Monthly water situation report: Wessex Area

1 Summary - March 2026

March 2026 was the first relatively dry month of 2026 with an average of 34mm of rain in Wessex, 54% of the long term average (LTA). The majority of days were dry with the main rainfall event recorded on 12 March. Soil moisture deficit (SMD) rose in March in response to the low rainfall. Monthly mean flows were mostly normal in the north of Wessex but predominantly above normal to notably high in the south because flows were supported by the Chalk aquifer. Groundwater levels in Wessex mainly fell during March. At the end of the month, most groundwater sites, including those on the Chalk, recorded normal or above normal levels. The two outliers were Kingston Russell Road (monitoring the Chalk) and Didmarton (monitoring the Inferior Oolite) which both recorded notably and exceptionally high levels respectively. Overall reservoir levels for Wessex Water were approximately 99% capacity at the end of March while for Bristol Water, levels were approximately 97% capacity.

1.1 Rainfall

An average of 34mm rain fell across Wessex in March (54% of the LTA). Most days in March were dry. Rain fell mostly towards the middle of the month with the largest rainfall event occurring on 12 March. Rain on 12 March accounted for 37% of the month's total rainfall. Most hydrological areas in Wessex received below normal rainfall with only 3 exceptions. These areas are all in the north and east of Wessex and received normal rainfall in March. The lowest cumulative rainfall was recorded in Poole Harbour and Purbeck which received 26mm (42% LTA). The highest relative rainfall was recorded in the Mendips and River Chew area which received 44mm (65% LTA).

Over the past 3 and 6 months, most hydrological areas in Wessex received exceptionally high rainfall. Despite a drier than average March, the past 3 months were the fourth wettest on record since 1871 with 368mm (163% LTA).

Over the past 12 months, hydrological areas to the north of Wessex received normal to above normal rainfall. In the south of Wessex, hydrological areas received above normal to notably high rainfall.

1.2 Soil moisture

SMD rose in the latter half of March in response to the low rainfall. At the end of March, all hydrological areas except for the Mendips and River Chew recorded an SMD between 11 and 40mm. SMD at the end of March was between 6 and 25mm greater than the LTA across most of Wessex. Three areas to the north west of Wessex, including the Mendips and River Chew recorded an SMD within 5mm of the LTA.

1.3 River flows

In March, river flows fell in the north of Wessex in response to the drier weather. All flow monitoring sites in the north recorded normal monthly mean flows except for Washford River at Beggearn Huish. Most flows remained higher in the south of Wessex due to supporting baseflow from the Chalk aquifer. Most monitoring sites in the south recorded above normal or notably high monthly mean flows. For most surface water catchments, flows peaked around 13 March following the rain from the day before. In groundwater dominated catchments, flows fell more steadily throughout the month.

1.4 Groundwater levels

Groundwater levels fell across most of Wessex in March in response to the low rainfall. At the end of the month, most monitoring sites reported normal or above normal levels. In the north, groundwater levels at Allington and Didmarton (monitoring the Greater and Inferior Oolite respectively) peaked during March but began to fall by the end of the month. Groundwater levels in the west and south of Wessex, including in the Chalk aquifer, fell throughout March. Groundwater levels at Kingston Russell Road (monitoring the Chalk) were notably high at the end of the month despite falling throughout March.

1.5 Reservoir stocks

Both Wessex Water and Bristol Water reservoir levels remained close to capacity throughout March. The combined levels at the end of the month for Wessex Water were approximately 99% capacity while for Bristol Water, combined levels were approximately 97% capacity. These levels are typical for this time of year.

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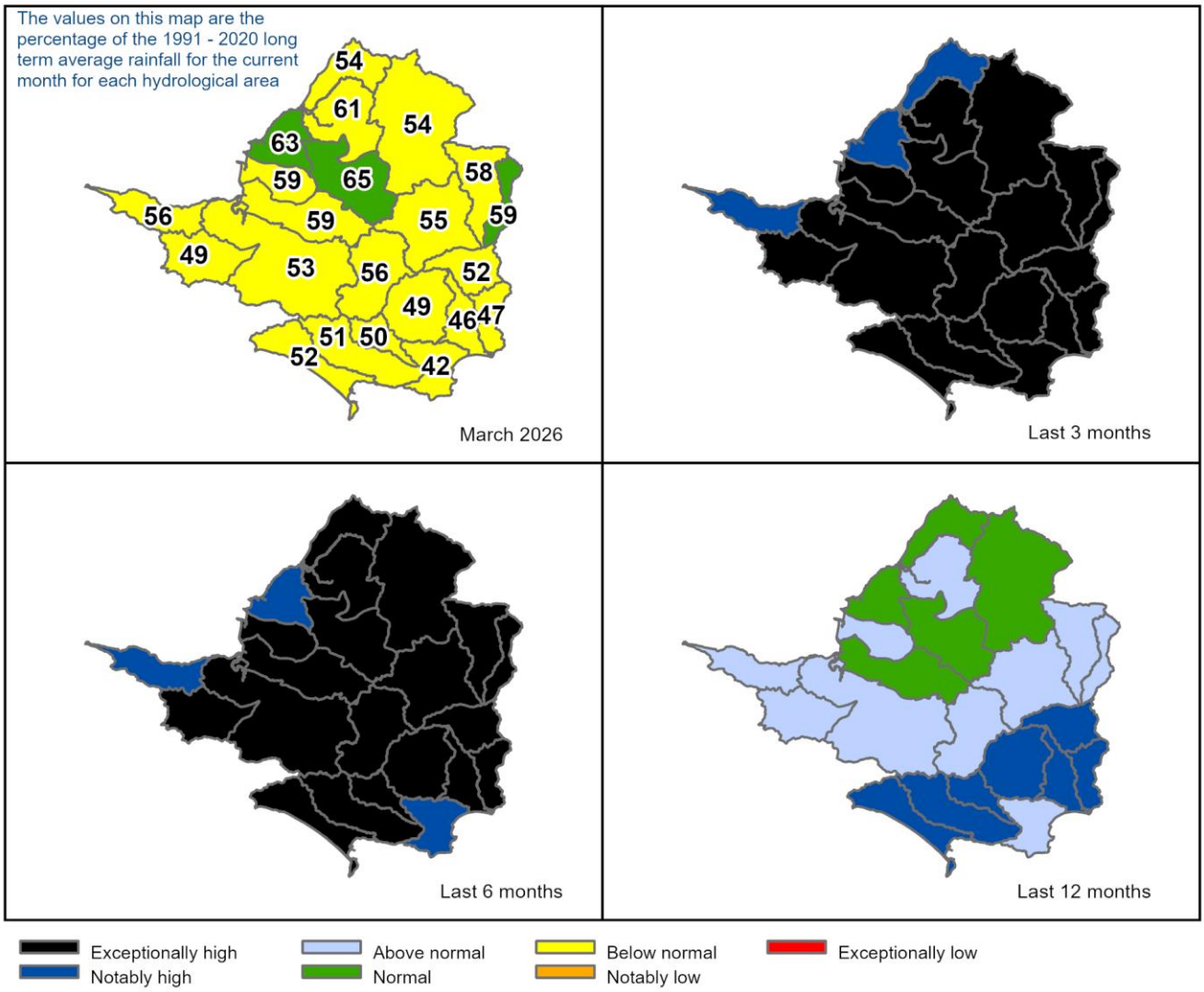
2 Rainfall

