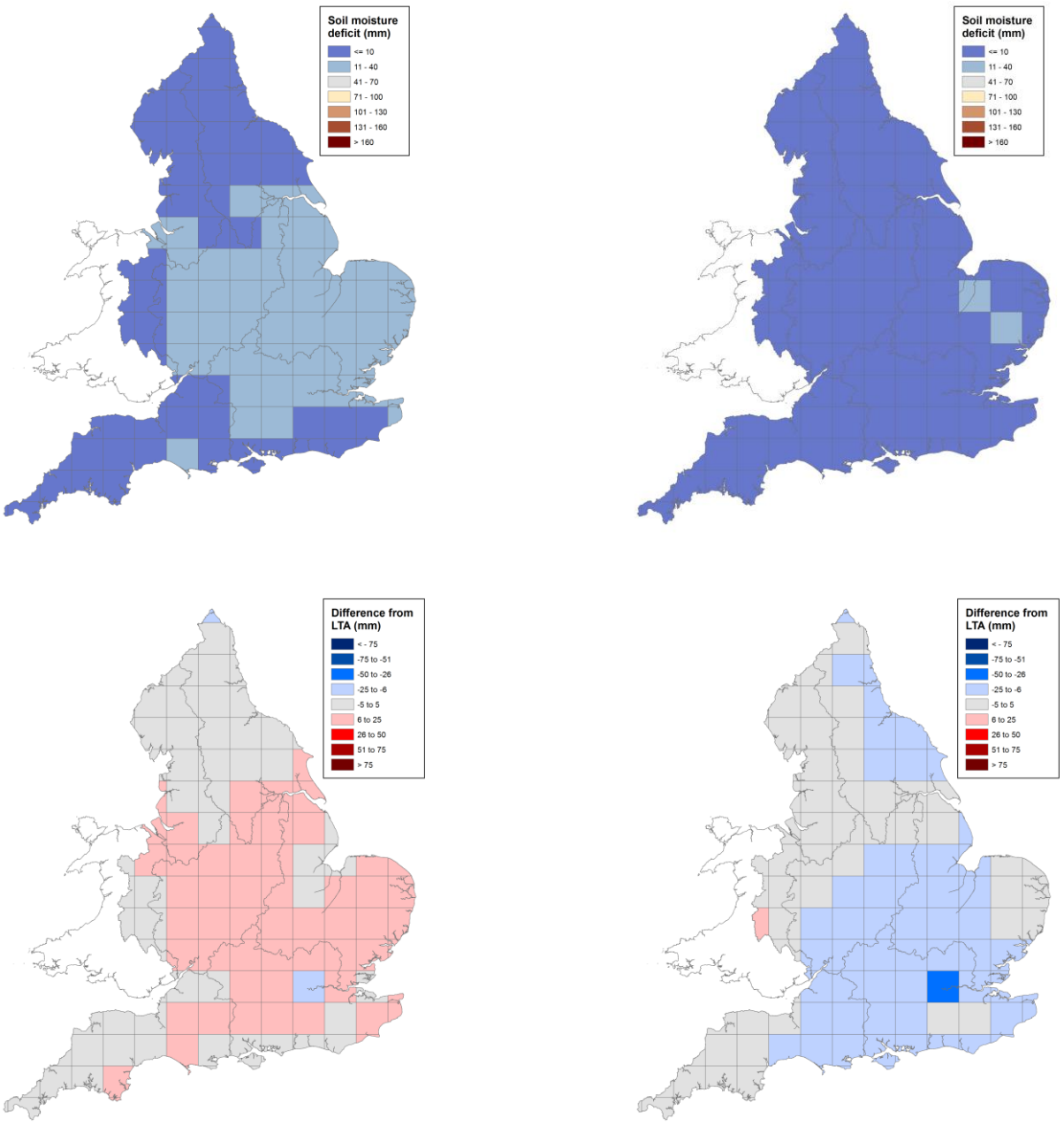
3 Soil moisture deficit

3.1 Soil moisture deficit map

Figure 3.1: Soil moisture deficits for weeks ending, 01 March 2023 (left panel) and 29 March 2023 (right panel). Top row shows actual soil moisture deficits (mm) and bottom row shows the difference (mm) of the actual from the 1961 to 1990 long term average soil moisture deficits. MORECS data for real land use.

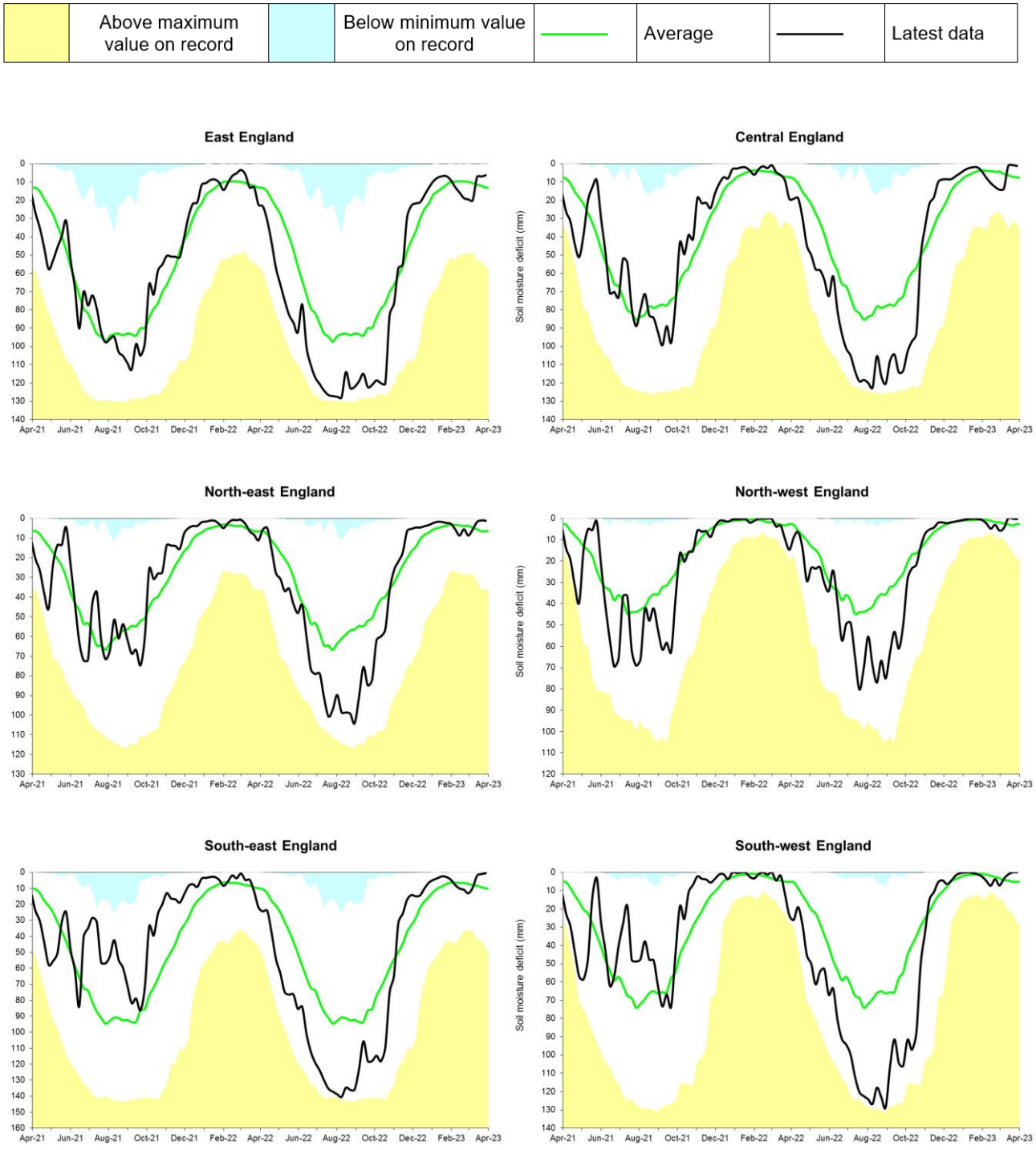
End of February 2023

End of March 2023



3.2 Soil moisture deficit charts

Figure 3.2: Latest soil moisture deficits for all geographic regions compared to maximum, minimum and 1961 to 1990 long term average. Weekly MORECS data for real land use.



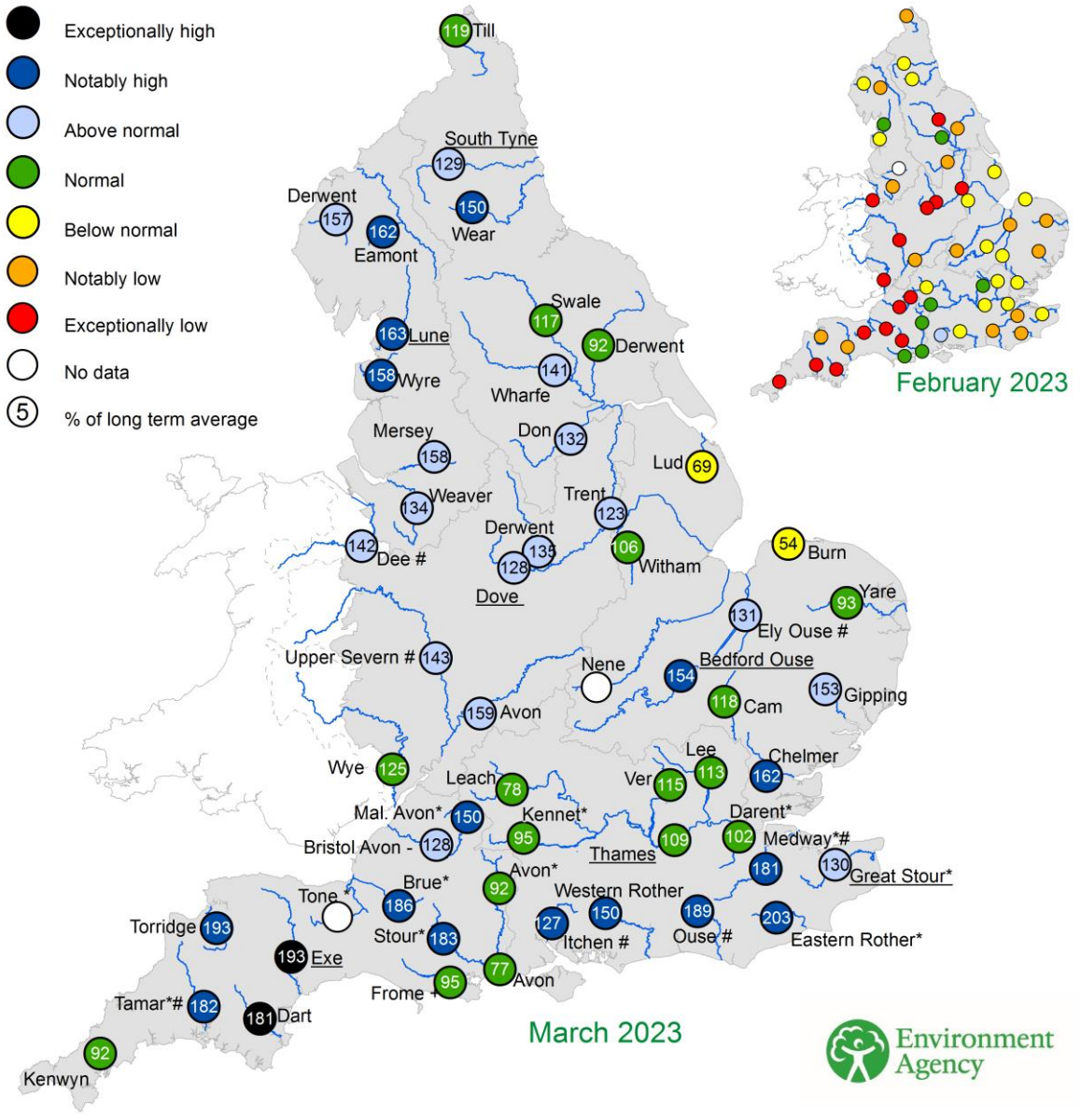
(Source: Met Office. Crown copyright, 2023).

