

WATER WE CAN TRUST

*Taking care of water so that it can
always take care of us*



Adam Tugwell

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Adam Tugwell | Cheltenham, U.K. | August 2026

“Water remembers the paths we’ve forgotten.”

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Author's Note

Water We Can Trust is the natural progression from *Foods We Can Trust*. Not a replacement. Not a diversion. And in no way less important.

Both pieces of work come from the same foundation: that the essentials we depend on every day should be understood, respected, and stewarded by the people who rely on them most.

Foods We Can Trust began that conversation by challenging how distant, commercial, and opaque our relationship with food has become. *Water We Can Trust* continues it by turning to the element that underpins everything else - our health, our homes, our communities, our food system, and the resilience of the country itself.

This work aligns closely with the LEGS and EFCG approach: responsibility rooted in place, capability built from the ground up, and stewardship that belongs to communities rather than distant interests. The principles are the same. The motivation is the same. The commitment to rebuilding trust is the same.

The only difference is the subject - and the urgency.

Like *Foods We Can Trust*, this is not a finished framework. It is a direction of travel, a foundation for thinking, and an invitation to begin the work together now.

It asks us to look again at something essential that has been allowed to drift out of sight, and to rebuild a relationship with water that is worthy of the generations who will depend on it after us.

This is the continuation of the same promise: that the basics of life should be trusted, protected, and never taken for granted.

Introduction

Most people rarely think about water.

We turn on a tap and expect it to flow. We flush a toilet and assume the system behind it will continue to work. We see rivers, reservoirs, and rainfall as background features of everyday life. Water is so fundamental to our existence that it has largely become invisible.

That invisibility is part of the problem.

Water is not simply a utility. It is not simply a service. It is not simply another commodity to be bought, sold, priced, managed, or regulated. Water is one of the foundations of life itself.

Every person depends on it. Every community depends on it. Every economy, every food system, every ecosystem, and every civilisation depends upon its availability and its health.

Yet despite its importance, many of us have lost our relationship with water. We no longer know where it comes from. We rarely consider how it is stored, protected, treated, or shared.

Decisions about water have increasingly become distant from the people who depend upon it most, while the systems that support it have become hidden from public view.

The purpose of the *Water We Can Trust* series is to challenge that disconnect.

This series is not simply about water companies, reservoirs, regulation, or infrastructure. It is about our relationship with water itself.

It is about responsibility, stewardship, resilience, and the role communities should play in protecting the resources they depend upon.

Throughout these documents, a simple proposition is explored:

Water is a natural power, not a product.

If that principle is accepted, a series of important questions follow.

What does a healthy relationship with water look like?

What responsibilities do households, communities, and the nation share?

How should water be governed?

How should water infrastructure be managed?

How do we build resilience in an age of climate uncertainty, environmental pressure, and increasing demand?

And perhaps most importantly:

How do we ensure that future generations inherit water systems that deserve their trust?

The *Water We Can Trust* series does not claim to offer a finished answer to every challenge. Instead, it provides a foundation for discussion, a framework for action, and a direction of travel.

The series is structured in four parts:

Part One: Why Water We Can Trust

An examination of our current relationship with water, how essential systems have become increasingly detached from the communities they serve, and why water security should matter to everyone.

Part Two: What Water We Can Trust Means

The principles, values, and policy commitments that define the Water We Can Trust approach.

Part Three: The Water We Can Trust Blueprint

A practical exploration of responsibility, capability, stewardship, and resilience, from households and communities through to national infrastructure.

Part Four: Governance, Delivery and Operation

A framework for how Water We Can Trust could function in practice, including ownership, stewardship, funding, accountability, professional expertise, and long-term resilience.

Taken together, these documents are intended to form a coherent vision for a future in which water is respected, protected, shared, and trusted.

Because ultimately, the question is not whether water matters.

Why Water We Can Trust

The three things most essential for life are also the same things we all take for granted. Air, food and water keep us alive not only daily, but in every moment, yet we have allowed the control and health of both our food supply and our water to be captured by commercial interests.

The only reason air has escaped the same fate is because restricting and measuring the supply of what we breathe every second is, for now at least, beyond reach.

This isn't conspiracy. It isn't cynicism. It's a systemic truth.

The food and water we consume every day - their supply, their quality, what they contain, what they don't, and everything else about them - is under the influence of someone seeking to make a profit from our access to them, unless we are literally taking water from a spring or growing and preparing our own food without relying on any external supply of any kind.

Food is a complex issue in its own right. Few of us really think about how food gets to us, what it contains, where those ingredients come from or why they are there, who makes it, what their motivation is, how far it travels, how it is stored, preserved, flavoured, or why it may be harming us even as we obsess only over its practical cost.

Yes, "food security" is a term we are starting to hear more often - heatwaves, droughts, supply shocks and increasing discussion about UK Farming have forced it into the conversation. But very few people think about what food security actually means, and even fewer look beyond the accepted narratives about how food secure the UK currently is.

To put it bluntly, those narratives are at best misleading, and in terms of food resilience - knowing everyone would have enough to eat in a crisis - they are fundamentally wrong.

And this is where the problem with our access to essential basics really begins to show itself, because food is only one of the three essentials.

The one we should now be thinking about in no less important terms is water - and how everything about our relationship with water is broken down and how every part is now focused on benefiting somebody somewhere else.