2.1 Rainfall map

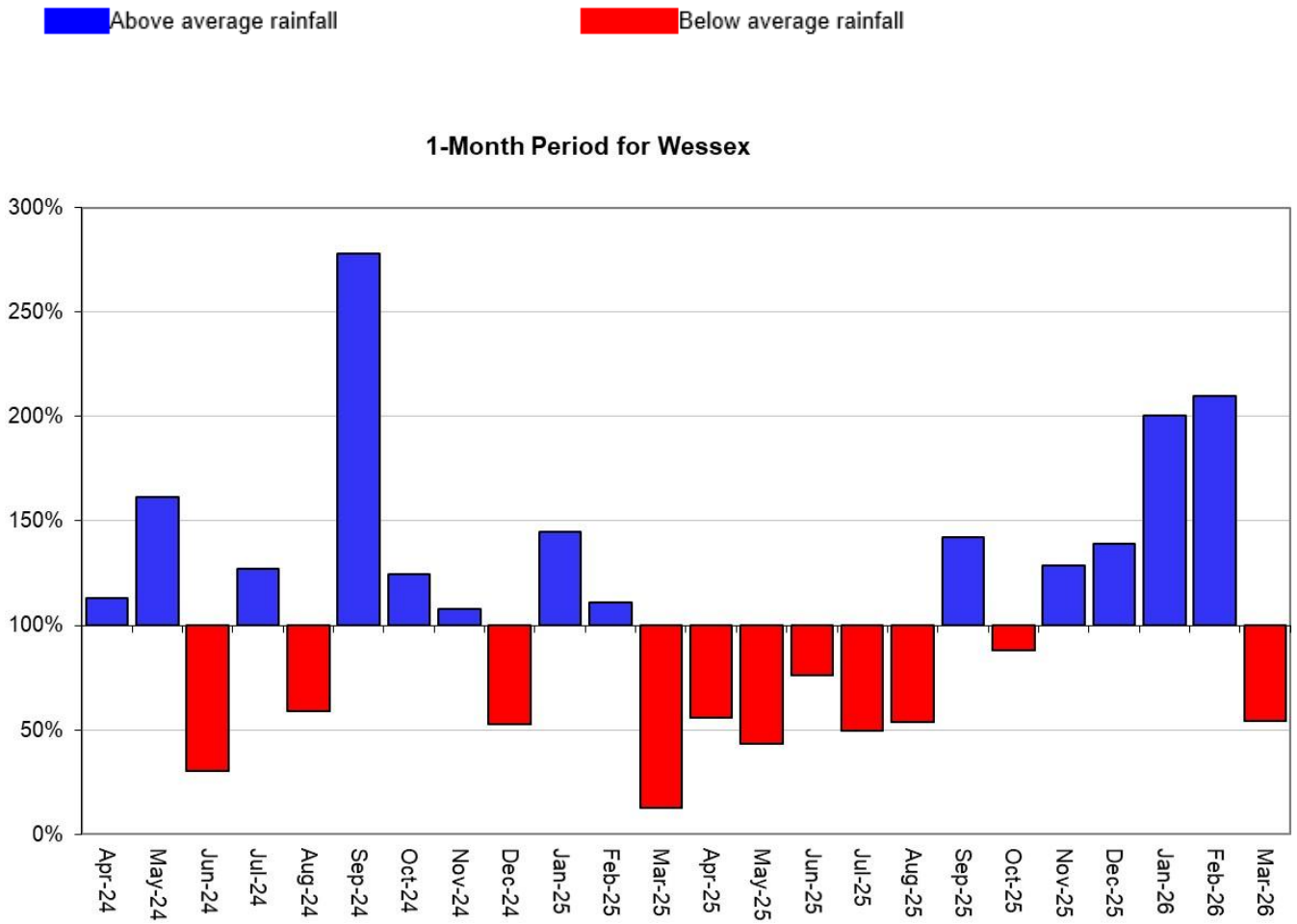
Figure 2.1: Total rainfall for hydrological areas for the current month (up to 31 March 2026), the last 3 months, the last 6 months, and the last 12 months, classed relative to an analysis of respective historic totals between 1991 and 2020. Table available in the appendices with detailed information.



Rainfall data for January 2025 onwards, extracted from Environment Agency 1km gridded rainfall dataset derived from Environment Agency intensity rain gauges. (Source: Environment Agency. Crown Copyright, AC0000807064, 2026). Rainfall data prior to January 2025, extracted from Met Office HadUK 1km gridded rainfall dataset derived from registered rain gauges (Source: Met Office. Crown copyright, 2026).

2.2 Rainfall charts

Figure 2.2: Monthly rainfall totals for the past 24 months as a percentage of the 1991 to 2020 long term average for each region and for England.

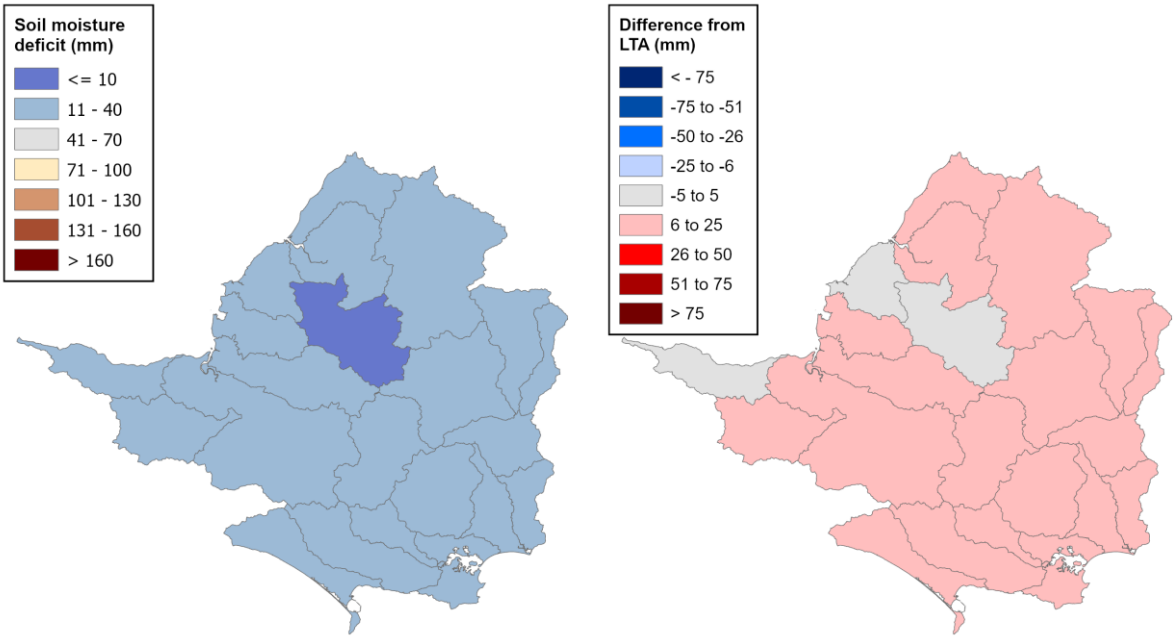


Rainfall data for January 2025 onwards, extracted from Environment Agency 1km gridded rainfall dataset derived from Environment Agency intensity rain gauges. (Source: Environment Agency. Crown Copyright, 100024198, 2026). Rainfall data prior to January 2025, extracted from Met Office HadUK 1km gridded rainfall dataset derived from registered rain gauges (Source: Met Office. Crown copyright, 2026).

