

# Oxford & Grand Union Water Resource Position Statement 25/09/2025

## Background

The Oxford & Grand Union Canals Hydrological Unit (Ox&GU) comprises: the North Oxford Canal, Coventry & Ashby Canal, the South Oxford Canal as far as Nell Bridge Lock, the Leicester Line as far as Kings Lock, the Northampton Arm and the Grand Union Canal from Radford Bottom Lock to Cosgrove Lock. Water resources to support canal demand in this hydrological unit include gravity feed from ten reservoirs, controlled and uncontrolled feeds from surface water sources, and discharges of treated sewage effluent. There are also a series of back pumps to transfer water throughout the hydrological unit as and when required. There are numerous abstraction licences in place which authorise, but also limit, water resource supply to the hydrological unit from adjacent streams/watercourses.

Over Easter 2025, all reservoirs within the Ox&GU were either full or near full. However, the exceptionally dry spring, which continued into the summer months, has caused the exceptionally poor water resource situation that has resulted in disruption to navigation across the Trust's network, including the Ox&GU. From the start of the main boating season, reservoir holdings fell quicker than normal. Measures were put in place to conserve available water resources for as long as possible. As reservoir holdings reduced, areas of navigation restrictions widened, and lock operating hours were further constrained, until the Ox&GU network was fully closed to navigation from 25th August.

The prolonged period of dry weather ended at the end of August and, at the time of writing, September monthly rainfall totals have already exceeded monthly averages. However, despite the return of wetter weather, the underlying conditions remain impacted by the previous dry weather. Soils are still dry and river baseflows remain low. As such, the Environment Agency has retained the West Midlands and East Midlands regions in 'Drought' status, whilst the Anglian Region remains in 'Prolonged Dry Weather' status.

## Current canal water resources position

Table 1 presents the current water levels (in metres below top water level, megalitres\*, and percentage holdings) for reservoirs supplying the Ox&GU canal network, in comparison against maximum holdings and levels in late August. \*Megalitre (MI), one million litres.

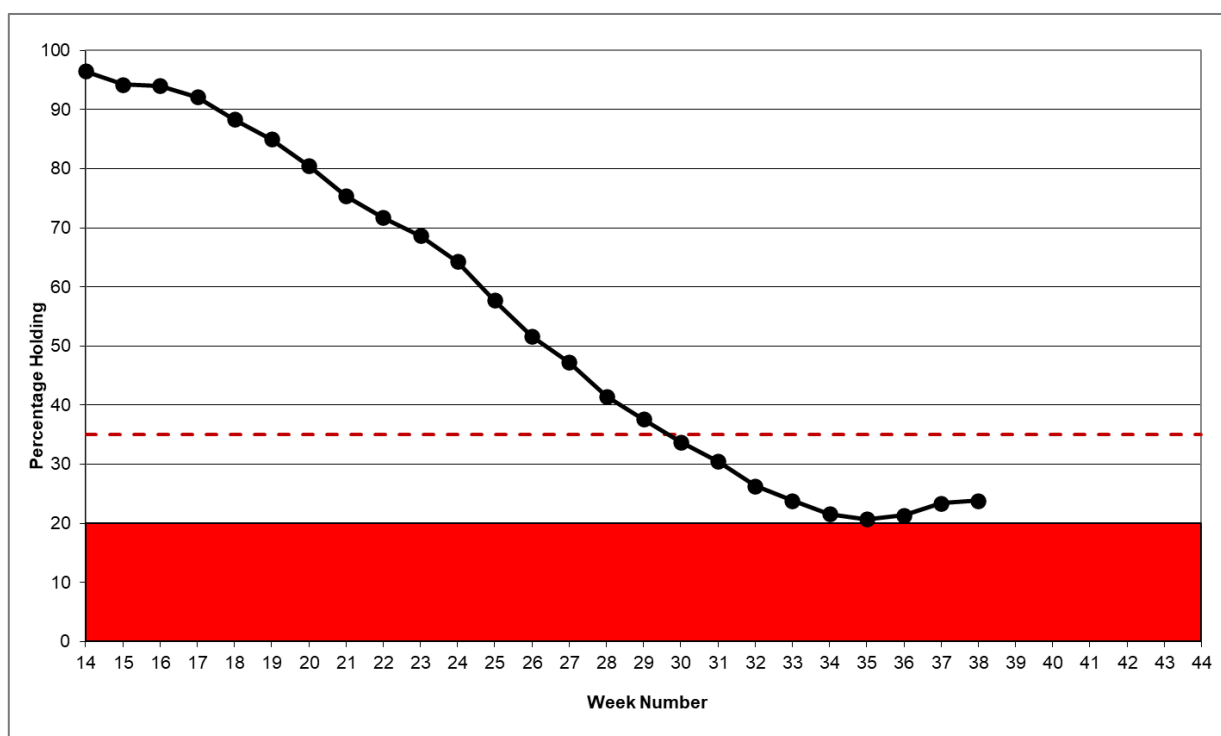
*Table 1: Ox&GU Reservoir Levels and Holdings*

