

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).

Your request, and our response to your specific questions, are outlined below::

Thank you for your detailed response to my request. I appreciate United Utilities providing the permitted dry weather flow, flow-to-full-treatment figure, storm storage volume, future population-equivalent figure for the AMP8 growth scheme, and the explanation of the 2024 storm tank return valve improvement.

I would be grateful for clarification on a small number of remaining points. I am deliberately keeping this follow-up narrow, as these points are directly relevant to current and future housing growth in the Sandbach WwTW catchment.

Please treat this as a further request for environmental information under the Environmental Information Regulations, insofar as the information is held.

1. Current measured use of capacity

You confirmed that the permitted dry weather flow for Sandbach WwTW is 5,352 m³/day and that the flow-to-full-treatment capacity is 151 l/s.

Please provide the latest held figures for the current actual measured dry weather flow and current actual load received at Sandbach WwTW, preferably for the latest full reporting year available.

If the current actual load is not held as a single population-equivalent figure, please provide the closest held equivalent, such as average flow, BOD load, ammonia load, suspended solids load, or any other standard operational measure used by United Utilities to assess current utilisation of Sandbach WwTW.

The dataset attached in Appendix A shows the 2025 calendar year total daily value (TDV) readings for Sandbach WwTW (in cubic meters). This is the dataset that is utilised within the Q90 calculation for dry weather flow. An explanation on how this calculation and assessment work is outlined below in the response to question 2.

Population Equivalent (PE) is a standardised metric used to quantify the total biodegradable organic load entering a wastewater treatment works (WwTW). This metric is different from an independent

physical count of the associated population.

PE is calculated by dividing the total daily biochemical oxygen demand (BOD₅) of combined domestic population, trade, and tourism effluent by the standard reference value of 60 grams of BOD₅ per person per day. By converting all these impacts into equivalent residential units, water companies can accurately determine the hydraulic and biological plant capacities required to ensure regulatory compliance.

The 2025 PE for Sandbach WwTW was calculated as 24,924.

2. Current headroom

Please confirm the current available headroom at Sandbach WwTW against:

- a. the permitted dry weather flow of 5,352 m³/day; and**
- b. the flow-to-full-treatment capacity of 151 l/s.**

Please provide this in absolute terms and, if held, as a percentage of available remaining capacity. If United Utilities does not hold a single “headroom” figure, please confirm what operational or planning measure is used instead when assessing whether Sandbach WwTW can accommodate additional development.

United Utilities do not typically undertake ‘headroom’ assessments. Instead, we use a Dry Weather flow (DWF) baseline for environmental impact, plant capacity and regulatory compliance assessments, known as a Q90.

The Q90 is a statistical flow metric representing the daily volume of wastewater treated at the works that is exceeded 90% of the time. The theory being that the lowest 10% will be the flows received by the works under ‘dry’ conditions, and therefore just be a representation of the domestic/commercial flows, without the impact of rain.

The Q90 is typically calculated by gathering a full year (365 days) of total daily volume (TDV) data from a site, then sorting the 365 individual values from lowest to highest. The Q90 is then the 10th percentile value within that list of ascending data. This means that this flow rate over a year, that is exceeded 90% of the time.

For the 2025 calendar year we have calculated the Q90 as 3,886 m³ against the permitted value of 5,352 m³, meaning the site was operating well within its hydraulic capacity.

3. Population-equivalent comparison

You stated that the AMP8 growth scheme is using a future population-equivalent figure of 27,267.

Please confirm what current or baseline population-equivalent figure this future figure is being compared against. If no current or baseline population-equivalent figure is held, please confirm this and explain what baseline measure is being used for the AMP8 growth scheme instead.

The baseline population equivalent (PE) figure used in our PR24 submission to Ofwat was 21,983.

4. Housing growth and the hydraulic model

You stated that the hydraulic model for this area was last updated in 2020 and that the model should be refreshed with updated population and development projections before solution development is undertaken for the AMP8 growth scheme.