4 River flows

4.1 River flow map

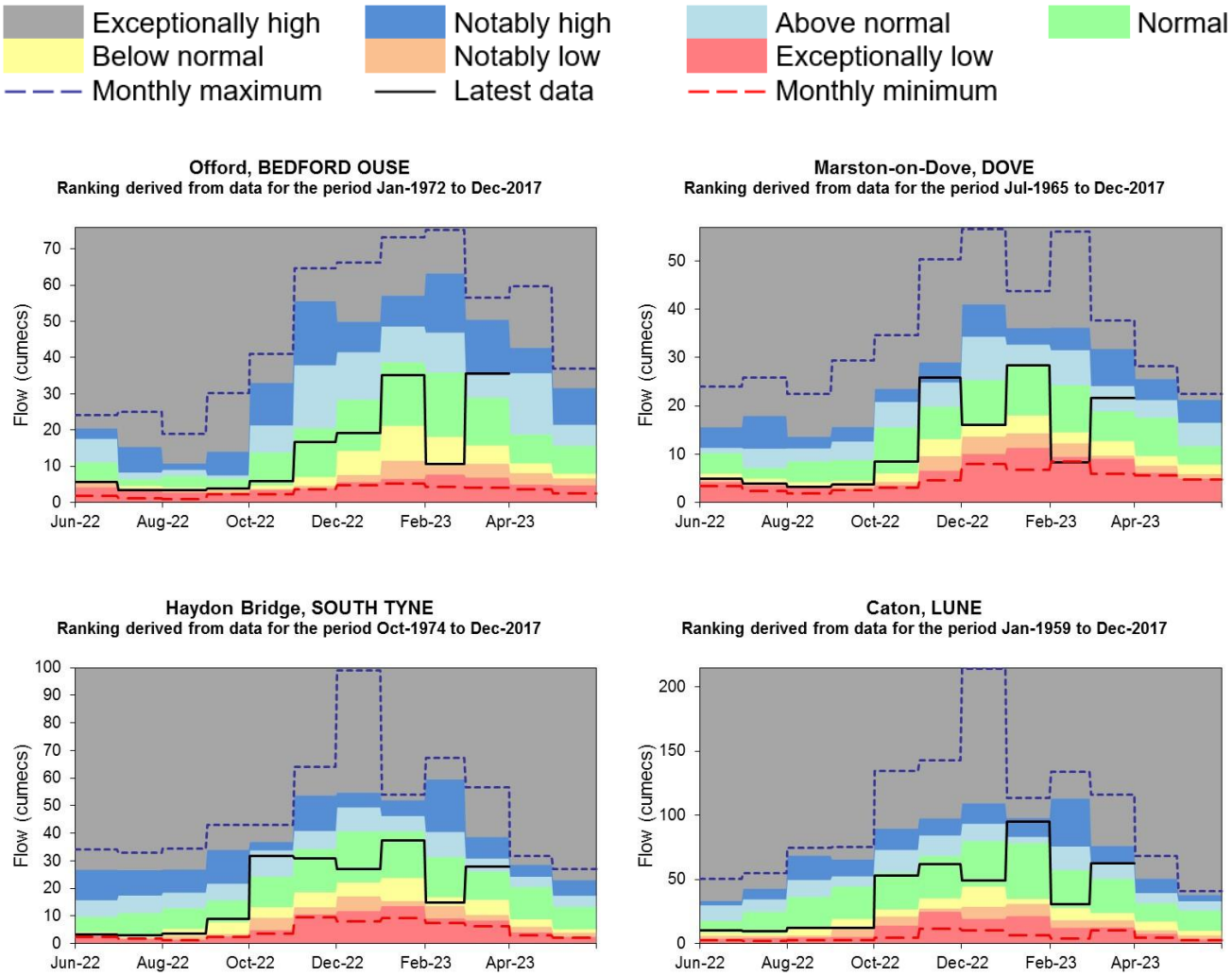
Figure 4.1: Monthly mean river flow for indicator sites for February 2023 and March 2023, expressed as a percentage of the respective long term average and classed relative to an analysis of historic February and March monthly means. Table available in the appendices with detailed information. Regional index sites are underlined and shown in the hydrographs in Figure 4.2.

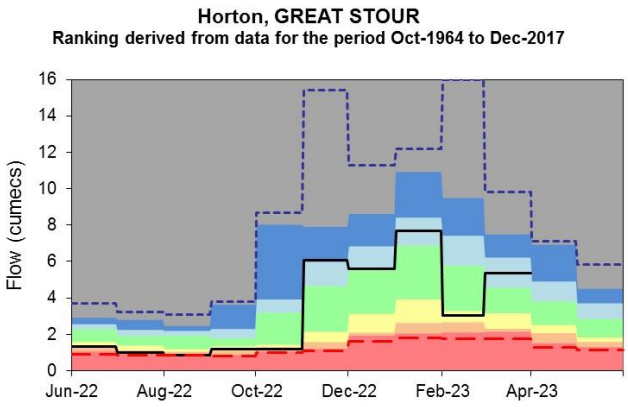
Naturalised flows are provided for the River Thames and the River Lee. +/- Monthly mean flow is the highest/lowest on record for the current month (note that record length varies between sites). * Flows may be overestimated at these sites – data should be treated with caution. # Flows may be impacted at these sites by water releases from upstream reservoirs.

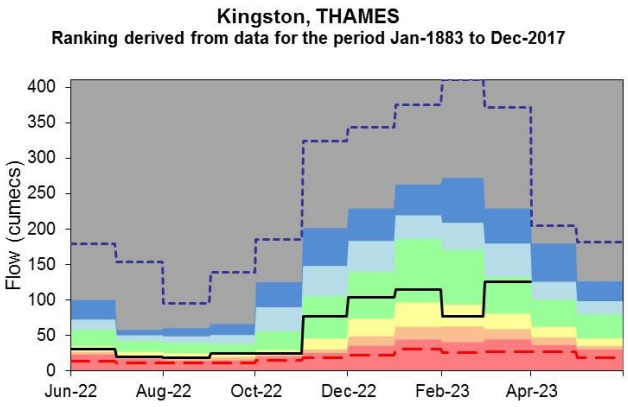


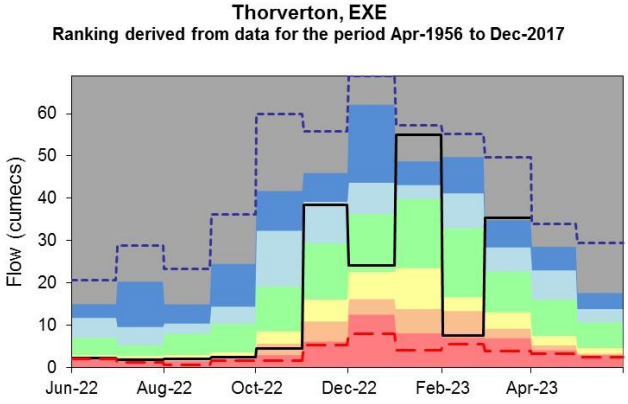
4.2 River flow charts

Figure 4.2: Monthly mean river flow for index sites over the past year for each geographic region, compared to an analysis of historic monthly mean flows, and long term maximum and minimum flows.









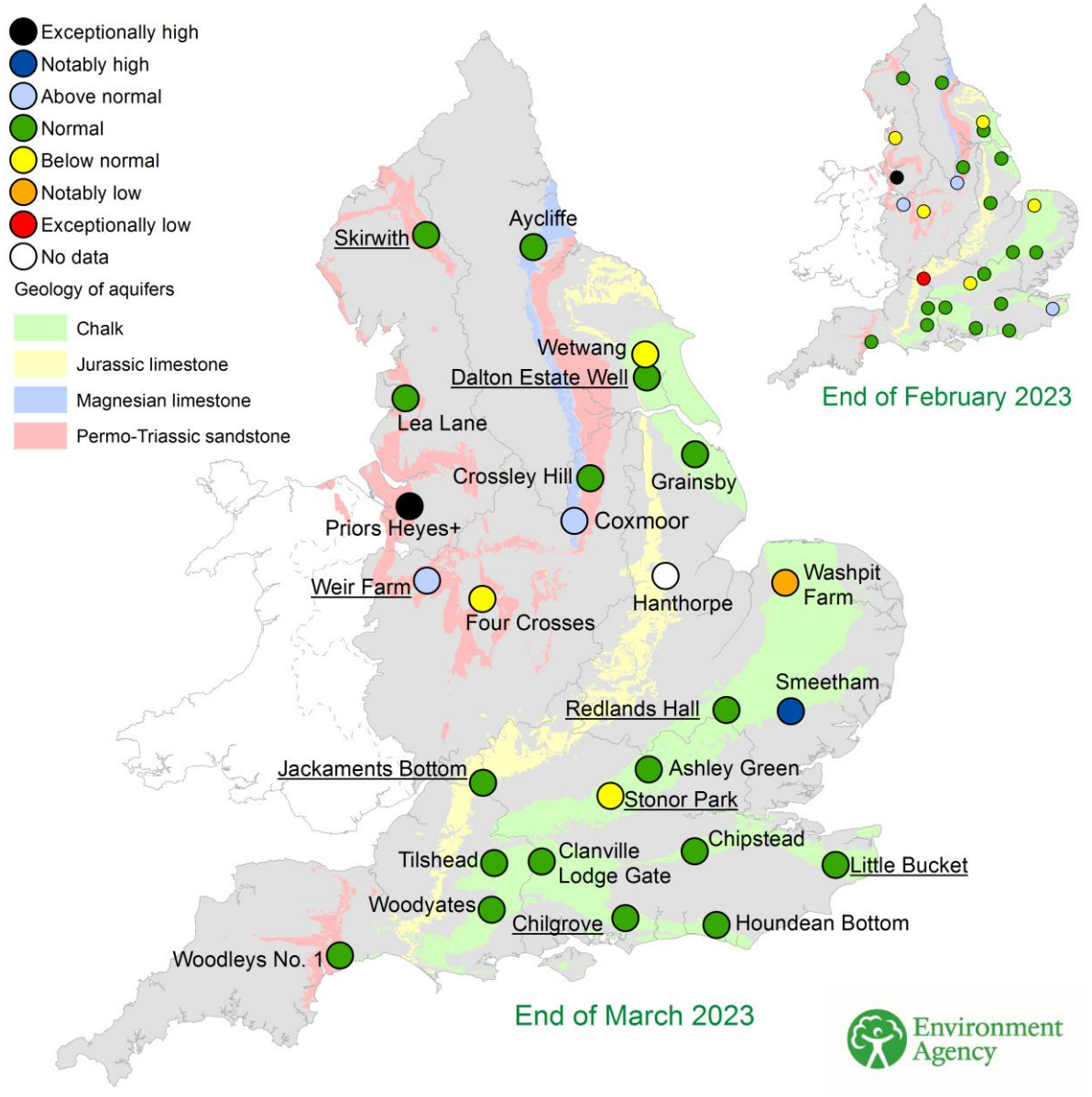
(Source: Environment Agency).