3 Soil moisture deficit

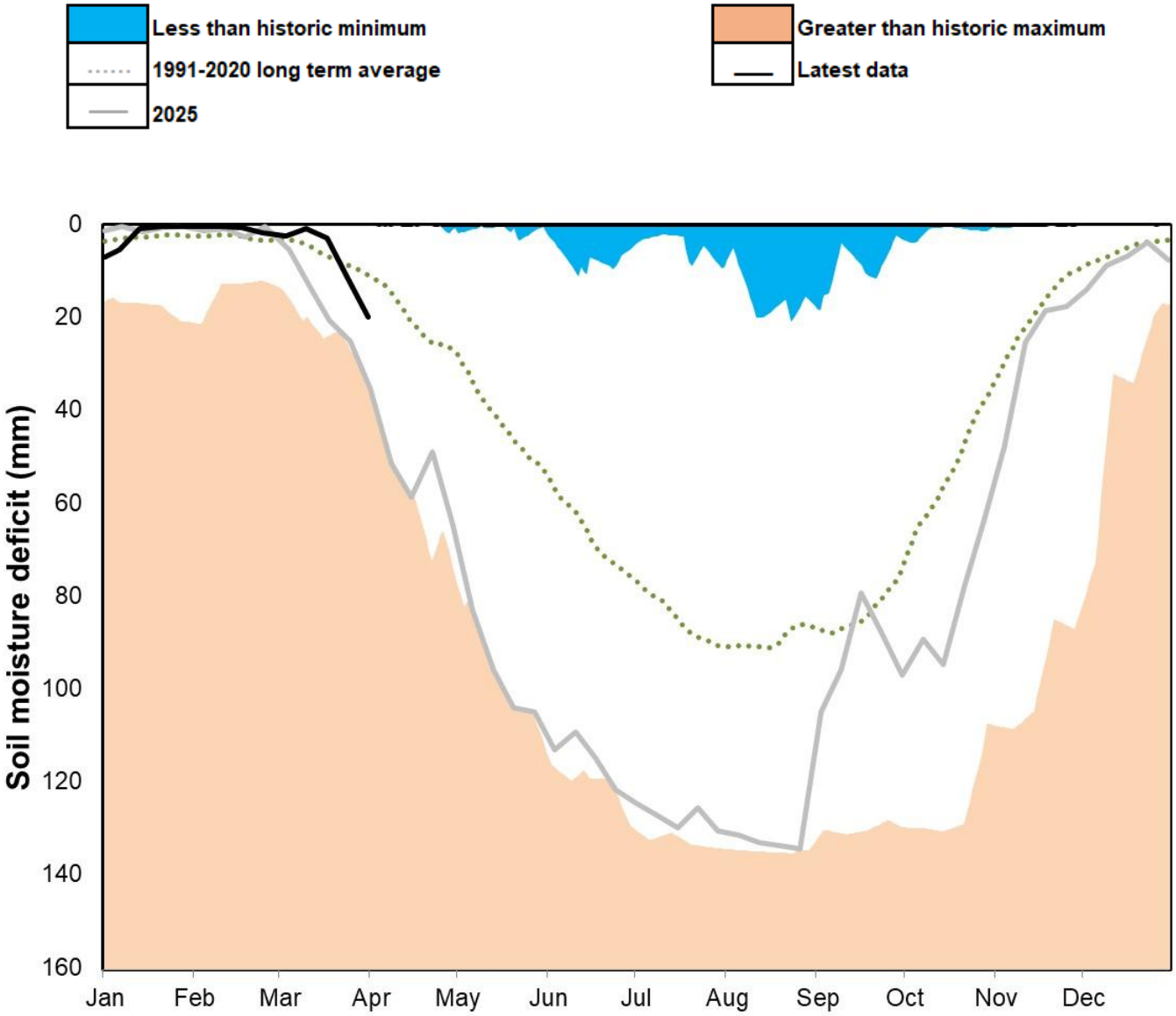
3.1 Soil moisture deficit map

Figure 3.1: Soil moisture deficits for weeks ending 31 March 2026. Shows the difference (mm) of the actual soil moisture deficit from the 1991 to 2020 long term average soil moisture deficits. MORECS data for real land use.



3.2 Soil moisture deficit charts

Figure 3.2: Latest soil moisture deficit compared to previous year, maximum, minimum, and 1991 to 2020 long term average. Weekly MORECS data for real land use.



4 River flows

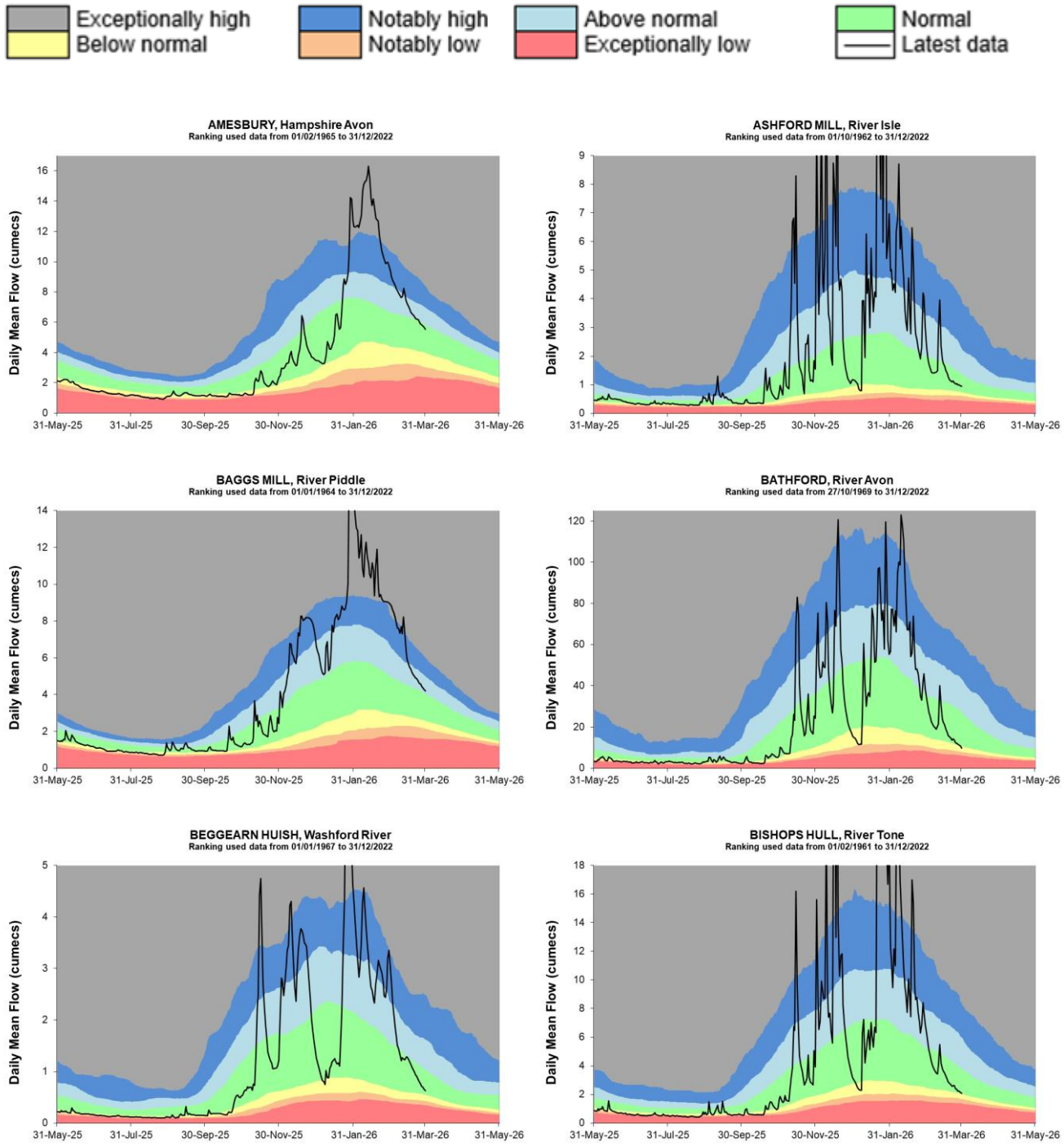
4.1 River flows map

Figure 4.1: Monthly mean river flow for indicator sites for March 2026, expressed as a percentage of the respective long term average and classed relative to an analysis of historic March monthly means Table available in the appendices with detailed information.