Culturally and historically, we know how important water is. Given the terrible history of water-borne disease and poor health that the UK struggled with until relatively recently, it is frightening that we have lost respect for something so essential and allowed its stewardship to be moved away from people towards profit instead.

The brilliance and magnitude of our domestic water system - clean, chlorinated water from the tap, the shower, the toilet - has become invisible to us. We treat it as one of

those things that will always be there, just like food, and we forget why it was brilliant in the first place.

And it's important not only to recognise what we have or have already had available to us, because water isn't just another essential - it's one we can't go a moment without.

The water system - or water as a utility - that was built by previous generations was brilliant because it was built on human equity and universality of supply. It was equitable because it rested on the principle that every single person should have access to the same resources and the same quality of water. And it wasn't just about drinking, washing or flushing. It was about the whole circular system - taking care of the other side of the water coin, where our wastewater goes, what it contains, and ensuring that whatever can harm us in what we drink or even in what we eat (because all food needs water too) cannot and will not harm us as it circles its way back - however long or convoluted that journey might be.

Public services that exist only to serve the public don't look at every part of this process in terms of cost, because people are what the service is about. Regrettably, too many people have lost sight of this and some of them should have known a lot better.

Once the water boards were sold off to private companies and shareholders, that priority shifted. Delivery to people and care of the related utility cycle itself became secondary. Profit became the focus.

Out of sight, out of mind - and with a political mindset that has favoured markets and big commercial interests for decades - cost-cutting became easy.

Regrettably, the idea that free markets cannot do wrong has given cover to behaviours that have led to the deterioration of our water system. Extraction, pollution, diminishing storage, reduced care for watercourses - these are just parts of a wider picture of neglect driven by the extraction of profit from an essential service that should never have been given up.

Most of us don't think about water because we've never had to. We assume the tap will run tomorrow because it ran today. But that assumption is now a risk to us all.

The sale and shipment of bottled water is no better. It is a clear example of how detached we have become from the reality that water is a natural power and a resource that should be available to all without gatekeeping of any kind.

Water should not - and never should - be about grades, different qualities, brands or fashion, or considered at any level to be a luxury. It should simply be a basic essential that is always accessible to us all.

Today, water security is as important and as pressing an issue as food security - yet most people don't even know there's a problem. When water fails, everything else

stops. Not gradually - immediately. A society without reliable water isn't a society with problems. It's a society that cannot function.

As things stand, we are at risk of massive shortages, and with questions over infrastructure and storage capacity only becoming more urgent as time moves forward, we must begin a major rethink about our relationship with water.

That rethink has to happen not only at a strategic national level, but regionally, locally within our communities, and yes - within our own homes too.

We've trusted the water system without ever checking whether the water system we have still deserves that trust. And this is the point where we have to stop assuming and start looking at what's actually happening.

As things stand, we are at risk of a catastrophic breakdown in the supply of water and in the processes that keep society healthy and clean.

We all have a part to play in how our future relationship with water unfolds from here.

A Clear Principle: What Water We Can Trust Is About

Water We Can Trust is about ensuring every person has regular, reliable and universal access to fresh, healthy water that supports life - without any restrictions on access, without fear of cost, and without qualifications or conditions that people cannot meet.

This is the foundation. Everything else builds from here.

Water We Can Trust is a way of thinking. It's a direction and a motivation that, like food, puts our relationship with water at the centre of everything we do.

Our health and our essential daily needs will always matter, and it is not overstating things to say that if we don't rethink and repair our relationship with water - and quickly - nothing else will really matter. Everything else will simply fall into insignificance.

What Water We Can Trust Means

What is Water We Can Trust?

Water We Can Trust is the idea that water should be something you never have to worry about. Not because a government promises it. Not because a company sells it. Not because a regulator oversees it. But because the people who live closest to the water - the people who depend on it every day - are the ones who look after it.

It's the belief that water is a natural power, not a product. It's the understanding that water belongs to communities, not corporations or distant bureaucracies. It's the commitment that every person has a right to clean, safe, local water without exploitation, scarcity pricing, or political games.

Water We Can Trust is simple:

- water is respected
- water is protected
- water is shared
- water is never owned
- water is never financialised
- water is never used as leverage
- water is never treated as a commodity

It means households understand their water. It means communities steward their water. It means the nation rebuilds resilience from the ground up - not from the top down.

It means reservoirs are restored, not sold off. It means rivers run clean, not brown. It means wetlands are revived, not drained. It means floodplains are respected, not built over. It means water companies stop behaving like extraction machines. It means water becomes part of everyday life again - visible, understood, and valued.

Water We Can Trust is not a slogan. It's a standard. It's a set of responsibilities. It's a set of protections. It's a set of limits. It's a promise that water will never again be treated as a revenue stream instead of a lifeline.

This is what Water We Can Trust means. And these are the policies that make it real.

The Water We Can Trust Policy List

1. Water is a natural power, not a product

Water behaves according to nature, not markets. It must be respected, protected, and shared. It must never be owned.

2. Water belongs to communities

Water belongs to the place it comes from. It belongs to the people who live there. No private interest should ever control access to water.

3. Natural access to water is a birthright

Every person has the right to clean, safe, local water. Access cannot depend on wealth, geography, or corporate decisions.

4. Communities must have direct access to their natural water supply

Communities should draw from their own rivers, springs, aquifers, and catchments. Where water is scarce, water-rich communities support water-poor ones.