5 Groundwater levels

5.1 Groundwater levels map

Figure 5.1: Groundwater levels for indicator sites at the end of February 2023 and March 2023, classed relative to an analysis of respective historic February and March levels. Major aquifer index sites are underlined and shown in groundwater level charts in Figure 5.2.

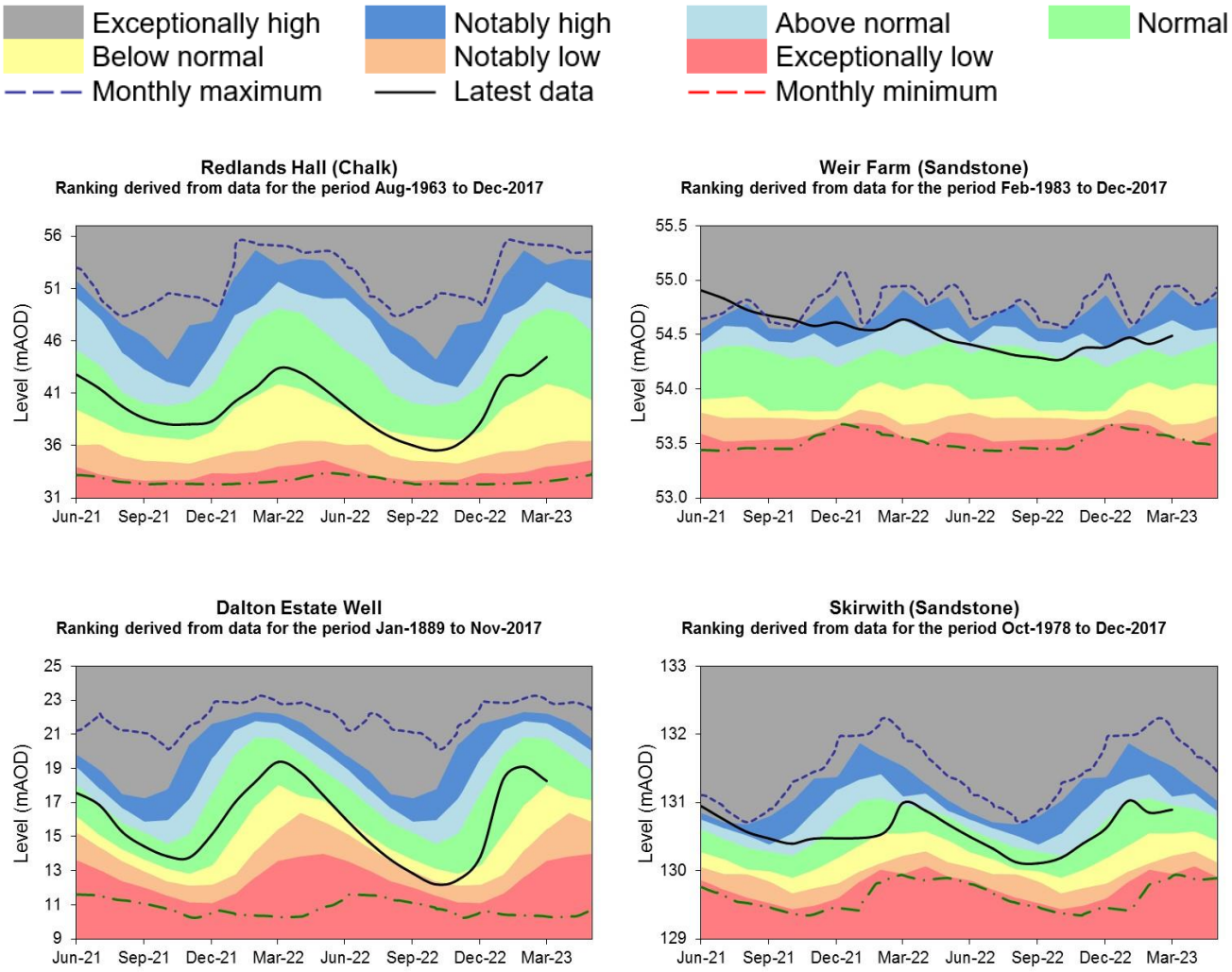
Redlands Hall and Aycliffe are manually dipped at different times during the month and so may not be fully representative of month end levels. Levels at Priors Heyes remain high compared to historic levels because the aquifer is recovering from the effects of historic abstraction. +/- End of month groundwater level is the highest/lowest on record for the current month (note that record length varies between sites).

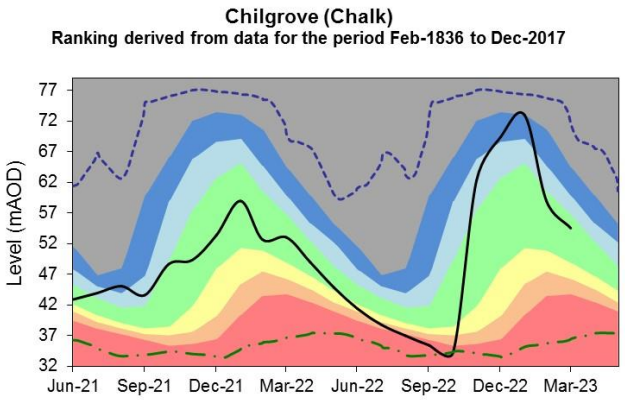


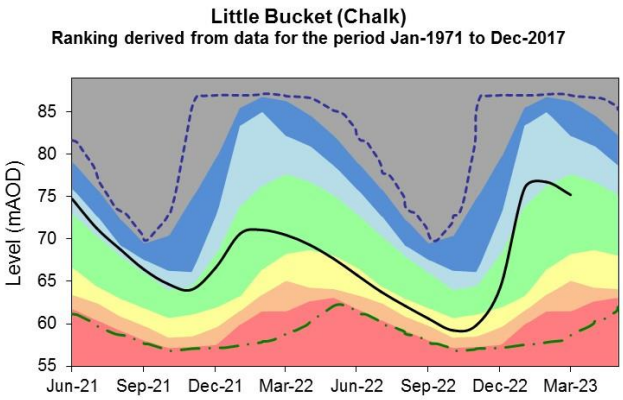
(Source: Environment Agency). Geological map reproduced with kind permission from UK Groundwater Forum, BGS copyright NERC. Crown copyright. All rights reserved. Environment Agency, 100024198, 2023.

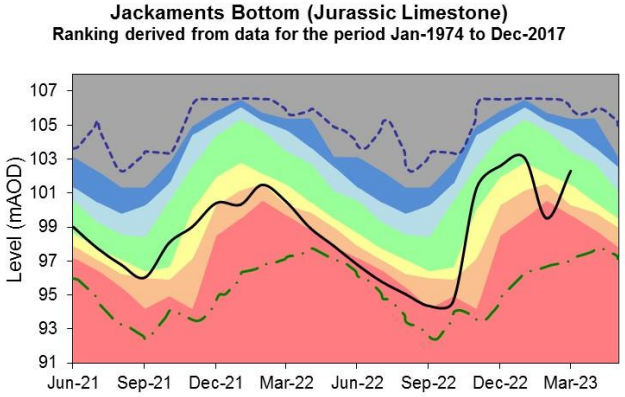
5.2 Groundwater level charts

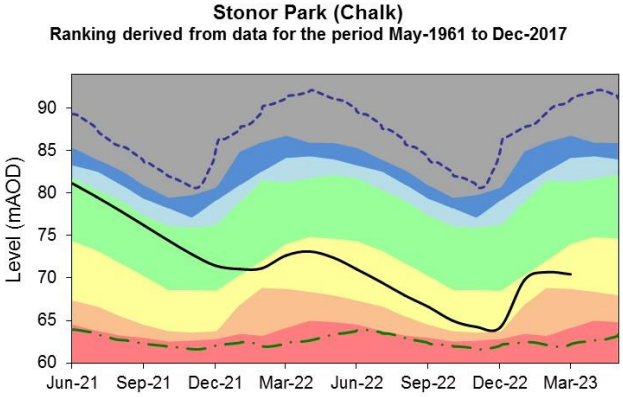
Figure 5.2: End of month groundwater levels at index groundwater level sites for major aquifers. Past 22 months compared to an analysis of historic end of month levels and long term maximum and minimum levels.