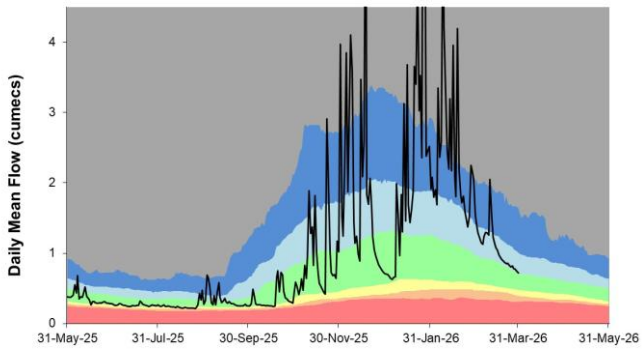
(Source: Environment Agency). Crown copyright. All rights reserved. Environment Agency, AC0000807064, 2026. The Stour at Throop, Piddle at Baggs Mill and Hampshire Avon at East Mills Combined should be treated with caution due to data issues.

4.2 River flow charts

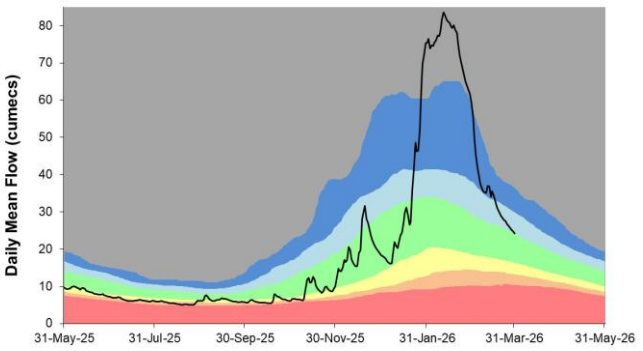
Figure 4.2: Daily mean river flow for index sites over the past year, compared to an analysis of historic daily mean flows.



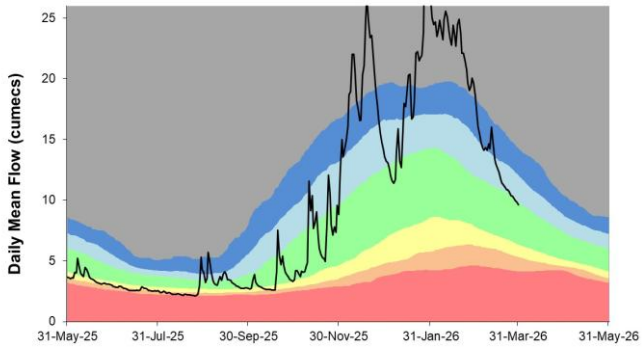
BRIDPORT EAST BRIDGE, River Asker
Ranking used data from 01/03/1996 to 31/12/2022



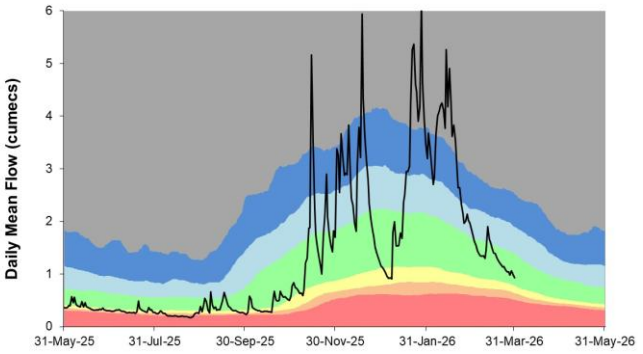
EAST MILLS COMBINED, Hampshire Avon
Ranking used data from 01/11/1965 to 31/12/2022



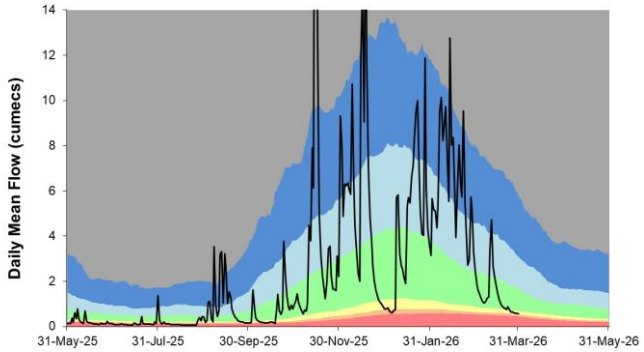
EAST STOKE COMBINED, Dorset Frome
Ranking used data from 01/10/1965 to 31/12/2022



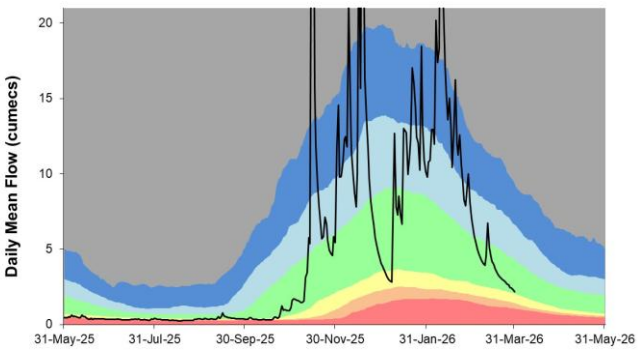
FENNY CASTLE , River Sheppey
Ranking used data from 01/01/1964 to 31/12/2022



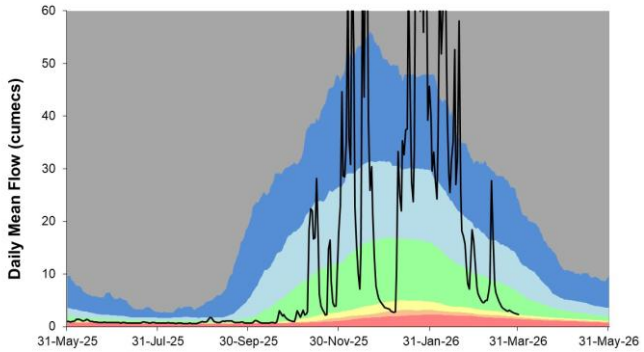
FRENCHAY, Bristol Frome
Ranking used data from 01/09/1961 to 31/12/2022



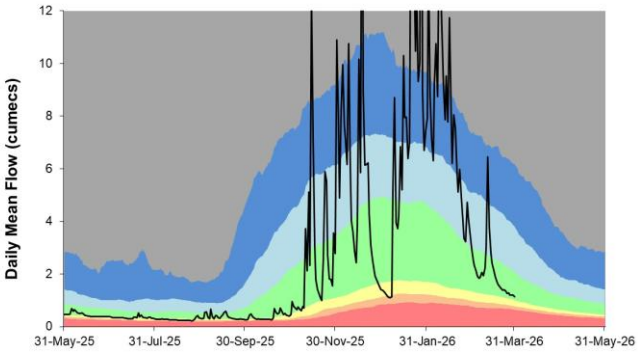
GREAT SOMERFORD, River Avon
Ranking used data from 16/12/1963 to 31/12/2022

