

Briefing Note: Cambridge Water Draft Drought Plan 2026
Summary of local impacts and key considerations for consultation

1. Overview

Cambridge Water has published its **Draft Drought Plan (2026)** for consultation.

- Covers all of **South Cambridgeshire, including Melbourn**
- Sets out how water shortages will be managed **before, during and after droughts**
- Required under legislation to be updated every 5 years

The region is identified as **water-stressed**, with increasing pressure from growth and climate change.

👉 Parish Council may wish to consider submitting a response before deadline of 30 July 2026.

2. What this means for Melbourn residents

Most likely impacts (routine drought conditions)

Residents should expect:

- Increased **water-saving campaigns** (earlier and more frequent)
- Occasional **hosepipe bans (Temporary Use Bans – TUBs)**

Typical restrictions would include no hosepipe use for gardens, car washing, patios etc.

👉 Expected frequency: **around once every 10 years on average**

If drought becomes more severe

- Further restrictions on **businesses and agriculture**
 - Stronger enforcement and messaging
 - Potential economic impacts on rural activity
 - Standpipes or rota cuts (emergency measures – very unlikely)
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3. Environmental impacts locally

The plan places **greater emphasis on protecting chalk streams and rivers**, which are:

- Globally rare and highly dependent on groundwater abstraction

Key approach:

- Introduces **“environmental stress triggers” before supply is affected**
- May reduce abstraction earlier to protect flows

👉 Likely implications in/around Melbourn:

- Lower river flows in dry periods
 - Greater public messaging linking water use to environmental impact
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4. Implications for Melbourn Parish Council

A. Communications role

The plan relies heavily on local engagement. Parish councils may be expected to:

- Share drought messaging
- Support campaigns
- Help reach residents quickly

B. Planning and development

Key issue identified:

- **Housing growth in South Cambridgeshire increases water demand**
(Stakeholder feedback highlights this as a major driver of water stress)

👉 Implications:

- Increased focus on **water efficiency in new developments**
- Greater scrutiny of sustainability in planning consultations

C. Changes affecting residents

- Expansion of **water metering**
 - Increased awareness and monitoring of individual consumption
 - Behaviour change becoming a long-term expectation
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5. Risks and concerns

A. Earlier and more frequent restrictions

- Drought measures have historically been introduced **too late**
- **Hosepipe bans should be implemented earlier** in the process

B. Environmental vs supply trade-offs

- Strong push for an “**environment first**” approach
- Abstraction already impacting chalk streams

C. Increasing drought risk (climate change)

- Drought frequency and duration expected to **increase significantly**
- Driven by higher temperatures and reduced effective rainfall

D. Heavy reliance on behaviour change

Regulators emphasise:

- Priority on **demand reduction** (leakage, behaviour change, restrictions)
- Less emphasis on new supply sources

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👉 Implications for Melbourn

- Residents reducing water use
- Community-wide behavioural change
- Restrictions may be introduced primarily to **protect rivers**, not just supply
- Expect stronger use of **local councils, media, and community networks**

F. Limited external resilience

- Limited ability to import water from other regions

6. Key points for consultation response

Councillors may wish to comment on:

- How will Cambridge Water work with **parish councils specifically**?
- Should **hosepipe bans be introduced earlier** to protect local rivers?
- Is the current trigger system sufficiently precautionary?
- How will **new housing in South Cambridgeshire** be balanced with limited water supply?
- How will impacts on residents be balanced against **chalk stream protection**?
- What support is available for agriculture, small businesses, community facilities?
- Does the plan rely too heavily on **restrictions vs new supply solutions**?

7. Summary

For Melbourn, the plan indicates:

-  More frequent and earlier drought communications
-  Periodic hosepipe bans likely to become more common
-  Stronger prioritisation of environmental protection
-  Pressure from housing growth and limited water availability
-  Greater reliance on residents reducing consumption

Melbourn sits in a **high-risk, water-stressed area**, and this plan signals a **long-term shift toward tighter water management, earlier intervention, and lower water use as the norm**