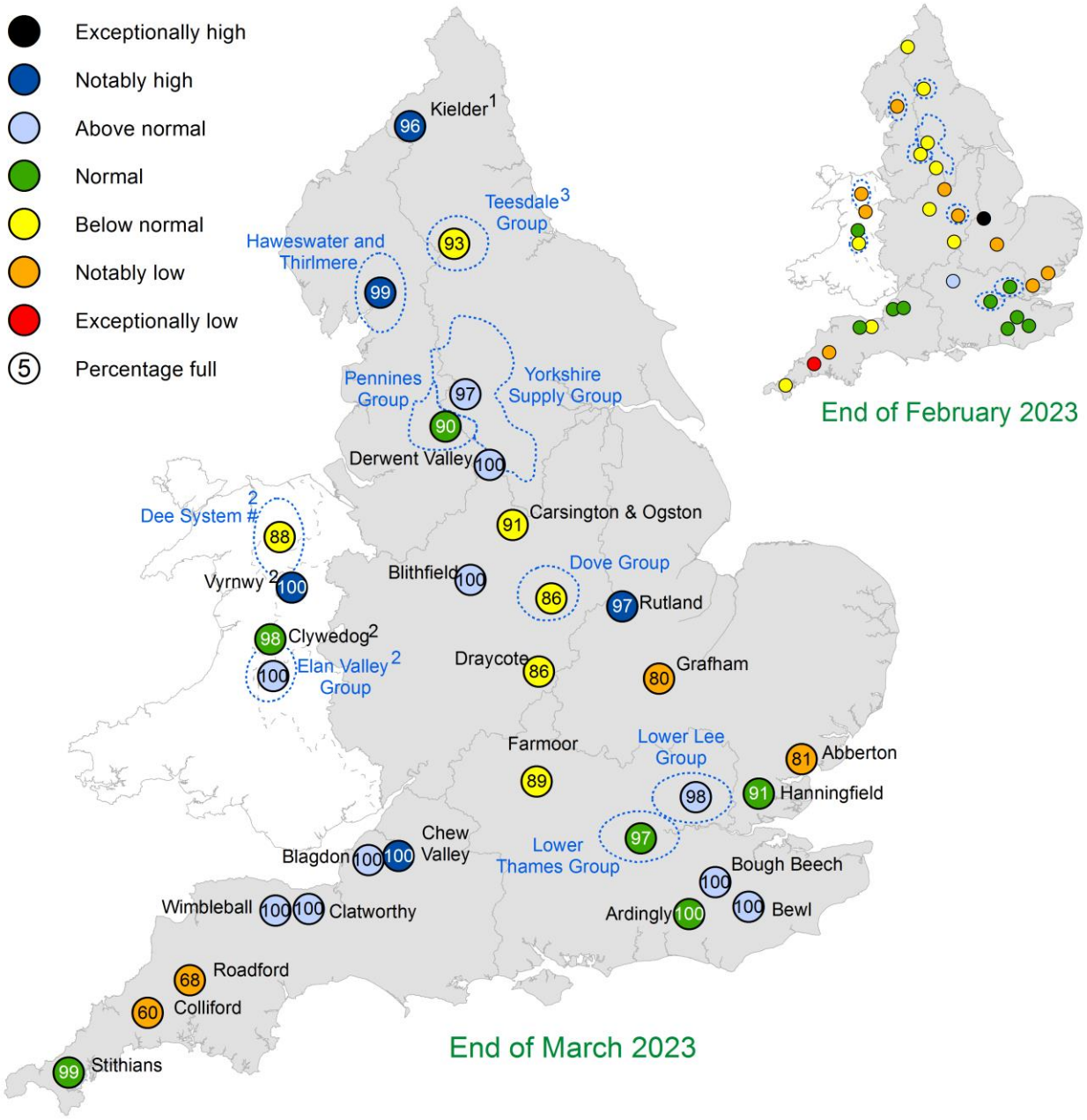


(Source: Environment Agency, 2023)

6 Reservoir storage

6.1 Reservoir storage map

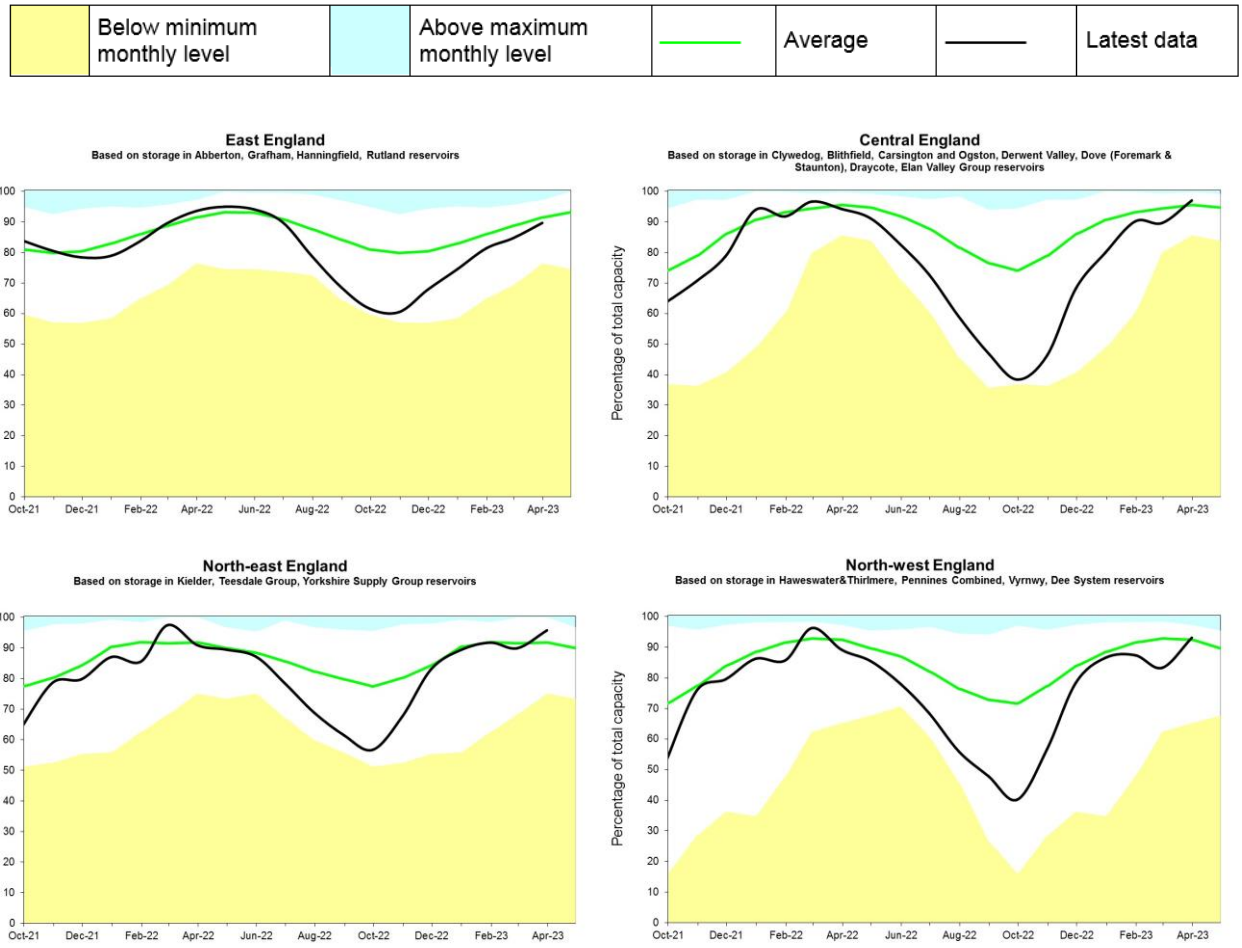
Figure 6.1: Reservoir stocks at key individual and groups of reservoirs at the end of February 2023 and March 2023 as a percentage of total capacity and classed relative to an analysis of historic February and March values respectively. Note: Classes shown may not necessarily relate to control curves or triggers for drought actions. As well as for public water supply, some reservoirs are drawn down to provide flood storage, river compensation flows or for reservoir safety inspections. In some cases current reservoir operating rules may differ from historic ones.

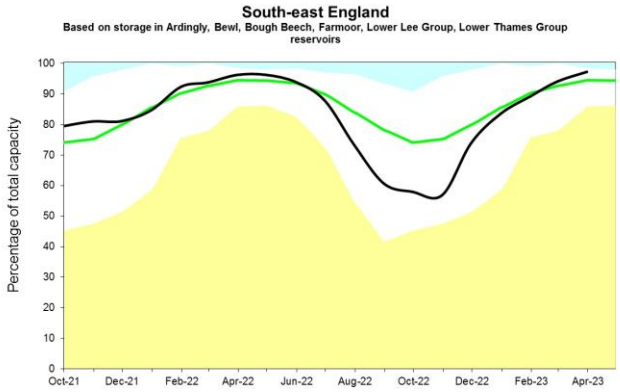


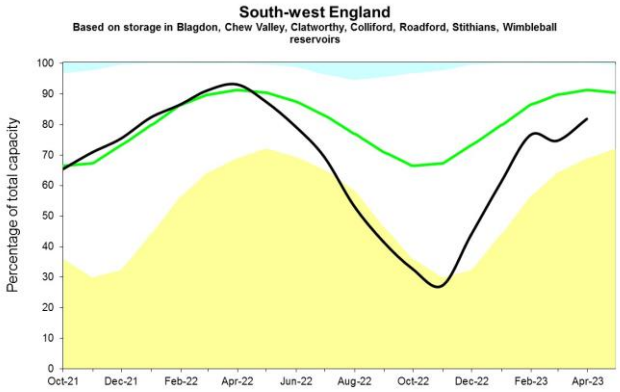
(Source: water companies). Crown copyright. All rights reserved. Environment Agency, 100024198, 2023

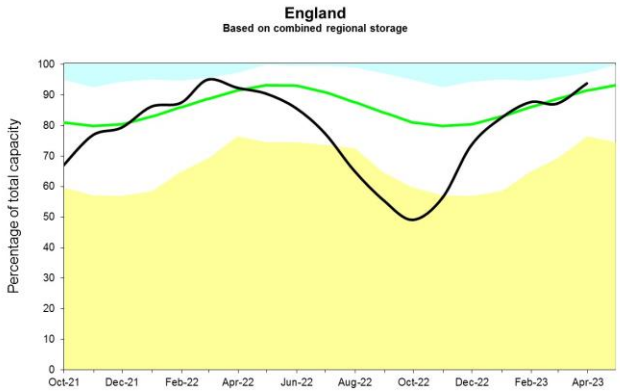
6.2 Reservoir storage charts

Figure 6.2: Regional reservoir stocks. End of month reservoir stocks compared to long term maximum, minimum and average stocks. Note: Historic records of individual reservoirs/reservoir groups making up the regional values vary in length.







