

# An update on the Hastings burst main

May 2-7, 2024



**Key**

Incident developments

Southern Water response

Customer support

## What happened – step by step

### Thursday 2 May

Early in the morning, we became aware of a possible burst on a water main feeding our Beauport Water Supply Works in Hastings. Our Control Centre knew there was a problem and could see the nearby Baldslow reservoir had started to empty. This was confirmed at around 03:45 when our Beauport works shut down.

An incident team was quickly set up, and by 07:00 it had raised a high-level alert as a potential 47,000 properties were now at risk of losing supply.

Our response teams immediately started the process to set up local bottled water stations and our water tankers were dispatched to care homes, local emergency services and the local hospital.

At around 07:45 our incident team held its first call. As the incident had been escalated to Gold, our highest level, our Executive team were alerted, and meetings were set up to take place every two hours. The Local Resilience Forum (LRF) – including Local Authority and Emergency Services teams – was also notified at this point.

At around 09:30am deliveries began to around 4,100 customers on our Priority Services Register, although this list was quickly expanded by the LRF teams, and added to throughout the incident.

#### Key fact

**We averaged about 9,450 PSR deliveries per day and 1.29 million litres of bottled water were delivered to PSR customers in total.**

By 10:00 we had teams walking the length of the nine-mile-long main to pinpoint the leak. An Environment team was also sent to site, as location was surrounded by thick woodland. By 15:00 the leak was located in Keeper's Wood, sadly more than 45 mins walk from the nearest access point.

At 17:00, the first two bottled water stations were opened at Asda and Tesco in St Leonards-on-Sea, three hours before any of our customers lost supply. By 19:00 a third was opened at Sea Road, Hastings.

Work continued at the site of the leak, and by 20:00 around 50 trees had been cleared to access the repair site and the dig down to water main could begin. This work continued overnight.

#### Key fact

**The Environment Agency and Natural England were consulted about the removal of the trees on site, and every effort was made to work around sensitive areas.**

### Friday 3 May

All three bottled water stations reopened at 07:00 and stayed open until 21:00.

Work continued at the site of the burst, with the clearance of the area and the four-metre-deep dig needed to reach the pipe taking around 29 hours in total. The repair could now start and, again, this work continued overnight.

### Saturday 4 May

The on-site team finished the repair on the water main at around 06:30, and we were able to begin to slowly recharge the network and our Beauport Water Supply Works. Recharge continued into the evening.

All three existing bottled water stations reopened at 08:00 and a fourth site was added at Hastings Academy on Rye Road at 12:00.

#### Key fact

**21 water tankers injected more than nine million litres of water into the network while we carried out the repair, as a result only 31,793 out of a possible 47,000 customer homes and businesses were impacted.**

At around 23:00 water had flowed through to Beauport and the on-site team could begin the flush through of the works to remove any possible risk of debris from the repair affecting water quality. This process continued overnight.

### Sunday 5 May

With water now flowing through to site, we were able to restart Beauport at around 07:30 while we continued to sample water quality at both Baldslow reservoir and the Beauport Supply Works. We must do this after any repair and restart of our works to check that strict water quality levels are being met before any water is put back into supply.

### Monday 6 May

This sampling of water continued at both the reservoir and water supply works throughout the day. Water supplies started to return in some areas.

### Tuesday 7 May

While water supplies were returned to around 30,000 properties, we kept the three original bottled water stations open at Asda, Tesco and Sea Road, with Hastings Academy closing as children returned to school.

By 12pm a fourth station was opened at Pelham Place Car Park, Carlisle Parade.

### Wednesday 8 May

We had a few small bursts to fix in the Clifton Road area as water flowed back through the network, but these were completed by 02:30 and all customers were back on mains supply.

#### Key fact

**More than 770,000 litres of water were delivered to 44 care homes, five emergency services, 24 schools, five farms and Conquest Hospital.**

## What caused the burst?

The length of main that burst on Thursday 2 May is concrete cast, which simply means it is encased by a layer of concrete. When the burst was found, there was visible water damage to the concrete shell, which will have caused water to leak through to the main causing erosion on the pipe over time.

**We're looking at the overall resilience of all of our sites and networks in Hastings and the surrounding area, and replacing these strategic mains is a key focus of our plans for the next investment period from 2025–30; we want to target these potential points of failure on our network so our customers don't suffer outages of this scale in the future.**

## What have we done to improve our response?

### Looking after our customers in vulnerable circumstances:

We know that there were some delays to our Priority Services deliveries during this latest incident in Hastings, and we apologise to those customers affected. We started off with a list of about 4,100 customers, and this quickly grew with us delivering bottled water to around 9,450 homes per day.

An investigation is continuing into the theft of some of the deliveries made by our teams. We're also working with local charities and support groups to improve the process by which we share data about those in need of support.

We have been actively promoting and expanding our Priority Services register, and the services we offer to customers that need our support during an emergency. For example, during 2023 we set up a partnership with Kidney Care UK, introducing a clearly defined incident process for those registered as receiving home dialysis.

The number of people on our Priority Services Register is 235,901 (2022–23: 166,384) representing 12% of households across our region.

### Improving our communications:

We have increased the number of people working on our communications during incidents in recent months, which means we're getting more updates out than ever before via text local media and social media.

During the Hastings incident we sent 660,000 text messages, posted 29 web updates, 88 update posts over X (Twitter) and Facebook and responded to more than 50 media enquiries – both regional and national.

We have also recruited a new media agency who helped us gather photography and film footage on site, as the repair was happening, so we could keep you informed at every stage of the repair.

These updates were also shared with local stakeholders via email with additional calls set up with interested MPs and councillors.

### Bottled water stations and tankers:

We have 646 pre-approved locations to be used as Bottled Water Stations. A total of 127 of these are "supersites" which means they are capable of being opened as multi-lane sites.

We have six of our own clean water tankers and a further eight available to us through our partners at Water Direct. Our tankers were used to keep schools and hospitals in supply throughout the incident.



We also had a further seven tankers called in to support deliveries and injection of water into the network – a number of these were offered by our neighbouring water companies.

We have set up dedicated 'on-call' rotas to man these stations during an incident so we're always able to set them up as quickly as possible.

## Key fact

**A total of 13,132,663 litres of this 'alternative' water was provided during the incident.**

## Giving back to the community in Hastings

Businesses and community groups in the Hastings area will benefit from a £1 million goodwill fund following this incident.

This donation is in recognition of the disruption and distress caused, and comes amid ongoing efforts to prevent a further weather-related flooding incident in Hastings town centre, following two events in 2023.

The £1m goodwill fund includes:

- £120,000 for local festivals and events
- £500,000 for community projects, allocated with the support of local partners
- £380,000 to support businesses.

All businesses who may benefit will be contacted directly, and community recipients will be engaged with via Southern Water partners in the coming weeks.