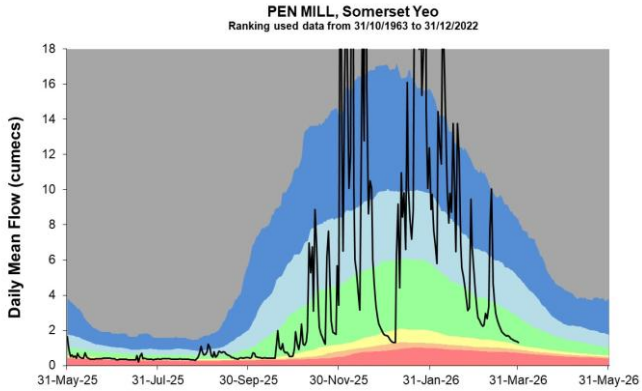


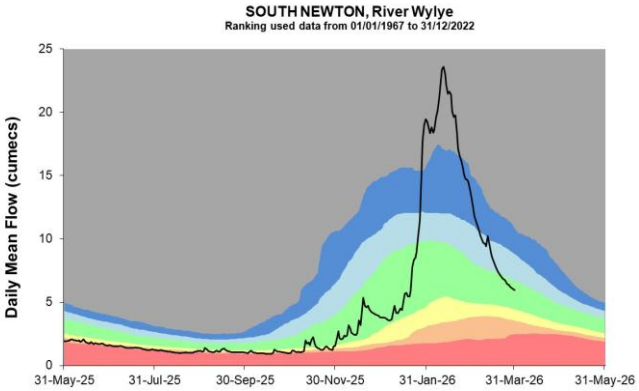
HAMMOON, River Stour
Ranking used data from 01/03/1968 to 31/12/2022

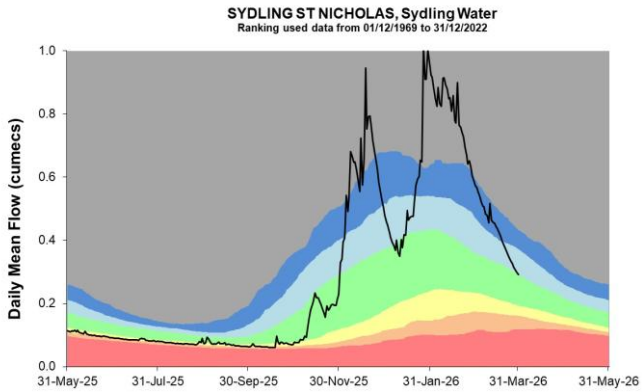


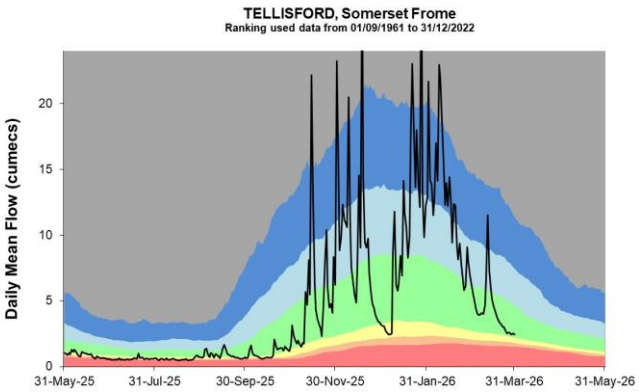
LOVINGTON, River Brue
Ranking used data from 01/10/1964 to 31/12/2022

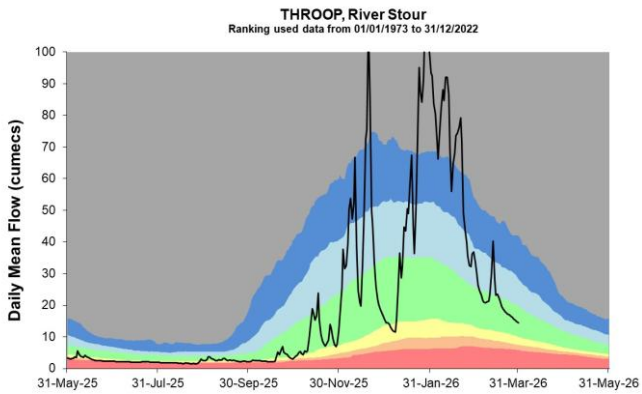










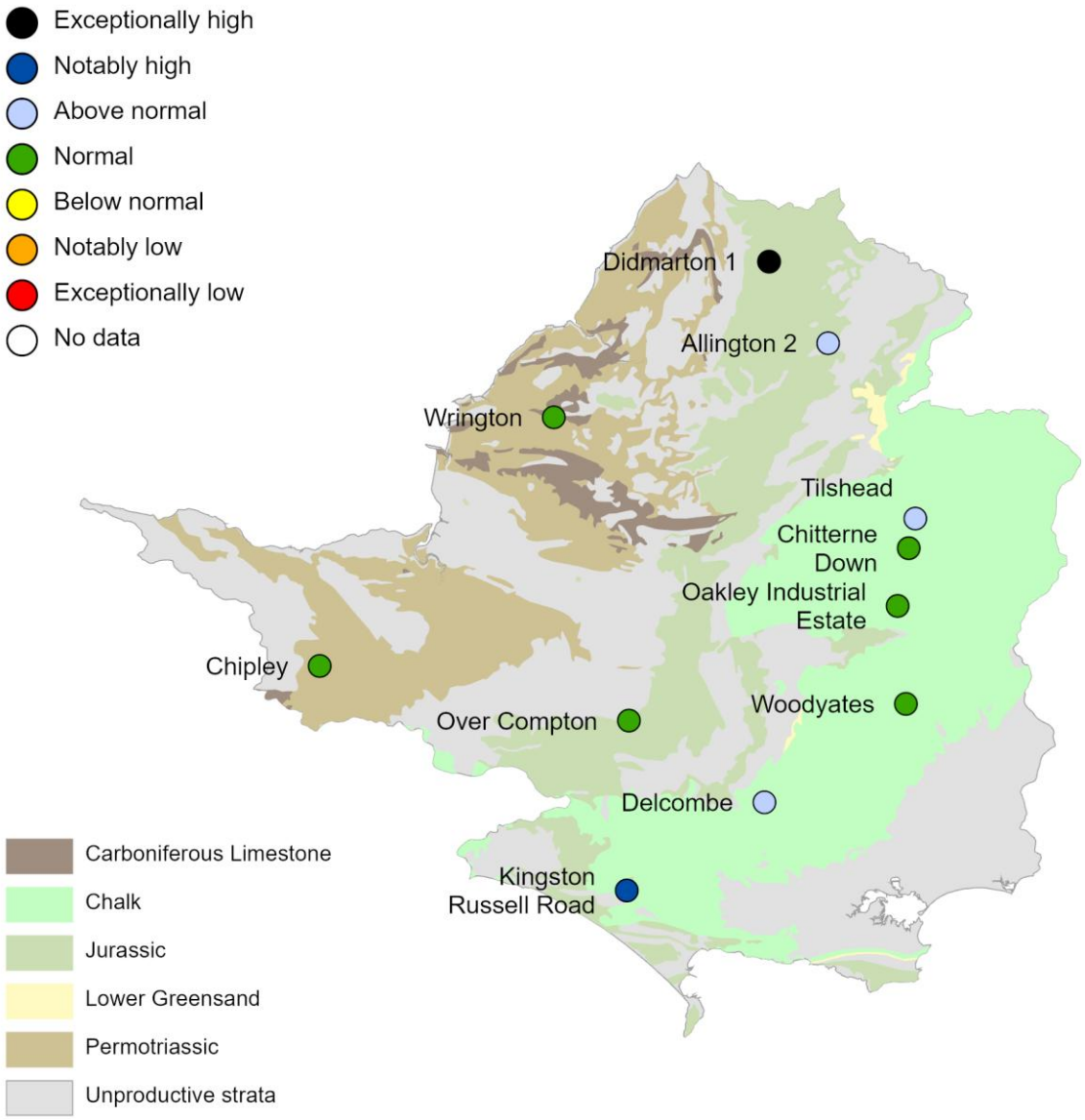


Source: Environment Agency, 2026. The Stour at Throop, Piddle at Baggs Mill and Hampshire Avon at East Mills Combined should be treated with caution due to data issues.