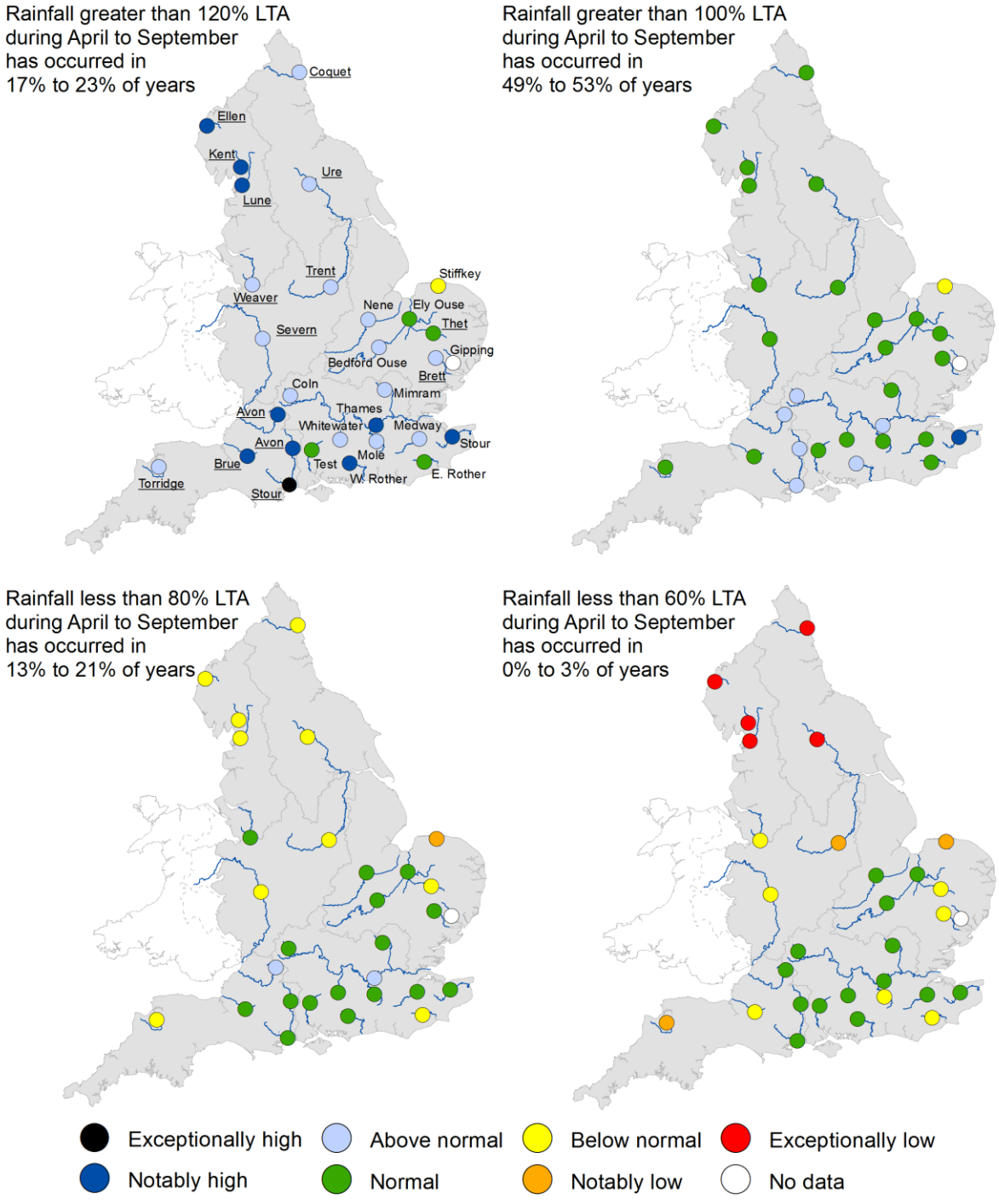


(Source: Water Companies).

7 Forward look

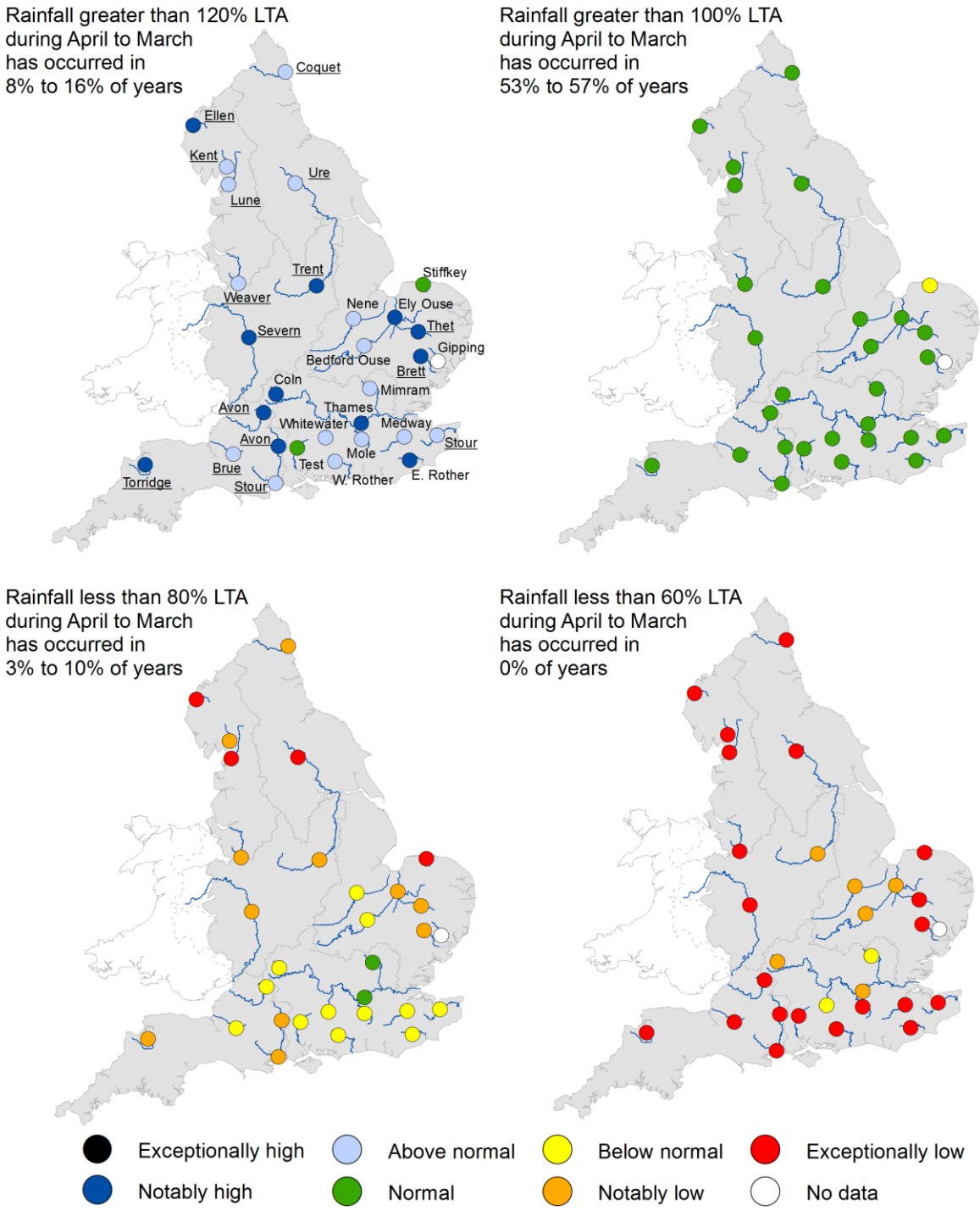
7.1 River flow

Figure 7.1: Projected river flows at key indicator sites up until the end of September 2023. Projections based on four scenarios: 120%, 100%, 80% and 60% of long term average rainfall between April 2023 and September 2023. Rainfall statistics based on occurrence in the historic record since 1891. Projections for underlined sites produced by CEH.



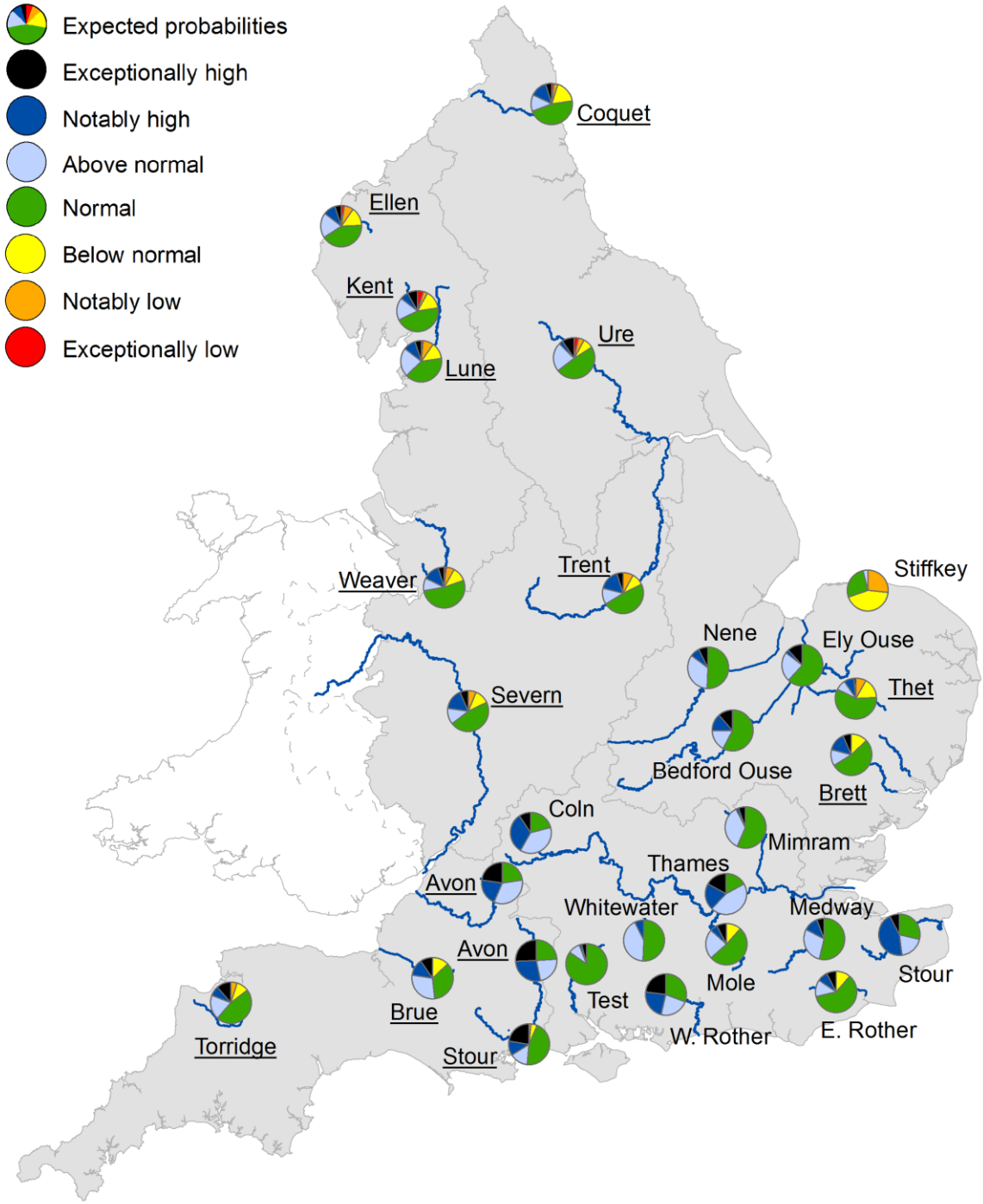
(Source: UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, Environment Agency).