5. No one should own more water than they need

Water cannot be hoarded or controlled for profit. Excess water must be shared. Water rights cannot be traded or sold.

6. Water companies must not treat water as a revenue stream

Scarcity must never be monetised. Bills must reflect service, not shareholder returns. Infrastructure must be maintained for resilience, not dividends.

7. Reservoirs and national storage must be reclaimed

Reservoirs sold off or decommissioned must return to community stewardship. Storage capacity must be rebuilt to protect against droughts, floods, and infrastructure failure.

8. Catchments, wetlands, and floodplains must be restored

Natural water-holding landscapes must be revived. Wetlands must be protected. Floodplains must be respected.

9. Pollution of rivers and waterways must end

Rivers cannot be treated as drains. Sewage dumping must stop. Industrial pollution must be strictly limited.

10. Communities must steward their local water

Communities protect rivers, streams, wetlands, and floodplains. They challenge harmful decisions. They organise restoration. They defend water assets from sale or neglect.

11. Households must become water-literate

People must understand where their water comes from and how much they use. They must store small amounts for emergencies. They must avoid harmful chemicals. They must recognise leaks early.

12. Communities must work together across boundaries

Water crosses borders - responsibility must too. Communities coordinate, support each other, and build shared resilience.

13. National resilience must be rebuilt from the ground up

Infrastructure must serve people, not profit. Storage must be restored. Catchments repaired. Wetlands revived. Rivers protected.

14. Water infrastructure must be transparent

Communities must know the state of their water systems. Failures must be reported openly. Investment decisions must be public.

15. Water must be prioritised above profit

People first. Community next. Environment always. Industry only when it fits those priorities.

16. Water scarcity must never be used as leverage

No punitive pricing during droughts. No exploitation of shortages. No community left vulnerable because infrastructure was neglected.

17. Water decisions must be made locally

Communities must have a say in how their water is managed. Local knowledge must guide land use, flood planning, and restoration.

18. Water must be visible again

People must see water as part of their environment, not just a tap. Rivers, reservoirs, and wetlands must be part of community life.

19. Emergency water security must be guaranteed

Households need basic emergency storage. Communities need emergency plans. National coordination must support crisis response.

20. Water justice must be protected

No community should be disadvantaged by geography. Pricing must be fair and stable. Vulnerable households must be protected.

21. Water systems must adapt to climate realities

Infrastructure must be designed for extremes - drought, flood, seasonal shifts. Resilience must be proactive, not reactive.

22. Land use must support water health

Agriculture must protect soil and water. Urban planning must respect natural water flow. Development must avoid water-critical areas.

23. Accountability must be enforceable

Strict penalties for pollution. Mandatory restoration after damage. Community oversight powers. Removal of licences for repeated harm.

24. Anti-capture safeguards must be built in

No corporate capture. No union capture. No political capture. No activist capture. Water governance must remain genuinely local.

25. Local governance must be clear and practical

Parish-level stewardship boards. Community assemblies. Transparent reporting. Flat hierarchy. Non-profit operation.

26. Inter-community coordination must be structured

Shared agreements. Mutual aid. Emergency support. Regional balancing. National resilience frameworks.

27. Water must support personal sovereignty

You cannot be sovereign if you depend on distant entities for water. Water security is foundational to autonomy. Water literacy is part of sovereignty.

28. The future of water must be chosen consciously

We stop drifting. We stop assuming water will always be there. We rebuild trust through stewardship, restoration, and shared responsibility.

How Water We Can Trust Actually Works

People will read the policies and think, *“This sounds good, but how does it work?”* And the answer is simple: **community ownership and genuine localism.**

Not the version of “local” that gets thrown around in politics. Not the version that means “a regional office 80 miles away.” Not the version that means “a public body with a union hierarchy.” Not the version that means “a private company with a customer service line.”

Localism means **the people who live closest to the water are the ones who run the water.**

It means:

- decisions made at parish level
- stewardship boards drawn from the community
- transparent accounts
- open meetings
- no hierarchy
- no profit motive
- no extraction
- no distance

It means water is managed by people who can walk to the river, the reservoir, the spring, the treatment works - and who actually care what happens to them.

It means the end of centralisation - because centralisation always serves those hidden by distance.

It means the end of the myth of “economies of scale” - because scale has only ever delivered fragility, not resilience.

It means the end of corporate capture - because corporations cannot own water.

It means the end of union capture - because unions cannot control community utilities.

It means the end of political capture - because water governance is not a political prize.

It means water becomes part of the local economy - not the national marketplace.

It means communities coordinate with each other, not compete with each other.

It means water becomes something people understand again - not something hidden behind pipes, billing systems, and distant decision-making.

This is how Water We Can Trust works. It's not theoretical. It's not utopian. It's not abstract. It's practical, grounded, and achievable - because it's built on the simplest idea of all:

The people who depend on the water should be the ones who look after it.

Water We Can Trust: This document is not the finished blueprint. It is the starting point.

It is a statement of values, a direction of travel, and an invitation to rethink what water is, who it belongs to, and how it should be protected.

The detailed structures, governance models, and implementation frameworks will follow. First, we must decide what we believe water is for.

The Water We Can Trust Blueprint

Part I - How We Lost Sight of Water

Water is one of those things we all rely on without ever really stopping to think about it. It's there when we turn on the tap, so we assume it'll always be there.

We forget that it's part of the land, the weather, the soil, the rivers that run through our towns. And we certainly forget that it's a force of nature, not a service.