Please confirm whether major housing developments and speculative housing applications in Sandbach Parish submitted or promoted after the 2020 model update are currently included in the modelling.

If they are not yet included, please confirm when the refreshed model is expected to be completed and whether it will include all completed, approved, pending and proposed major housing developments in Sandbach, Wheelock, Elworth and the wider Sandbach WwTW catchment.

Our modelling is always based on the latest data available to us at the time. Our AMP8 growth project therefore utilised the latest available data at the time of our Price review (PR24) submission to Ofwat.

As part of the AMP8 scheme development, we will revisit the dataset and initial project assumptions to ensure the solution developed is aligned with the current growth projections in the catchment. Therefore, any known development information that has come to light post our PR24 submission will be captured in the model update. This project driven update will be completed in line with the development of the solution for the site.

5. Development before the AMP8 scheme is delivered

You stated that the Sandbach WwTW AMP8 growth scheme is due to be delivered before 31 March 2030.

Please confirm how United Utilities assesses the wastewater impact of any housing developments that may be occupied before that scheme is delivered. In particular, please confirm whether such developments are assessed against existing Sandbach WwTW and network capacity, or against the future capacity expected to be delivered by the AMP8 growth scheme.

Under the conditions of the Water Industry Act 1991, developers have a statutory (legal) right to connect to the public sewerage network. If a developer meets the necessary legal and technical requirements, we are legally obligated to allow the connection and cannot refuse it.

With regard to managing network capacity, we carefully assess every new development. Occasionally,

our assessments show that a new development will be ready to connect before we have finished building planned capacity upgrades in that area.

As we must allow the connection to proceed by law, we therefore take proactive steps to protect the local environment and customer service. This is typically achieved through a combination of the following measures:

- **Operational Interventions & Network Management:** We make hands-on adjustments to how the local network operates to safely manage the additional wastewater.
- **Ongoing Monitoring:** We keep a close eye on the system to actively identify and mitigate any risks before they become problems.
- **Accelerated Investment:** Where necessary, we will speed up or reprioritize our funding and project plans to ensure the network gets the upgrades it needs faster.

This approach ensures that we follow our strict legal obligations while continuing to maintain the environmental performance and reliable service customers expect from us.

6. Spill reduction and rainfall context

You explained that spills reduced from 58 spills lasting 375 hours in 2024 to 12 spills lasting 23 hours in 2025, and that 2026 year-to-date has seen two spills lasting one hour.

Please confirm whether United Utilities has assessed these reductions against rainfall conditions for the relevant years.

If held, please provide the rainfall comparison or rainfall-normalised assessment used to determine whether the reduction is due primarily to the 2024 storm tank return valve improvement rather than differences in rainfall between years.

If such rainfall-normalised analysis is not held, please simply confirm that.

United Utilities do review 'Radar' rainfall data, sourced from the Met Office, across our wastewater treatment works catchments.

The table below shows the total rainfall depth (in mm) across the Sandbach Catchment in both 2024 and 2025, alongside the year-to-date total for 2026. Whilst there was a rainfall reduction experienced between 2024 and 2025 of circa 23%, this would not directly account for the 80% spill reduction seen over the same period. As such, the operational intervention made at the site must therefore be viewed as having a notable effect. This is further backed up by the 2026 YTD data, where the daily average rainfall is currently at a higher level in 2026 than in 2025, but yet the spill reduction trend has continued.

United Utilities accepts that rainfall can affect spill performance, and that the reduction seen in the Sandbach catchment in 2025 would have contributed to the spill reduction experienced in that year.

Yet, we do not believe this alone is the catalyst for improved performance and maintain that the operational intervention is the likely primary driver.

Rain vs Spills			
	Rainfall (mm)	Daily Average	Spill Count
2024	1224.52	3.35	58
2025	939.37	2.57	12
2026 (YTD)	471.34	2.86	2

We hope that this response 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.

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



EIR Team
United Utilities

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.