Figure 7.2: Projected river flows at key indicator sites up until the end of March 2024. Projections based on four scenarios: 120%, 100%, 80% and 60% of long term average rainfall between April 2023 and March 2024. Rainfall statistics based on occurrence in the historic record since 1891. Projections for underlined sites produced by CEH.



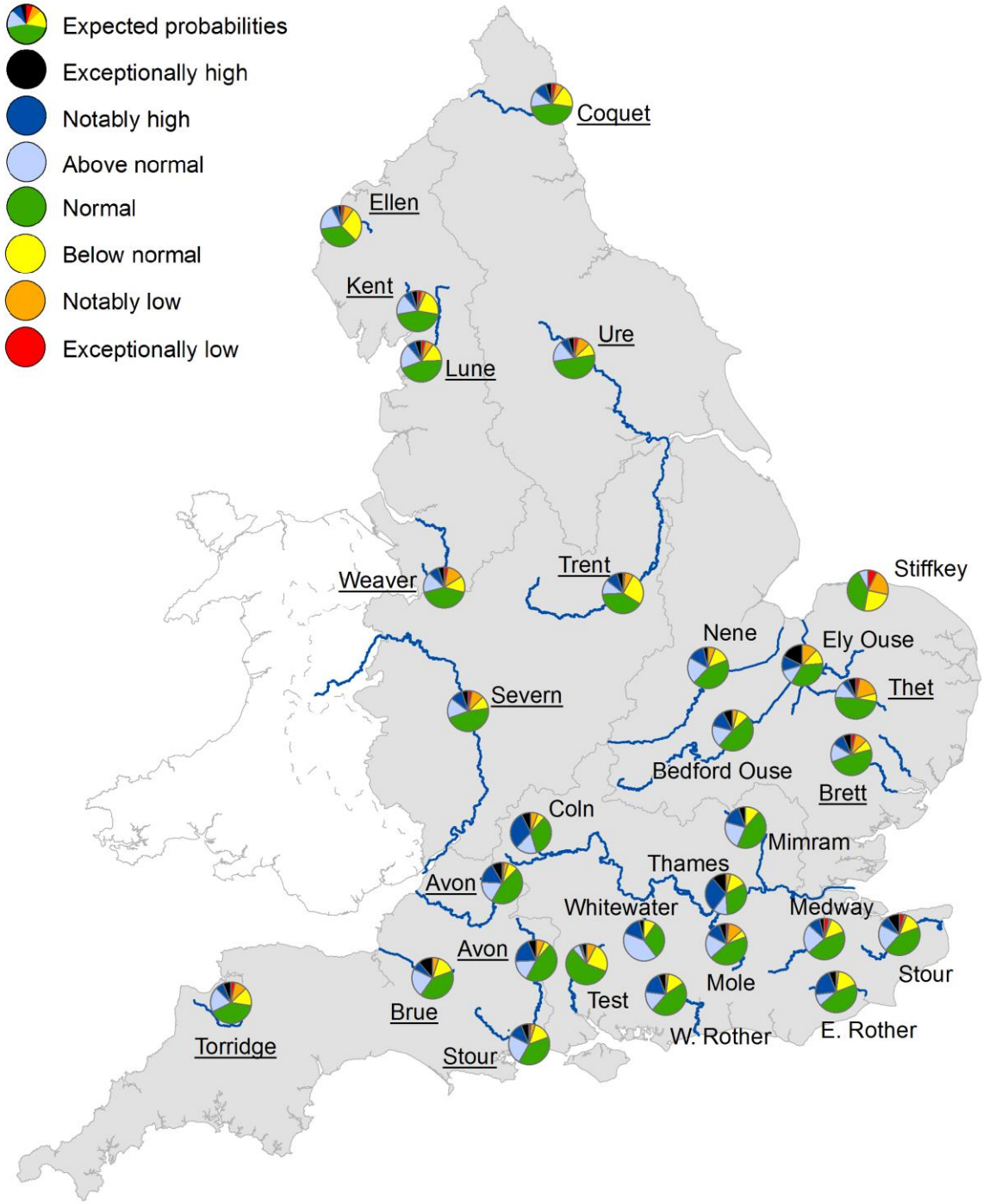
(Source: UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, Environment Agency)

Figure 7.3: Probabilistic ensemble projections of river flows at key indicator sites up until the end of September 2023. Pie charts indicate probability, based on climatology, of the surface water flow at each site being e.g. exceptionally low for the time of year. Projections for underlined sites produced by CEH.



(Source: UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, Environment Agency).

Figure 7.4: Probabilistic ensemble projections of river flows at key indicator sites up until the end of March 2024. Pie charts indicate probability, based on climatology, of the surface water flow at each site being e.g. exceptionally low for the time of year. Projections for underlined sites produced by CEH.



(Source: UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, Environment Agency).

7.2 Groundwater

Figure 7.5: Projected groundwater levels at key indicator sites at the end of September 2023. Projections based on four scenarios: 120%, 100%, 80% and 60% of long term average between April 2023 and September 2023. Rainfall statistics based on occurrence in the historic record since 1891. Projections for underlined sites produced by BGS.

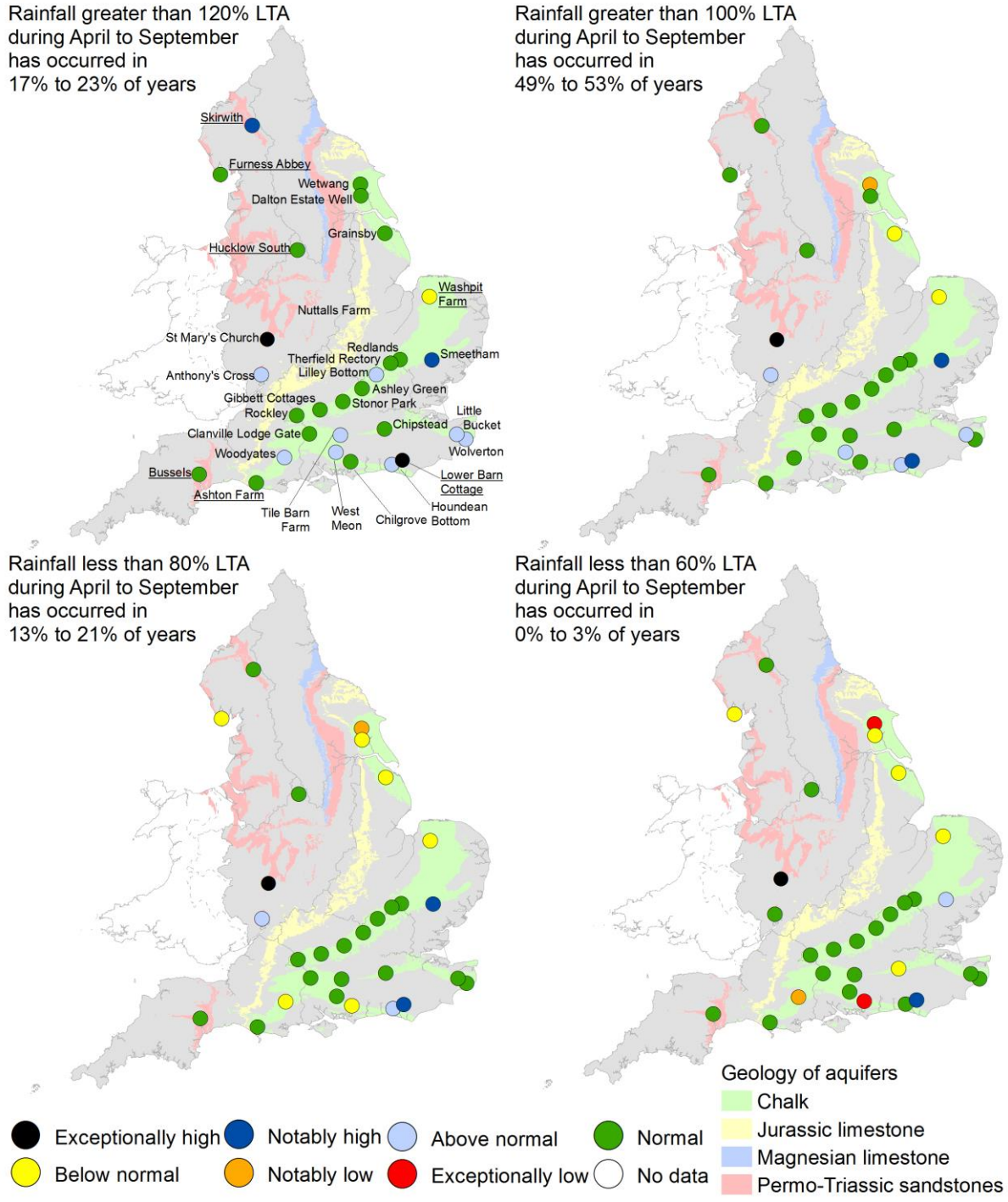


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Figure 7.6: Projected groundwater levels at key indicator sites at the end of March 2024. Projections based on four scenarios: 120%, 100%, 80% and 60% of long term average rainfall between April 2023 and March 2024. Rainfall statistics based on occurrence in the historic record since 1891. Projections for underlined sites produced by BGS.