If you've ever experienced a water system fail – and I mean fail properly – you don't forget it. I haven't. And plenty of people around Gloucestershire haven't either.

Because in July 2007, we didn't face one water problem. We didn't even face two. We faced **three**, each one compounding the last.

1. The extreme rainfall - the sky opens

The first demonstration of water's power came on a Friday afternoon, when an extreme rainfall (pluvial) event dumped more water than the land or the drainage network could cope with.

Natural drainage, utility drainage, roadside gullies, culverts, ditches - all of it was overwhelmed. So the storm water simply abandoned the routes engineered for it and carved its own pathways toward the river system.

By the next morning, the landscape looked like something out of *War of the Worlds*: cars flipped onto their backs, others nose-down in ditches. The water had simply gone where it wanted to go. It wasn't going to be stopped as it headed for its destination, and flooding appeared in places where water simply shouldn't have been. It was a stark demonstration of what happens when development, drainage, and land management fail to account for the way water naturally moves across the landscape.

2. The fluvial flood - the rivers rise

Then came the second problem. As the Severn and Avon swelled, fluvial flooding swept across Tewkesbury and down toward Gloucester. This wasn't surface water anymore - this was the river system itself pushing back. And the volume of water converging on the Severn floodplain was more than enough to reach places that were never supposed to be touched.

This included the Mythe Water Treatment Plant.

3. The infrastructure failure - the taps run dry

The third reminder was the one nobody expected: the moment the Mythe Water Treatment Plant flooded near Tewkesbury, and the water supply for a huge part of

Gloucestershire disappeared. Not because the country lacked water, but because the infrastructure we depend on proved far less resilient than people assumed. The system lacked sufficient protection and backup to withstand an event of that scale.

The event demonstrated that water security depends not only on the availability of water itself, but also on the resilience of the infrastructure used to treat and distribute it.

For a time, it was touch-and-go whether a key Gloucester electricity substation would flood too - a possibility that could have turned a serious crisis into something far worse if the electricity supply to thousands of homes had also been cut off by the floodwaters.

As it was, people spent more than two weeks collecting bottled water and queuing at bowlers just to meet basic needs.

And that's the point

Water isn't guaranteed. It never was. It behaves according to nature, not according to whatever plan a company or a government has drawn up – even when they've already assessed or modelled the risks as they see them and have 'contingencies' baked in.

If we don't look after water, water won't look after us. It's as simple as that.

Perception is Everything

Events like Floods are hard enough to consider because they are as serious in the moment as they are no more than an afterthought once left behind.

However, what's harder to reckon with is the reality that we've allowed ourselves to drift away from our everyday relationship with water without even noticing.

Once water went behind pipes and meters, it became invisible. Once it became invisible, it became easy to treat it like a product. Once it became a product, it became something people could profit from. And once profit entered the picture, the priorities completely changed.

That's how we ended up in a situation where clean water is something you pay more for, polluted rivers are shrugged off, and reservoirs - public assets in every practical sense - can be decommissioned, repurposed, neglected, or removed from meaningful strategic use when they no longer fit a commercial model.

Anything genuinely good for us now comes with a premium label. Anything essential is treated as a revenue stream.

It's not that people stopped caring. It's that water was taken out of sight, and once it was out of sight, it was easy for the people with the wrong priorities to take control of it.

We need to bring water back into view. Back into the community. Back into the conversation.

Water belongs to the place it comes from. It should be managed in the public interest by and for the communities that depend on it.

No private interest should ever be able to decide who gets water and who doesn't. No company should be able to profit from scarcity. No shareholder should be able to dictate access to something people need every single day.

Every community should have direct access to its natural water supply. And where a community doesn't have enough, the ones that do should share. Not because it's charitable, but because that's how communities survive and support each other.

Water flows across boundaries, and our responsibility to each other should too.

This isn't ideology. It's common sense. It's fairness. It's how people have always lived when things are done properly.

Water is a natural power. It must be respected. It must be protected. It must be shared. But it must never be owned.

That's the foundation. Everything else we build has to sit on top of that.

Part II - Building Water Stewardship

If Part I was about how we drifted away from water without noticing, this part is about how we find our way back. Not through glossy strategies or distant promises, but through stewardship: the everyday responsibility of households, communities, and communities acting together.

Most people think water responsibility belongs to governments, regulators, or companies. It does not. It begins where water is actually used: the home. Every tap, every flush, every drain, every appliance is part of the relationship we either have with water or have been encouraged to forget.

Households: Restoring Water Literacy

In many homes, that relationship has almost disappeared. People often do not know where their water comes from, what happens when it leaves, how much they use, how fragile the supply is, or how their habits affect the rivers around them.

None of this is their fault - the system was designed to keep water out of sight and out of mind. But if we want communities to be resilient, households have to become water literate again.

That doesn't mean turning every kitchen into a science lab. It means understanding the basics: how water behaves in your area, what your local risks are, how much you actually use, and what small changes make a big difference.

It means noticing leaks instead of ignoring them, thinking twice about what goes down the drain, keeping a modest supply of stored water for emergencies, and treating water as something we are responsible for rather than something we simply receive.

When households do that, communities become stronger before any formal plan is written.

Communities: Protecting Local Water

A community can do what an individual household cannot. It can look after a river, protect a floodplain, restore a wetland, challenge a water company when something is wrong, protect water storage assets that should never have been lost to communities, and make decisions about land use that respect water instead of fighting it.