Reservoir	Max Holding (MI)	25 August			22 September		
		Reservoir Level (m Below Top Water Level)	Holding (MI)	Holding (%of total)	Reservoir Level (m Below Top Water Level)	Holding (MI)	Holding (% of total)
Daventry	970	-3.1	276	28	-2.6	357	37
Drayton	354	-2.2	145	41	-1.8	180	51
Boddington	859	-2.8	147	17	-2.7	159	18
Wormleighton	80	-2.2	14	18	-2.2	14	18
Clattercote	241	-3.2	90	37	-3.2	90	37
Napton	161	-1.2	83	52	-1.8	51	32

Reservoir	Max Holding (MI)	25 August			22 September		
		Reservoir Level (m Below Top Water Level)	Holding (MI)	Holding (% of total)	Reservoir Level (m Below Top Water Level)	Holding (MI)	Holding (% of total)
Welford	310	-4.0	48	15	-4.1	47	15
Sulby	339	-3.0	41	12	-2.7	29	9
Naseby	962	-3.6	180	19	-4.1	118	12
Saddington	472	-3.6	115	24	-3.6	119	25

The percentage holding in the Ox&GU reservoir group is presented in Figure 1.

*Figure 1: Ox&GU Reservoir percentage holding*



As of 22 September, the Ox&GU reservoir group is currently 26% full. This is significantly below the long-term average for this time of year of 54%.

It is important to note that not all water in our reservoirs is available to feed the canal network. Some water has to be retained in reservoirs to maintain the reservoir environment. In addition, even a closed canal has water resource demands such as evaporation, seepage and transpiration, and flow required for environmental reasons and to protect the canal infrastructure. The Trust also must remain compliant with environmental legislation in place to protect rivers and streams for environmental harm. As such, the Ox&GU was closed when the reservoir group was 30% full.

Since the canal has been closed, and despite recent rainfall and minimal feed to the canals, there has been little to no recovery in reservoir water levels since the closure.

Currently, three reservoirs - Boddington, Wormleighton and Sulby - still have no usable storage to feed the network. In addition, six others have only minimal water reserves, insufficient to sustain navigation over an extended period.

Daventry is the only reservoir in the hydrological unit that has seen reasonable improvements in levels and holdings (rising from -3.1m in late August to -2.6 m in late September). This is because it receives its water via drainage from the urbanised town, which has been responsive following recent heavy storms. As such, Daventry remains the only reservoir with a meaningful volume of usable water (261 MI). This water is expected to play a key role in supporting the reopening of the Ox&GU network allowing a period of navigation before the start of the winter stoppage season.

## Prospects

Based on the current water resource position and anticipated increase in rainfall over the coming weeks, the Trust is hopeful that the current closures will be lifted to allow for navigation before the commencement of the stoppage season in November. The water available from Daventry Reservoir, in the geographical centre of the hydrological unit, is helpful. Canals downstream of the Braunston Summit will have easier access to this water. Elsewhere, backpumping systems can move water up lock flights in specific locations. However, not all canals in the hydrological unit can benefit from this water. As such, the reopening will be split, based on access to water as follows:

The Grand Union mainline from Radford to Cosgrove, North Oxford and Coventry & Ashby to Glascote, and Napton/Marston Doles will reopen on Friday 10 October until Sunday 2 November (inclusive). Overnight restrictions will remain in place, Timings and detail of passage can be found on the notice on our webpage.

The Leicester Line, Northampton Arm and South Oxford south of Claydon will reopen from Monday 27 October to Sunday 2 November (inclusive). The pounds along these sections of canal will be more susceptible to failing water levels as they are further away from the Braunston Summit reservoirs, so the reopening window is shorter. Overnight restrictions will also be in place, with timings to be confirmed. It is strongly advised that customers consult the [notices and stoppages webpage](#) when planning their journey to ensure they have enough time to navigate through restricted sections of the network.

The reopening described above is dependent on no other unforeseen issues emerging, and details may be amended. We will review plans closely between now and 10 October, and if improved forecasts allow reopening sooner we will do that. In addition, continued navigation from Monday 3 November will be reviewed (subject to winter stoppages) in due course.

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