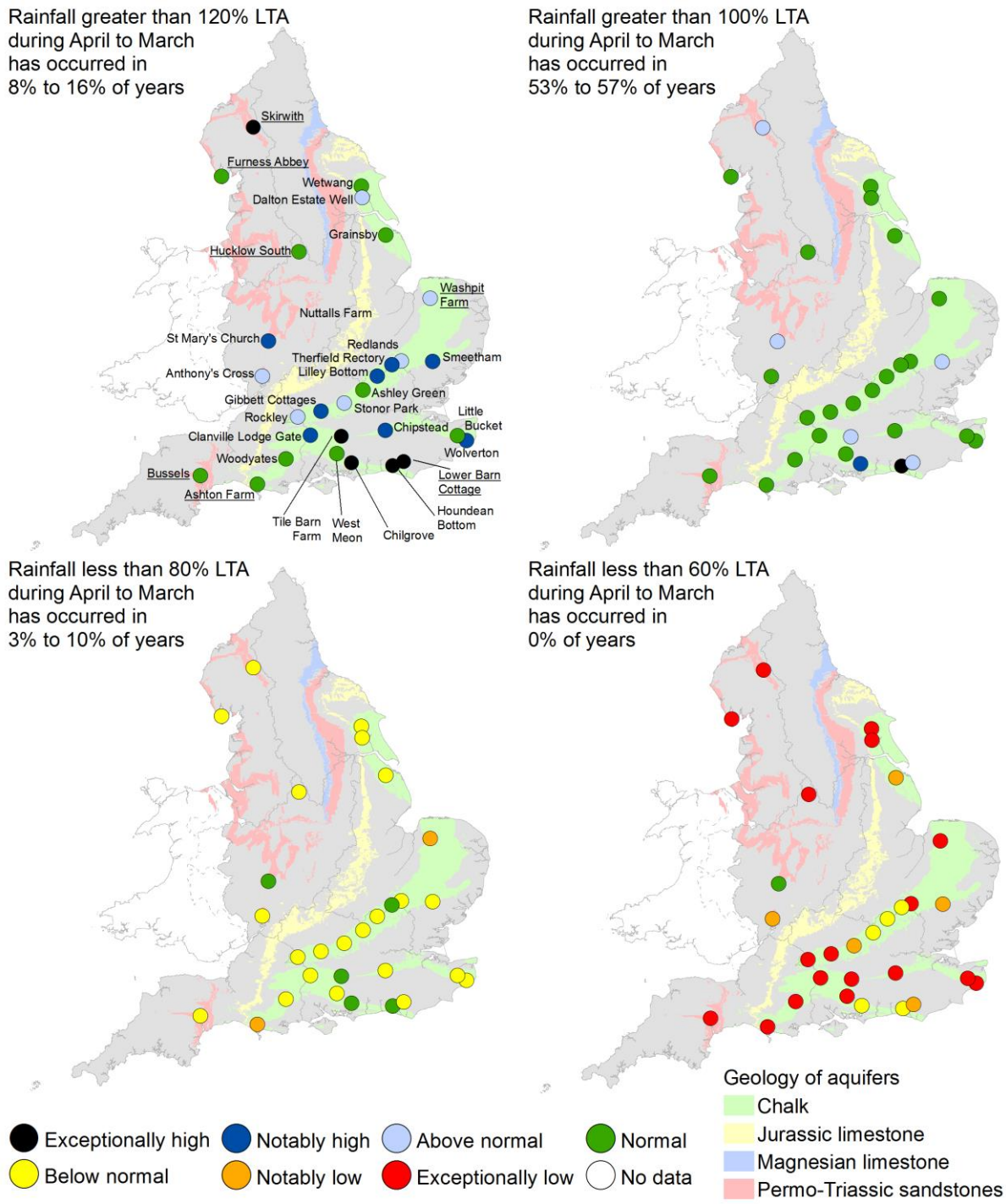

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Figure 7.7: Probabilistic ensemble projections of groundwater levels at key indicator sites at the end of September 2023. Pie charts indicate probability, based on climatology, of the groundwater level at each site being e.g. exceptionally low for the time of year. Projections for underlined sites produced by BGS.

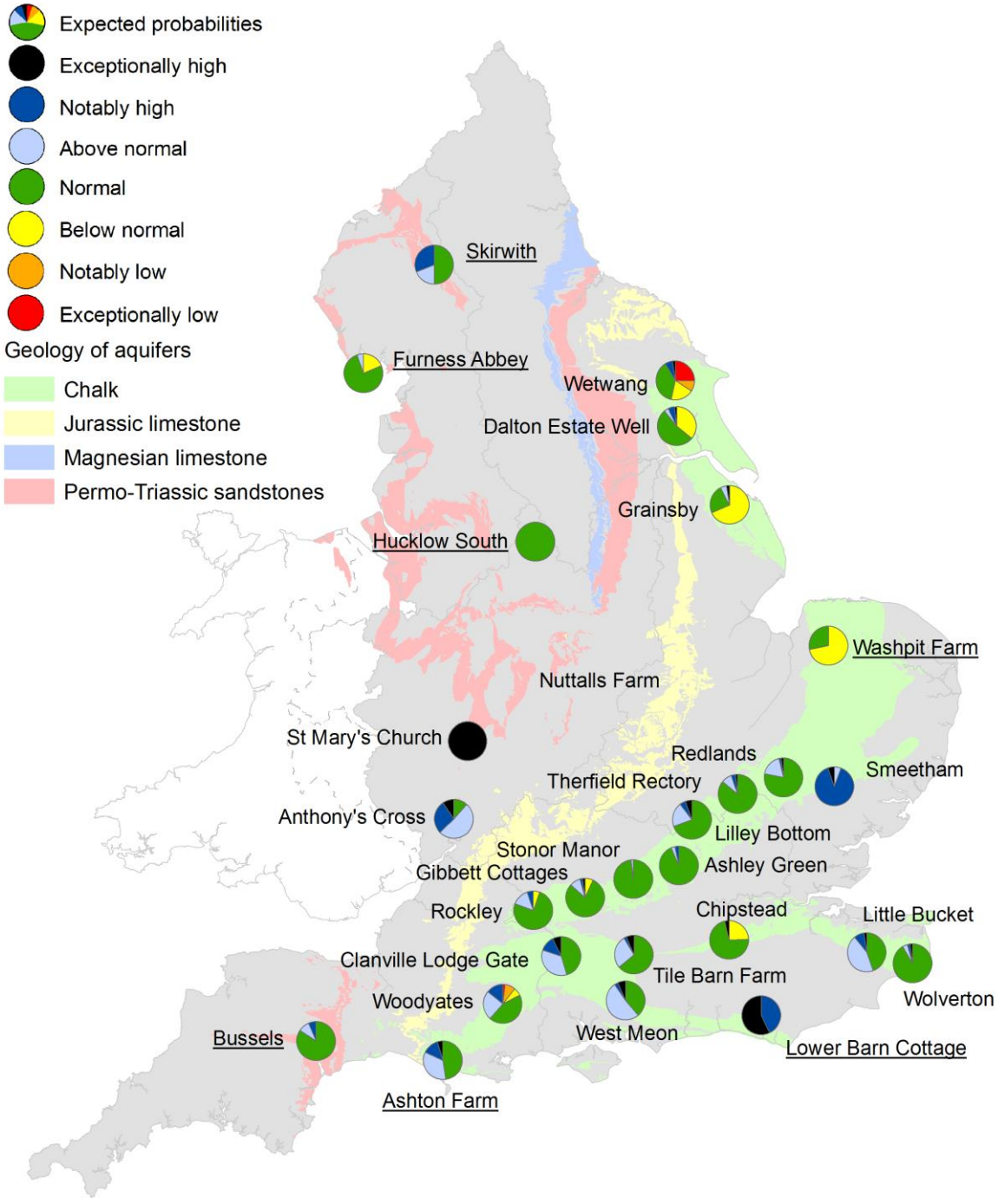

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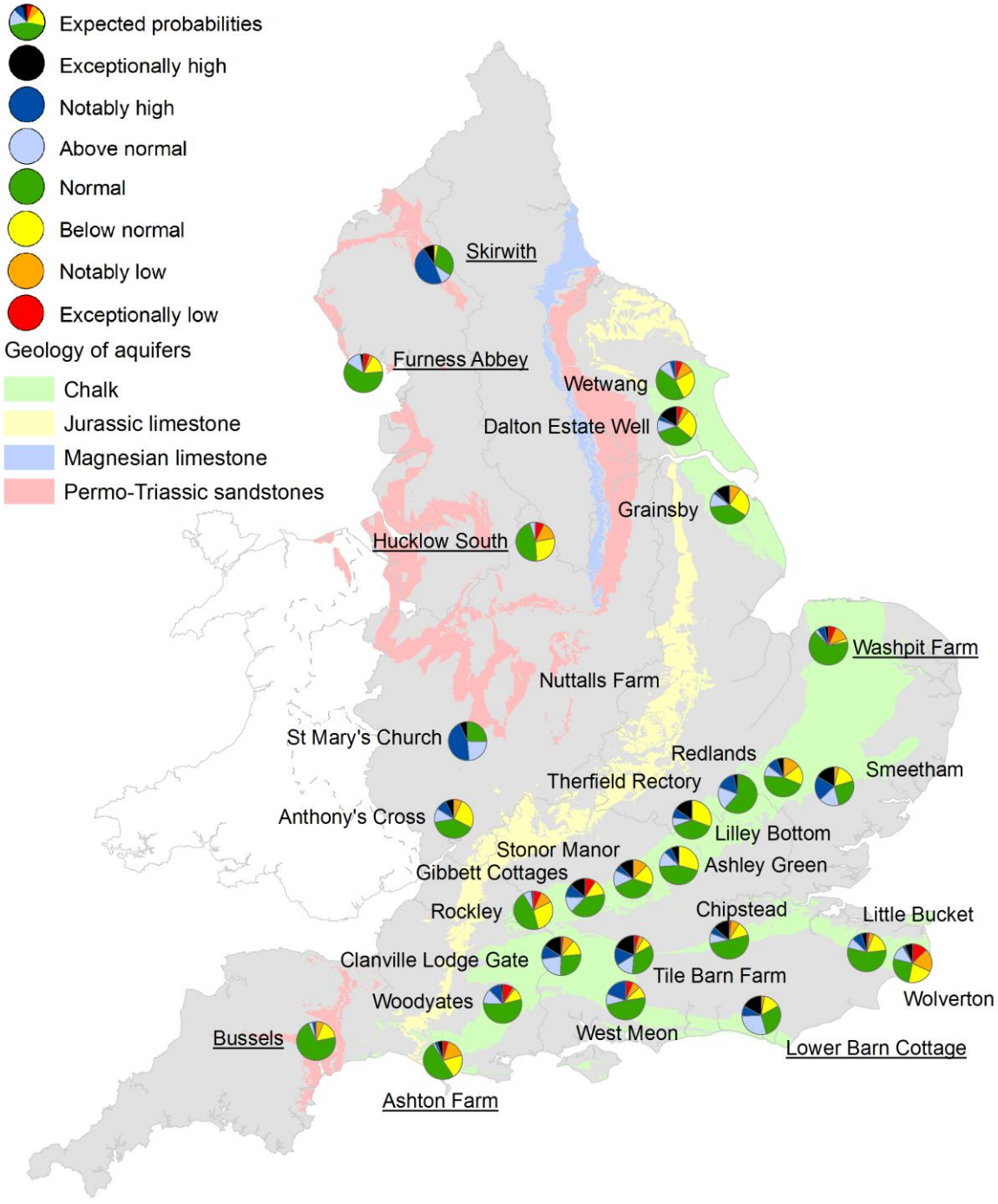
Figure 7.8: Probabilistic ensemble projections of groundwater levels at key indicator sites at the end of March 2024. Pie charts indicate probability, based on climatology, of the groundwater level at each site being e.g. exceptionally low for the time of year. Projections for underlined sites produced by BGS.