These are not abstract ideas. They are practical choices that make the difference between a place that copes and a place that suffers. But they only work when households are already paying attention.

Community stewardship cannot be built on household indifference.

Capability: Knowing What to Look After

Responsibility only becomes real when it turns into capability. A capable household does not need to become a bunker or a laboratory. It simply understands water well enough to make sensible choices: where it comes from, where it goes, how much is used, how problems appear, how a small emergency supply can help, and how local land behaves when it floods, dries out, or swings between the two.

A capable community builds on that awareness. It knows its rivers and streams. It knows where water gathers and where it disappears. It knows which fields act as natural floodplains, which wetlands matter, which reservoirs and storage assets are at risk, and when something is wrong: a river running low, a stream running brown, a wetland drying out, or a water asset being quietly removed from meaningful public use.

A capable community does not wait passively for someone else to fix things. It organises, restores, protects, challenges, and pays attention.

It understands that water is part of the place, and if the place is going to stay healthy, the water has to be healthy too.

Collective Action: Resilience from the Ground Up

Beyond households and individual communities sits a bigger shared responsibility: rebuilding national water storage, restoring strategic reservoirs and storage sites that were decommissioned, neglected, repurposed, or removed from public use, restoring catchments that were drained, and undoing the damage caused by decades of treating water as something to monetise rather than protect.

That cannot be done by one household or one village. It has to be done by communities acting together, because the water system is national even though water itself is local.

Households look after their own water. Communities look after their local water. Communities together look after national water.

None of these responsibilities replace the others. They stack, reinforce each other, and create resilience from the bottom up instead of pretending resilience can be delivered from the top down.

This is how we rebuild our relationship with water: from the inside out.

Part III - Reclaiming What Was Lost and Rebuilding National Resilience

Once households are paying attention and communities are organised, the national picture becomes impossible to ignore. Some of the greatest weaknesses in the water system are not natural at all. They are the result of choices made over decades.

Choices to decommission reservoirs and reduce strategic storage. Choices to neglect, repurpose, or remove water assets from meaningful public use. Choices to drain catchments. Choices to treat water infrastructure as something that could be stripped for parts or profit. Choices made by organisations that should never have been allowed that degree of control over something so essential.

The result is a country far more vulnerable than it needs to be.

Households can become water aware. Communities can protect rivers, wetlands, and floodplains. But if national storage has been hollowed out, everything sits on shaky ground. You cannot build resilience on missing infrastructure.

So this part is about putting back what was taken away.

Restoring strategic water storage isn't nostalgia. It's common sense. Many of these sites were built for a reason. They held water when rivers ran low. They protected communities during droughts. They buffered the system when demand spiked. They gave the country breathing room. When storage is decommissioned, neglected, repurposed, or allowed to fall out of strategic use, that breathing room is lost.

The same goes for catchments that were drained or abandoned. These places weren't just bits of land - they were natural storage. They held water in the soil, in the vegetation, in the landscape itself. When you remove that, you don't just lose storage. You lose stability. You lose the ability to cope with extremes. You lose the natural balance that keeps rivers flowing and communities protected.

Rebuilding national resilience is not about endless new mega-projects or pouring concrete everywhere. It is about restoring what already worked, putting back the pieces

that were removed, and recognising that water storage is not optional. It is the backbone of the whole system.

And here's the important part: this isn't something government will do on its own. It's not something companies will volunteer for. It's something communities will have to push for, together.

When enough communities say "we need strategic water storage restored", things start to move.

When enough communities say "stop treating public water assets as disposable", things change.

When enough communities say "restore the catchments you drained", the pressure becomes impossible to ignore.

National resilience does not come from the top alone. It grows from the ground up, through people who refuse to let essential infrastructure be treated as disposable property.

This part of the blueprint is about that refusal: reclaiming what was lost, rebuilding the foundation that households and communities depend on, and making sure the country never again finds itself one flooded treatment works away from crisis.

Part IV - The Future We Choose

By this point, the picture is clear. We know how we lost sight of water. We know how stewardship begins at home, grows through communities, and becomes powerful when communities act together. We know what needs to be reclaimed and rebuilt.

So the last part is really about choice.

None of this happens automatically. It will not happen because a company suddenly discovers a conscience, or because a government writes another strategy, or because people wait quietly for someone else to act.

It happens when people decide they are no longer willing to live in a country where water is treated as a commodity, rivers are treated as drains, reservoirs disappear from public life, scarcity is managed as a commercial problem rather than a shared risk, and resilience is only discussed after a crisis.

It happens because communities decide they want something better.

And the future splits into two very different paths.

One path is the one we are already on: more shortages, more pollution, more rivers running dry, more water storage disappearing from public life, higher bills, greater

dependence on fragile infrastructure, more moments like Gloucestershire 2007, and more people realising too late that water was never guaranteed.

The other path is the one we build ourselves: households that understand water, communities that protect it, catchments restored, wetlands revived, floodplains respected, strategic storage rebuilt, water companies held to account, and water treated as a natural power rather than a product.

That future isn't perfect. But it's stable. It's fair. It's resilient. It's something you can pass on to the next generation without apologising for what was left behind.

It starts with a simple decision: to stop assuming water will always be there, and to start treating it as something worth looking after.

Everything in this blueprint comes down to that choice. Not a dramatic one. Not a political one. A human one.

Do we keep drifting? Or do we pay attention?