5 Groundwater levels

5.1 Groundwater levels map

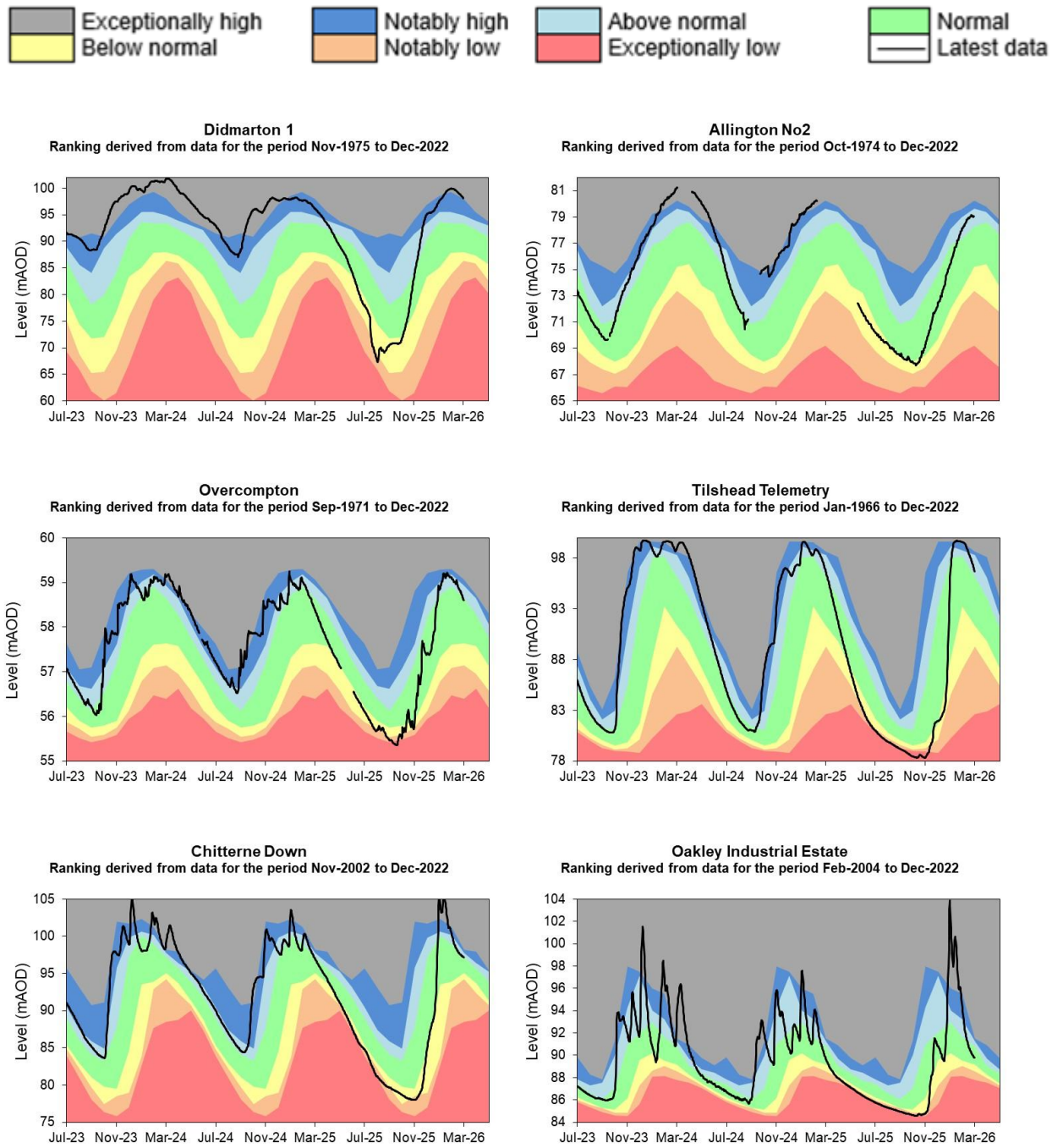
Figure 5.1: Groundwater levels for indicator sites at the end of March 2026, classed relative to an analysis of respective historic March levels. Table available in the appendices with detailed information.

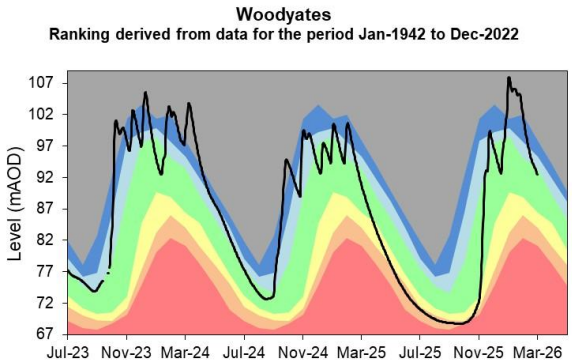


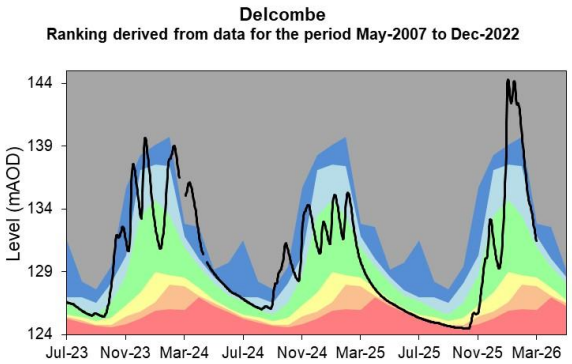
(Source: Environment Agency). Geological map reproduced with kind permission from UK Groundwater Forum, BGS copyright NERC. Crown copyright. All rights reserved. Environment Agency, AC0000807064, 2026.