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8 Glossary

8.1 Terminology

Aquifer

A geological formation able to store and transmit water.

Areal average rainfall

The estimated average depth of rainfall over a defined area. Expressed in depth of water (mm).

Artesian

The condition where the groundwater level is above ground surface but is prevented from rising to this level by an overlying continuous low permeability layer, such as clay.

Artesian borehole

Borehole where the level of groundwater is above the top of the borehole and groundwater flows out of the borehole when unsealed.

Cumecs

Cubic metres per second (m^3s^{-1} or m^3/s).

Effective rainfall

The rainfall available to percolate into the soil or produce river flow. Expressed in depth of water (mm).

Flood alert and flood warning

Three levels of warnings may be issued by the Environment Agency. Flood Alerts indicate flooding is possible. Flood Warnings indicate flooding is expected. Severe Flood Warnings indicate severe flooding.

Groundwater

The water found in an aquifer.

Long term average (LTA)

The arithmetic mean calculated from the historic record, usually based on the period 1961-1990. However, the period used may vary by parameter being reported on (see figure captions for details).

mAOD

Metres above ordnance datum (mean sea level at Newlyn Cornwall).

MORECS

Met Office Rainfall and Evaporation Calculation System. Met Office service providing real time calculation of evapotranspiration, soil moisture deficit and effective rainfall on a 40 x 40 km grid.

Naturalised flow

River flow with the impacts of artificial influences removed. Artificial influences may include abstractions, discharges, transfers, augmentation and impoundments.

NCIC

National Climate Information Centre. NCIC area monthly rainfall totals are derived using the Met Office 5 km gridded dataset, which uses rain gauge observations.

Recharge

The process of increasing the water stored in the saturated zone of an aquifer. Expressed in depth of water (mm).

Reservoir gross capacity

The total capacity of a reservoir.

Reservoir live capacity

The capacity of the reservoir that is normally usable for storage to meet established reservoir operating requirements. This excludes any capacity not available for use (e.g. storage held back for emergency services, operating agreements or physical restrictions). May also be referred to as ‘net’ or ‘deployable’ capacity.

Soil moisture deficit (SMD)

The difference between the amount of water actually in the soil and the amount of water the soil can hold. Expressed in depth of water (mm).

8.2 Categories

Exceptionally high: Value likely to fall within this band 5% of the time.

Notably high: Value likely to fall within this band 8% of the time.

Above normal: Value likely to fall within this band 15% of the time.

Normal: Value likely to fall within this band 44% of the time.

Below normal: Value likely to fall within this band 15% of the time.

Notably low: Value likely to fall within this band 8% of the time.

Exceptionally low: Value likely to fall within this band 5% of the time.

8.3 Geographic regions

Throughout this report regions of England are used to group Environment Agency areas together. Below the areas in each region are listed, and Figure 8.1 shows the geographical extent of these regions.

East includes: Cambridgeshire and Bedfordshire, Lincolnshire and Northamptonshire, and Essex, Norfolk and Suffolk areas.

South east includes: Solent and South Downs, Hertfordshire and North London, Thames, and Kent and South London areas.

South west includes: Devon and Cornwall, and Wessex areas.

Central includes: Shropshire, Herefordshire, Worcestershire and Gloucestershire, Staffordshire, Warwickshire and West Midlands, and Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire and Leicestershire areas.

North west includes: Cumbria and Lancashire, and Greater Manchester, Merseyside and Cheshire areas.

North east includes: Yorkshire, and Northumberland Durham and Tees areas.

Figure 8.1: Geographic regions

9 Appendices

9.1 Rainfall table

Region	Mar 2023 rainfall % of long term average 1961 to 1990	Mar 2023 band	Jan 2023 to March 2023 cumulative band	Oct 2022 to March 2023 cumulative band	Apr 2022 to March 2023 cumulative band
East England	188	Exceptionally High	Normal	Above normal	Below normal
Central England	193	Exceptionally High	Normal	Above normal	Normal
North-east England	133	Above Normal	Normal	Normal	Below normal
North-west England	157	Notably High	Above normal	Above normal	Normal
South-east England	210	Exceptionally High	Above normal	Notably high	Normal
South-west England	201	Exceptionally High	Above normal	Notably high	Normal
England	180	Exceptionally High	Normal	Above normal	Normal

9.2 River flows table

Geographic area	Site name	River	Mar 2023 band	Feb 2023 band
East	Burnham	Burn	Below normal	Below normal
East	Claypole	Upper Witham	Normal	Below normal
East	Colney	Yare	Normal	Notably low
East	Denver	Ely Ouse	Above normal	Notably low
East	Dernford	Cam	Normal	Below normal
East	Louth Weir	Lud	Below normal	Below normal
East	Offord	Bedford Ouse	Notably high	Below normal
East	Springfield	Chelmer	Notably high	Below normal
East	Stowmarket	Gipping	Above normal	Notably low
East	Upton Mill	Nene	No data	Notably low
Central	Bewdley	Severn	Above normal	Exceptionally low
Central	Derby St Marys	Derwent	Above normal	Exceptionally low
Central	Evesham	Avon	Above normal	Notably low
Central	Marston-on-dove	Dove	Above normal	Exceptionally low
Central	North Muskham	Trent	Above normal	Exceptionally low
North East	Buttercrambe	Derwent	Normal	Notably low

North East	Crakehill Topcliffe	Swale	Normal	Exceptionally low
North East	Heaton Mill	Till	Normal	Notably low
North East	Doncaster	Don	Above normal	Notably low
North East	Haydon Bridge	South Tyne	Above normal	Below normal
North East	Tadcaster	Wharfe	Above normal	Normal
North East	Stanhope	Wear	Notably high	Below normal
North West	Ashton Weir	Mersey	Above normal	No data
North West	Caton	Lune	Notably high	Normal
North West	Ouse Bridge	Derwent	Above normal	Below normal
North West	Pooley Bridge	Eamont	Notably high	Notably low
North West	St Michaels	Wyre	Notably high	Below normal
North West	Ashbrook	Weaver	Above normal	Notably low
South East	Allbrook and Highbridge	Itchen	Notably high	Above normal
South East	Feildes Weir	Lee	Normal	Below normal
South East	Hansteads	Ver	Normal	Normal
South East	Hawley	Darent	Normal	Below normal
South East	Horton	Great Stour	Above normal	Below normal
South East	Kingston	Thames	Normal	Below normal
South East	Lechlade	Leach	Normal	Below normal

South East	Teston and Farleigh	Medway	Notably high	Notably low
South East	Marlborough	Kennet	Normal	Normal
South East	Udiam	Rother	Notably high	Notably low
South East	Ardingley Gs	Ouse	Notably high	Notably low
South East	Princes Marsh Gs	Rother	Notably high	Below normal
South West	Amesbury	Upper Avon	Normal	Normal
South West	Bathford	Avon	Above normal	Exceptionally low
South West	Bishops Tull	Tone	No data	Exceptionally low
South West	East Stoke	Frome	Normal	Normal
South West	Great Somerford	Avon	Notably high	Exceptionally low
South West	Gunnislake	Tamar	Notably high	Exceptionally low
South West	Hammoon	Middle Stour	Notably high	Exceptionally low
South West	Knapp Mill	Avon	Normal	Normal
South West	Lovington	Upper Brue	Notably high	Exceptionally low
South West	Thorverton	Exe	Exceptionally high	Notably low
South West	Torrington	Torridge	Notably high	Notably low

South West	Truro	Kenwyn	Normal	Exceptionally low
South West	Austins Bridge	River Dart	Exceptionally high	Exceptionally low
EA Wales	Manley Hall	Dee	Above normal	Exceptionally low
EA Wales	Redbrook	Wye	Normal	Exceptionally low

9.3 Groundwater table

Geographic area	Site name	Aquifer	End of Mar 2023 band	End of Feb 2023 band
East	Grainsby	Grimsby Ancholme Louth Chalk	Normal	Normal
East	Redlands Hall	Cam Chalk	Normal	Normal
East	Hanthorpe	Cornbrash (South)	No data	Normal
East	Smeetham Hall Cott.	North Essex Chalk	Notably high	Normal
East	Washpit Farm Rougham	North West Norfolk Chalk	Notably low	Below normal
Central	Four Crosses	Grimsby Ancholme Louth Limestone	Below normal	Below normal
Central	Weir Farm	Bridgnorth Sandstone Formation	Above normal	Above normal
Central	Coxmoor	Permo Triassic Sandstone	Above normal	Above normal
Central	Crossley Hill	Permo Triassic Sandstone	Normal	Normal
North East	Dalton Estate Well	Hull & East Riding Chalk	Normal	Normal
North East	Aycliffe Nra2	Skerne Magnesian Limestone	Normal	Normal
North East	Wetwang	Hull & East Riding Chalk	Below normal	Below normal

North West	Priors Heyes	West Cheshire Permo-Triassic Sandstone	Exceptionally high	Exceptionally high
North West	Skirwith	Carlisle Basin Permo-Triassic sandstone	Normal	Normal
North West	Lea Lane	Fylde Permo-Triassic Sandstone	Normal	Below normal
South East	Chilgrove	Chichester-Worthing-Portsdown Chalk	Normal	Normal
South East	Clanville Gate Gwl	River Test Chalk	Normal	Normal
South East	Houndean Bottom Gwl	Brighton Chalk Block	Normal	Normal
South East	Little Bucket	East Kent Chalk - Stour	Normal	Above normal
South East	Jackaments Bottom	Burford Oolitic Limestone (Inferior)	Normal	Exceptionally low
South East	Ashley Green Stw Obh	Mid-Chilterns Chalk	Normal	Normal
South East	Stonor Park	South-West Chilterns Chalk	Below normal	Below normal
South East	Chipstead Gwl	Epsom North Downs Chalk	Normal	Normal
South West	Tilshead	Upper Hampshire Avon Chalk	Normal	Normal
South West	Woodleys No1	Otterton Sandstone Formation	Normal	Normal
South West	Woodyates	Dorset Stour Chalk	Normal	Normal

9.4 Reservoir table

Geographic region	% Full	Average comparison
East England	90	Below average
Central England	97	Above average
North-east England	96	Above average
North-west England	93	Above average
South-east England	97	Above average
South-west England	82	Below average
England	94	Above average