Do we let water be something sold back to us? Or do we take back what should never have been lost?

Do we wait for another crisis? Or do we build resilience now, while we still can?

The future isn't written. But the direction is ours to set.

And if we choose the right one, we end up with something simple and powerful:

Water we can trust.

Water We Can Trust: Governance, Delivery and Operation

Introduction

The purpose of Water We Can Trust is not simply to change who owns water infrastructure. It is to change the relationship between people, communities, and water itself.

The previous documents established three things.

First, that water is a natural power, not a product.

Second, that responsibility for water begins with households and grows outward through communities and ultimately across the nation.

Third, that resilience depends on stewardship, capability, and long-term thinking rather than profit extraction and short-term economics.

This document explains how those principles are put into practice.

It describes how Water We Can Trust is governed, funded, operated, maintained, and protected.

Part I - The Principle of Subsidiarity

The central organising principle of Water We Can Trust is simple:

The people most directly affected by water decisions should have the greatest influence over them.

Water management should happen at the lowest practical level.

National decisions should only occur when genuinely national coordination is required.

Regional decisions should only occur when communities cannot reasonably act alone.

Everything else should remain local.

This creates accountability, transparency, and connection between people and the water they depend upon.

Part II - The Four Layers of Stewardship

Water We Can Trust operates through four connected layers.

Layer One: Households

Households remain the foundation of resilience.

Their responsibilities include:

- understanding local water sources
- using water responsibly
- reporting leaks
- avoiding unnecessary pollutants
- maintaining basic emergency reserves
- participating in water literacy initiatives

Households do not manage infrastructure.

Their role is awareness, preparedness, and participation.

Layer Two: Community Stewardship

Every community forms a Water Stewardship Board.

These boards are responsible for:

- local monitoring
- catchment protection
- community engagement
- resilience planning
- environmental restoration
- safeguarding local water assets

Board meetings are open.

Financial records are public.

No profits may be extracted.

No private ownership interests may dominate decision making.

The purpose of stewardship boards is guardianship, not administration for its own sake.

Layer Three: Regional Coordination

Water crosses boundaries.

Aquifers serve multiple settlements.

Rivers flow through numerous communities.

Reservoirs often support entire regions.

For this reason, neighbouring communities form Regional Water Partnerships.

Their role is to coordinate:

- drought management
- flood response
- major infrastructure
- technical expertise
- inter-community water sharing
- emergency planning

Regional structures exist to support communities, not replace them.

Layer Four: National Resilience

Certain responsibilities must remain national.

These include:

- water quality standards
- emergency coordination
- scientific research
- climate modelling
- national infrastructure planning
- strategic water storage
- long-term resilience forecasting

National bodies exist to provide support, standards, and coordination.

They do not exist to centralise control.

Part III - Ownership and Public Trust

Water itself cannot be owned.

Infrastructure can only be held in trust.

Major water assets include:

- reservoirs
- treatment works
- pumping stations
- strategic pipelines

- emergency storage systems
- major catchment infrastructure

These assets are held for public benefit.

They cannot be:

- sold for profit
- used as speculative investments
- leveraged as financial assets
- stripped for short-term gain

Water infrastructure exists to provide resilience and security.

Its purpose is service.

Part IV - Professional Expertise

Stewardship does not mean amateur management.

Water systems are complex.

They require:

- engineers
- treatment operators
- hydrologists
- ecologists
- planners
- scientists
- maintenance teams

These professionals remain essential.

Water We Can Trust does not remove expertise from the system.

It changes who that expertise serves.

Professionals serve the public interest and support community stewardship rather than shareholder returns.

National standards remain rigorous.

Public safety remains paramount.

Part V - Funding the System

Water systems require investment.

Pipes require maintenance.

Reservoirs require upkeep.

Treatment works require skilled operation.

Funding therefore remains essential.

Revenue can be generated through:

- service charges
- infrastructure contributions
- resilience funds
- environmental restoration programmes
- public investment

The key principle is simple:

Money raised through water remains within the water system.

No dividends.

No extraction.

No financial engineering.

No transfer of public value into private gain.

Every pound collected serves resilience, maintenance, improvement, or restoration.

Part VI - Transparency and Accountability

Trust requires visibility.

Communities should always know:

- the condition of their infrastructure
- local water quality
- leakage levels
- storage capacity
- planned investments
- pollution incidents

- resilience risks

Annual reports must be publicly available.

Meetings must be open.

Independent audits must be mandatory.

Commercial confidentiality must never be used to conceal failures affecting public water security.

Part VII - Responding to Failure

No system is perfect.

Failures will occur.

The difference is how they are handled.

Where stewardship bodies fail:

- independent reviews are triggered
- improvement plans are implemented
- external support is deployed
- temporary administration may be introduced when necessary

The goal is always restoration of effective local stewardship.

Intervention exists to protect communities, not to permanently remove local responsibility.

Part VIII - Drought, Flood, and Emergency Planning

Water We Can Trust treats resilience as a permanent responsibility.

Every community must maintain plans for:

- drought
- flooding
- contamination incidents
- infrastructure failure
- temporary loss of supply

Preparedness includes:

- restored reservoirs
- healthy catchments

- protected wetlands
- emergency storage
- mutual aid agreements
- coordinated response procedures

The objective is simple:

When disruption occurs, communities cope rather than collapse.

Part IX - The Transition

The move toward Water We Can Trust cannot happen overnight.

It must happen in stages.