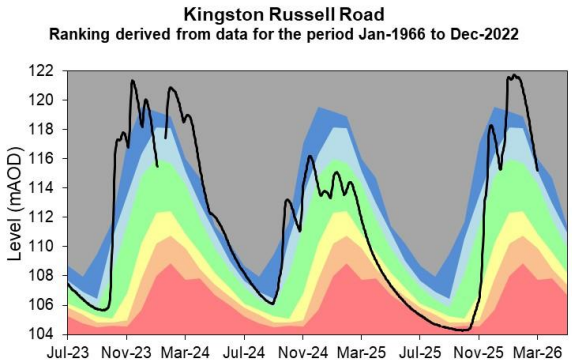
5.2 Groundwater level charts

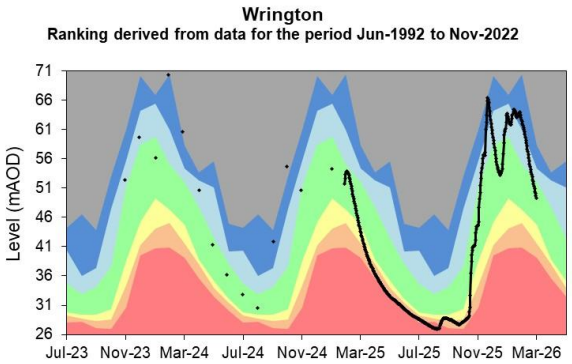
Figure 5.2: End of month groundwater levels at index groundwater level sites for major aquifers. 34 months compared to an analysis of historic end of month levels.

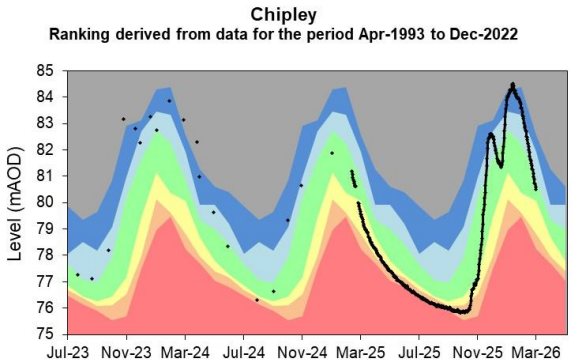








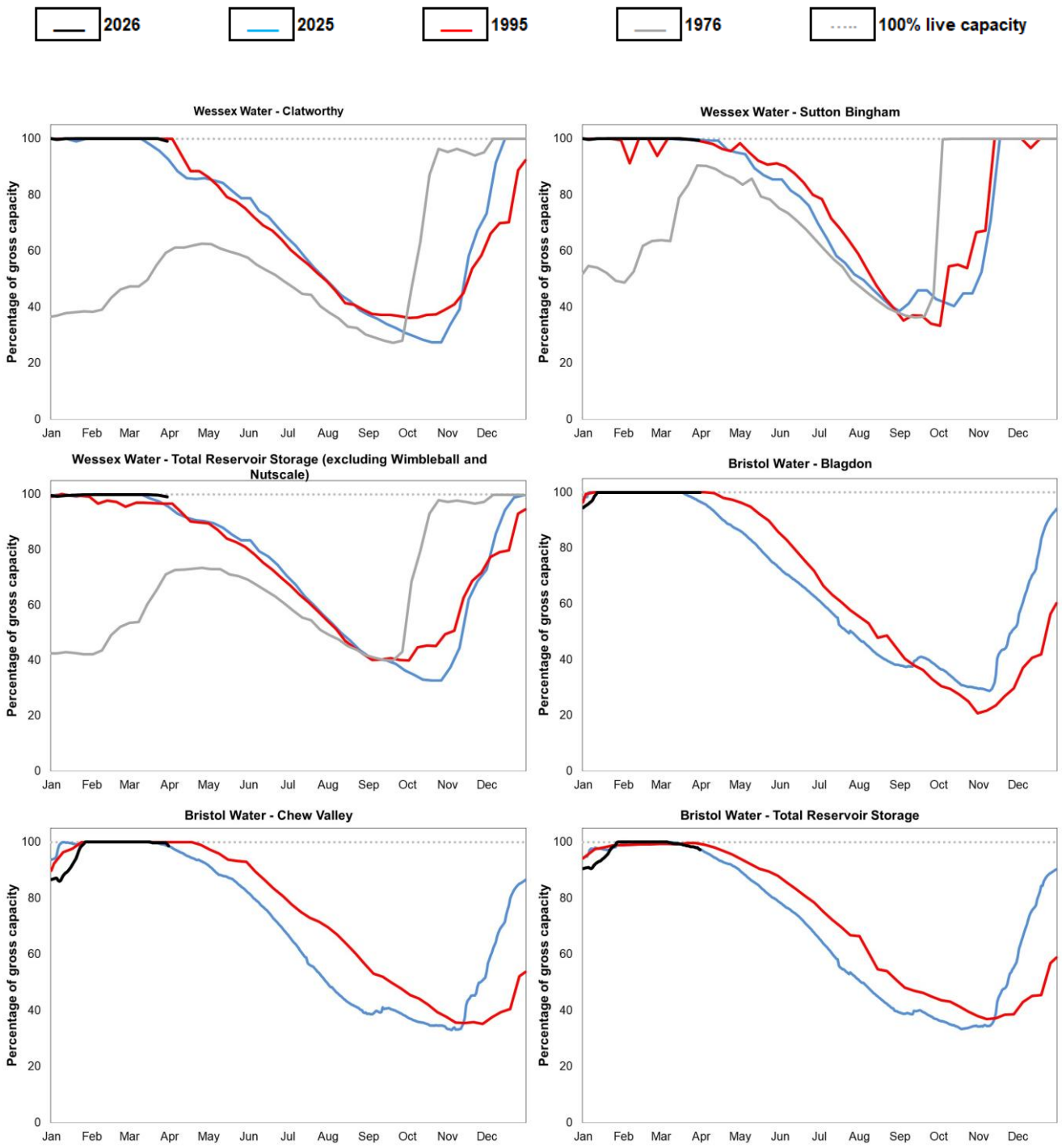




Source: Environment Agency, 2026.

6 Reservoir stocks

Figure 6.1: End of month regional reservoir stocks compared to the previous year, and if available, also a comparison to reservoir stocks in 1995 and 1976.



(Source: Wessex Water and Bristol Water).

7 Flood alerts and warnings

7.1 Flood alerts

Table 1: Fluvial, coastal and groundwater flood alerts issued during March

Area	Number of fluvial flood alerts in March	Number of coastal flood alerts in March	Number of groundwater flood alerts in March
North Wessex	3	2	0
South Wessex	0	0	0*

7.2 Flood warnings

Table 2: Fluvial, coastal and groundwater flood warnings issued during March

Area	Number of fluvial flood warnings in March	Number of coastal flood warnings in March	Number of groundwater flood warnings in March
North Wessex	0	0	0
South Wessex	0	0	1*

*several groundwater alerts and warnings issued prior to March remained in force

7.3 Severe flood warnings

Table 3: Fluvial, coastal and groundwater severe flood warnings issued during March

Area	Number of fluvial severe flood warnings in March	Number of coastal severe flood warnings in March	Number of groundwater severe flood warnings in March
North Wessex	0	0	0
South Wessex	0	0	0

8 Stream support

8.1 Sites providing stream support

Table 4: End of March status for stream support sites.

Catchment	River	Stream support site	Gauging station	End of March status
Bristol Avon	Chalfield Brook	South Wraxall	Great Chalfield (Wessex Water)	Off
Bristol Avon	Chalfield Brook	Little Chalfield	Great Chalfield (Wessex Water)	Off
Bristol Avon	Charlton Stream	Charlton	Crabb Mill	Off
Bristol Avon	Gauze Brooke	Hullavington	Rodbourne	Off
Bristol Avon	Horscombe Stream	Tucking Mill	No Gauge	Off
Bristol Avon	Luckington Brook	Luckington	Fossway	Off
Bristol Avon	Rodbourne Brook	Lower Stanton St. Quinton	Startley	Off
Bristol Avon	Semington Brook	Easterton	No Gauge	Off
Bristol Avon	Sherston Avon	Stanbridge	Fossway	Off
Bristol Avon	Tetbury Avon	Tetbury	Brokenborough	Off
Dorset Frome	South Winterbourne	Winterbourne Abbas	Winterbourne Steepleton	Off

Catchment	River	Stream support site	Gauging station	End of March status
Dorset Frome	Watergates Stream	Watergates	No Gauge	Off
Piddle	Devil's Brook	Dewlish	Dewlish Woodsdown Cross	Off
Piddle	Piddle	Alton Mill	South House & Little Puddle	Off
Piddle	Piddle	Morningwell	South House & Little Puddle	Off
Piddle	Piddle	Briantspuddle	Briantspuddle	Off
Dorset Stour	Crichel Stream	Long Crichel	No Gauge	Off
Dorset Stour	Gussage Stream	Gussage All Saints	Bowerswain	Off
Dorset Stour	Allen	Wyke Down	All Hallows	Off
Dorset Stour	Pimperne Stream	Pimperne	No Gauge	Off
Hampshire Avon	Bourne	Porton	Salisbury Bourne	On
Hampshire Avon	Chitterne Brook	Codford Road	Codford	Off
Hampshire Avon	Wylye	Brixton Deverill	Brixton Deverill & Heytesbury	Off
Hampshire Avon	Wylye	Kingston Deverill	Brixton Deverill & Heytesbury	Off

9 Abstraction licences subject to restrict or cease

9.1 Abstraction licences subject to restrict or cease

Table 5: Number of licences at restrict or cease at the end of March.

Catchment	Number of licences at restrict at the end of March	Number of licences at cease at the end of March
Bristol Avon	0	0
Dorset	0	0
Hampshire Avon	0	0
Somerset	0	3

10 Glossary

10.1 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}).

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 1991 to 2020. 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 by 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 (for example, 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).

10.2 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.

10.3 Rainfall Areas Map

Figure 6.2 Rainfall catchments in Wessex.

11 Appendices

11.1 Rainfall table

Hydrological area	Mar 2026 rainfall % of long term average 1991 to 2020	Mar 2026 band	Jan 2026 to March cumulative band	Oct 2025 to March cumulative band	Apr 2025 to March cumulative band
Axe	59	Below Normal	Exceptionally high	Exceptionally high	Above normal
Brue	59	Below Normal	Exceptionally high	Exceptionally high	Normal
Little Avon	54	Below Normal	Notably high	Exceptionally high	Normal
Lower Bristol Avon And Bristol Frome	61	Below Normal	Exceptionally high	Exceptionally high	Above normal
Lower Dorset Stour And River Crane	46	Below Normal	Exceptionally high	Exceptionally high	Notably high
Lower Hampshire Avon	47	Below Normal	Exceptionally high	Exceptionally high	Notably high
Mendips And River Chew	65	Normal	Exceptionally high	Exceptionally high	Normal
Middle And Upper Bristol Avon	54	Below Normal	Exceptionally high	Exceptionally high	Normal

Hydrological area	Mar 2026 rainfall % of long term average 1991 to 2020	Mar 2026 band	Jan 2026 to March cumulative band	Oct 2025 to March cumulative band	Apr 2025 to March cumulative band
Middle Dorset Stour	49	Below Normal	Exceptionally high	Exceptionally high	Notably high
Middle Hampshire Avon	52	Below Normal	Exceptionally high	Exceptionally high	Notably high
Parrett	53	Below Normal	Exceptionally high	Exceptionally high	Above normal
Poole Harbour And Purbeck	42	Below Normal	Exceptionally high	Notably high	Above normal
River Bourne	59	Normal	Exceptionally high	Exceptionally high	Above normal
River Frome	51	Below Normal	Exceptionally high	Exceptionally high	Notably high
River Piddle	50	Below Normal	Exceptionally high	Exceptionally high	Notably high
Tone	49	Below Normal	Exceptionally high	Exceptionally high	Above normal
Upper Dorset Stour	56	Below Normal	Exceptionally high	Exceptionally high	Above normal
Upper Hampshire Avon	58	Below Normal	Exceptionally high	Exceptionally high	Above normal

Hydrological area	Mar 2026 rainfall % of long term average 1991 to 2020	Mar 2026 band	Jan 2026 to March cumulative band	Oct 2025 to March cumulative band	Apr 2025 to March cumulative band
West Dorset Streams	52	Below Normal	Exceptionally high	Exceptionally high	Notably high
West Somerset Streams	56	Below Normal	Notably high	Notably high	Above normal
Wylye And Nadder	55	Below Normal	Exceptionally high	Exceptionally high	Above normal
Yeo And Kenn	63	Normal	Notably high	Notably high	Normal

11.2 River flows table

Site name	River	Catchment	Mar 2026 band	Feb 2026 band
Amesbury	Upper Hampshire Avon	Hampshire Avon	Above normal	Exceptionally high
Ashford Mill	Isle	Parrett	Normal	Notably high
Baggs Mill	Piddle	Piddle	Exceptionally high	Exceptionally high
Bathford	Bristol Avon	Bristol Avon	Normal	Notably high
Beggearn Huish	Washford	Washford River	Above normal	Notably high
Bishops Hull	Tone	Tone	Normal	Exceptionally high
Bridport East Bridge	Asker	Asker	Notably high	Exceptionally high
Fenny Castle	Sheppey	Brue	Normal	Exceptionally high
East Mills Combined	Middle Hampshire Avon	Hampshire Avon	Above normal	Exceptionally high
East Stoke Combined	Dorset Frome	Dorset Frome	Above normal	Exceptionally high
Frenchay	Bristol Frome	Bristol Frome	Normal	Exceptionally high

Site name	River	Catchment	Mar 2026 band	Feb 2026 band
Great Somerford	Bristol Avon	Bristol Avon	Normal	Exceptionally high
Hammoon	Middle Stour	Dorset Stour	Normal	Exceptionally high
Knapp Mill	Lower Hampshire Avon	Hampshire Avon	Data unavailable	Data unavailable
Lovington	Upper Brue	Brue	Normal	Exceptionally high
Pen Mill	Yeo	Parrett	Normal	Notably high
South Newton	River Wylye	Hampshire Avon	Above normal	Exceptionally high
Sydling St Nicholas	Sydling Water	Dorset Frome	Notably high	Exceptionally high
Tellisford	Somerset Frome	Bristol Avon	Normal	Exceptionally high
Throop	Lower Stour	Dorset Stour	Normal	Exceptionally high

11.3 Groundwater table

Site name	Aquifer	End of Mar 2026 band	End of Feb 2026 band
Allington No2	Upper Bristol Avon Great Oolite	Above normal	Above normal
Chitterne Down	Upper Hampshire Avon Chalk	Normal	Notably high
Delcombe	Dorset Frome and Piddle Chalk / Upper Greensand	Above normal	Exceptionally high
Didmarton 1	Upper Bristol Avon Inferior Oolite	Exceptionally high	Exceptionally high
Kingston Russell Road	Dorset Frome Chalk	Notably high	Exceptionally high
Overcompton	Somerset Yeo Bridport Sand	Normal	Above normal
Tilshead	Upper Hampshire Avon Chalk	Above normal	Exceptionally high
Woodyates	Dorset Stour Chalk	Normal	Exceptionally high
Oakley Industrial Estate	Upper Hampshire Avon Chalk	Normal	Notably high
Chipley	Somerset Tone Otter Sandstone	Normal	Notably high

Site name	Aquifer	End of Mar 2026 band	End of Feb 2026 band
Wrington	North Somerset Carboniferous Limestone	Normal	Notably high