Stage One: Visibility

Full transparency of water assets, infrastructure, storage, and resilience.

Stage Two: Community Capacity

Creation of stewardship boards and water literacy programmes.

Stage Three: Asset Protection

Prevention of further loss of storage, catchments, reservoirs, and strategic infrastructure.

Stage Four: Restoration

Recovery of degraded rivers, wetlands, reservoirs, and natural storage systems.

Stage Five: Resilience

Full operation of a stewardship-based system capable of supporting future generations.

Conclusion

Water We Can Trust is neither a return to the past nor an extension of the present.

It is a practical framework for reconnecting people with the water they depend upon.

It combines household responsibility, community stewardship, professional expertise, regional cooperation, and national resilience.

It recognises that water is too important to be managed purely for profit, too essential to be neglected, and too fundamental to be treated as just another commodity.

The purpose is not control.

The purpose is trust.

The goal is not ownership.

The goal is stewardship.

And the outcome is simple:

Water that is respected. Water that is protected. Water that is shared. Water We Can Trust.

Water We Can Trust | Conclusion

This series began with a simple observation: the things most essential to life are often the things we think about least.

Water is one of them.

For generations, we have benefited from systems that delivered water so reliably that many of us stopped noticing it altogether. We stopped seeing the rivers, reservoirs, wetlands, catchments, pipes, treatment works, and people that make modern life possible. We stopped thinking about where water comes from, where it goes, and what happens when the systems supporting it begin to fail.

The result is not simply a technical problem. It is a relationship problem.

We have become disconnected from something fundamental to our survival.

That disconnect has consequences. It makes it easier to neglect infrastructure. Easier to tolerate pollution. Easier to overlook diminishing resilience. Easier to accept the idea that water is just another commodity, another service, another invoice arriving through the letterbox.

But water is none of those things.

Water is a natural power. It sustains life, shapes landscapes, supports communities, and underpins every other system we depend upon. Without reliable access to clean water, nothing else functions for long.

That understanding sits at the heart of Water We Can Trust.

Throughout this series, we have explored how our relationship with water has changed, why stewardship matters, how responsibility begins at home and grows outward through communities, and how resilience can be rebuilt through local knowledge, shared responsibility, professional expertise, and long-term thinking.

The purpose has never been to create another slogan or another policy platform.

The purpose has been to propose a different way of thinking.

A way of thinking that sees water as something to be protected rather than exploited.

A way of thinking that values stewardship over extraction.

A way of thinking that prioritises resilience over short-term gain.

A way of thinking that places communities closer to the resources upon which they depend.

Most importantly, it is a way of thinking that recognises trust must be earned.

Water systems deserve trust when they are transparent. When they are resilient. When they are accountable. When they exist to serve people and places rather than distant interests. When communities understand them, participate in them, and help protect them.

The future described throughout these documents is not inevitable.

Neither is the alternative.

We can continue to drift, assuming that water will always be available, always be affordable, and always be someone else's responsibility.

Or we can choose a different path.

We can rebuild our understanding of water.

We can strengthen our households, communities, and infrastructure.

We can restore the rivers, wetlands, catchments, and reservoirs that support us.

We can create systems designed not only to meet today's needs but to endure for generations.

The choice is ultimately a simple one.

Will we treat water as a commodity to be managed?

Or as a shared foundation of life to be respected, protected, and passed on?

The answer to that question will shape far more than our water systems. It will shape the resilience of our communities, the health of our environment, and the legacy we leave behind.

Water We Can Trust is not the end of that conversation.

It is the beginning.

Because the goal has always been simple:

Water that is respected.

Water that is protected.

Water that is shared.

Water We Can Trust | Executive Summary

Water We Can Trust is a series of documents exploring how society can rebuild a healthier, more resilient relationship with water.

The series begins from a simple principle:

Water is a natural power, not a product.

Water is essential to life, public health, food production, communities, and the natural environment. Yet modern society has largely become disconnected from where water comes from, how it is managed, and how vulnerable the systems that support it can be.

This disconnect has contributed to declining resilience, environmental degradation, infrastructure neglect, and a growing tendency to treat water primarily as an economic commodity rather than a shared public necessity.

The purpose of Water We Can Trust is to propose an alternative approach based on stewardship, responsibility, transparency, resilience, and community participation.

The series argues that:

- Water should be respected, protected, and shared.
- Access to clean, safe water should be universal and reliable.
- Communities should play a central role in protecting and stewarding local water resources.
- Households should become more water literate and resilient.
- Rivers, wetlands, catchments, and reservoirs should be restored and protected.
- Water infrastructure should exist to serve people and places, not profit extraction.
- Long-term resilience should be prioritised over short-term economic interests.

The series is structured in four parts:

Part One: Why Water We Can Trust examines the challenges facing modern water systems and the growing risks associated with complacency, underinvestment, and the commercialisation of essential resources.

Part Two: What Water We Can Trust Means defines the principles, values, and policy commitments that underpin the Water We Can Trust approach.

Part Three: The Water We Can Trust Blueprint explores how responsibility for water begins with households, extends through communities, and contributes to wider national resilience.

Part Four: Governance, Delivery and Operation sets out how a stewardship-based water system could function in practice through community governance, professional expertise, transparent funding, regional coordination, and long-term infrastructure planning.

Taken together, these documents present a vision for a future in which water is treated as a shared foundation of life rather than merely a utility, and where resilient communities play an active role in safeguarding one of society's most essential resources.

Water We Can Trust | Key Points Summary

1. Water is a Natural Power, Not a Product

The series is built around a single foundational principle:

Water should be respected, protected, and shared rather than treated as a commodity for profit.

Water is essential to life and should not be viewed primarily through commercial, financial, or market-based interests.

2. Society Has Become Disconnected from Water

Modern water systems have made water largely invisible.

Most people:

- Don't know where their water comes from.
- Don't know where it goes.
- Don't understand how vulnerable supplies can be.
- Assume water will always be available.

This disconnect has weakened public awareness, stewardship, and resilience.

3. Water Security Is as Important as Food Security

Reliable access to water underpins:

- Public health
- Food production
- Economic activity
- Environmental health
- Community resilience

When water systems fail, the impacts are immediate and far-reaching.

4. Responsibility Starts at Home

Water stewardship begins with individuals and households.

Capable households:

- Understand their local water sources.
- Use water responsibly.

- Recognise leaks and waste.
- Avoid unnecessary pollution.
- Maintain basic emergency preparedness.
- Develop water literacy.

5. Communities Are the Natural Stewards of Water

Communities are best placed to:

- Protect local rivers and streams.
- Restore wetlands and floodplains.
- Challenge harmful decisions.
- Monitor environmental health.
- Safeguard local water assets.

The people closest to the water should have the strongest voice in its care and management.

6. Resilience Must Be Rebuilt from the Ground Up

The series argues that resilience is created through:

- Informed households
- Capable communities
- Cooperation between communities
- National support and coordination

Resilience is strongest when responsibility is distributed rather than concentrated.

7. Natural Water Systems Must Be Restored

Key priorities include:

- Restoring wetlands
- Rebuilding catchments
- Protecting aquifers
- Respecting floodplains
- Improving river health
- Recovering natural water storage

Healthy landscapes are seen as part of the water system itself.

8. Water Infrastructure Exists to Serve People

Water infrastructure should be managed for:

- Reliability
- Resilience
- Public benefit
- Long-term sustainability

Rather than:

- Short-term profit
- Asset extraction
- Financial speculation

9. Professional Expertise Remains Essential

The series does not reject technical expertise.

Engineers, scientists, operators, hydrologists, and planners remain critical.

The argument is that expertise should serve communities and water security rather than shareholder returns.

10. Governance Should Be Local Where Possible

The proposed model operates across four levels:

1. Households
2. Communities
3. Regional partnerships
4. National resilience institutions

Decision-making should occur as close as possible to the people affected by it.

11. Transparency and Accountability Are Essential

Water systems should provide:

- Open reporting
- Public accounts
- Infrastructure transparency

- Water quality information
- Independent oversight

Trust depends upon visibility and accountability.

12. The Future Is a Choice

The series concludes that society faces two paths:

- Continue treating water as a commodity while accepting increasing fragility and dependence.
- Rebuild a culture of stewardship, resilience, and community responsibility.

The central message throughout the series is simple:

Water should be respected, protected, shared, and trusted.

Water We Can Trust | Key Messages in Brief

Core Principle

Water is a natural power, not a product.

The Problem

- Society has become disconnected from water.
- Water has become invisible, commodified, and taken for granted.
- Resilience has been weakened by neglect, underinvestment, and profit-driven priorities.
- Water security is as important as food security.

The Vision

- Clean, safe water should be available to everyone.
- Water should be respected, protected, and shared.
- Water should never be treated primarily as a financial asset.
- Communities should have a meaningful relationship with the water they depend upon.

The Foundation

Responsibility starts at home.

Capable households:

- Understand their water.
- Use it responsibly.
- Avoid waste and pollution.
- Prepare for emergencies.
- Develop water literacy.

The Community Role

Communities are the natural stewards of water.

Communities should:

- Protect rivers and streams.
- Restore wetlands and floodplains.

- Safeguard local water assets.
- Monitor environmental health.
- Build local resilience.

The National Role

Resilience must be rebuilt from the ground up.

This includes:

- Restoring reservoirs.
- Protecting catchments.
- Rebuilding storage capacity.
- Improving drought resilience.
- Improving flood resilience.

Governance Principles

- Local decision-making wherever possible.
- Regional coordination where necessary.
- National support for strategic resilience.
- Open reporting and transparency.
- Accountability at every level.

Professional Expertise

- Engineers, scientists, and operators remain essential.
- Expertise serves communities and resilience.
- Safety and quality standards remain high.

Funding Principle

Money raised through water stays within the water system.

Funds support:

- Infrastructure
- Maintenance
- Restoration
- Resilience

- Emergency preparedness

The Long-Term Goal

To create a society where:

- Households understand water.
- Communities protect water.
- Infrastructure supports resilience.
- Natural systems are restored.
- Future generations inherit water systems they can trust.

In One Sentence

Water We Can Trust is a stewardship-based vision for rebuilding resilient communities and resilient water systems through responsibility, transparency, local involvement, and long-term care of one of life's most essential resources.

Disclaimer

This work reflects the author's observations, experiences, and interpretations of water-related events and infrastructure challenges. It is not a technical manual, nor a substitute for professional advice in areas such as flood risk, water management, or emergency planning.

Although care has been taken to ensure accuracy, water systems are complex and constantly evolving, and readers should verify information independently where necessary.

The author and publisher accept no responsibility for any actions taken on the basis of this material.

Further Information

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