

SNOWS Applicant User Guide

March 2025

This document provides guidance to applicants seeking to use the Sussex North Offsetting Water Scheme (SNOWS) to meet the offsetting needs for their development. It provides an overview of which developments can request access to SNOWS and how these will be prioritised, how to apply for SNOWS access, information requirements for planning applications and SNOWS applications, how the SNOWS process works and associated deadlines, and the cost for SNOWS access.

Further information and guidance about the SNOWS scheme is available via the [SNOWS web page](#). You can also contact the SNOWS team via SNOWS@horsham.gov.uk.

This guidance relates only to the SNOWS application process. If you have any queries related to the planning application process and water neutrality, we recommend that you refer to [FAQs on Horsham District Council's website](#) and/or contact your local planning department directly.

Contents

- Applications that can access SNOWS 2
- Outline planning applications..... 2
- When to apply for SNOWS access..... 2
- SNOWS information to submit with planning applications 3
- SNOWS application process and deadlines 3
- Money laundering checks – information to be provided 4
- Application prioritisation for SNOWS access 4

Applications that can access SNOWS

Our definition for the applications that can access SNOWS is provided below.

If your application meets this definition, you are open to requesting access to SNOWS during the planning application process.

If your application does not meet this definition, you cannot request access to SNOWS and will need to find an alternative solution to meet your application's water offsetting needs.

If you are unsure whether your application meets the SNOWS access definition, please contact the local authority Development Management team relevant to your application, who will be able to provide you with further advice.

Applications submitted via West Sussex County Council's (WSCC) Regulation 3 (for infrastructure related development) will follow a different SNOWS process offering secured access. If your application will be submitted as Regulation 3, please discuss SNOWS access with the Development Management team at WSCC.

SNOWS access definition

Applicants will be able to access SNOWS for their development's water offsetting needs, unless it is:

1. Development where the principle is not in accordance with an adopted development plan or neighbourhood plan, or a post-submission local plan (all of which have informed the preparation of Southern Water's Water Resources Management Plan 2024 calculations of water demand). This includes housing development outside settlement boundaries on unallocated sites, employment development on unallocated sites and/or outside of existing employment sites (unless supported by economic planning policies), or development not otherwise accepted in-principle by way of specific development plan policies – such policies include: retirement and specialist care, gypsy and traveller sites, tourism, and some minerals and waste development; and/or
2. Development permitted by virtue of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (or as subsequently amended) (GPDO)*

** Excluding applications submitted to SNOWS for development by a local authority (as defined in Schedule 2, Part 12 of the GPDO)*

Outline planning applications

Applications will only be allocated to available capacity in SNOWS following Full or Reserved Matters approval. Applications will not be allocated to available SNOWS capacity following approval of Outline planning applications.

Outline sites intending to use SNOWS will need to request access at the Outline application stage, as long as they meet the [SNOWS access definition](#), but SNOWS capacity will not be allocated until Reserved Matters applications linked to the Outline application are submitted.

When to apply for SNOWS access

Currently, you can only request access to SNOWS at the planning application stage by indicating in your Water Neutrality Statement that you wish to access SNOWS to cover your application's water offsetting needs. Your application must meet the [SNOWS access definition](#).

Once the SNOWS team is consulted with your application by the relevant local authority Development Management team, we will contact you directly to discuss your SNOWS access.

SNOWS information to submit with planning applications

Any information to support your SNOWS application should be included in the Water Neutrality Statement (WNS) submitted with your planning application. Any requirements listed below are in addition to any requirements set by the relevant Development Management team for information to be included in any WNS.

You will need to provide a value in litres per day (l/d) for the water offsetting need for the application. This will allow us to determine the SNOWS allocation you require and your cost for SNOWS access. Development Management case officers will not consult SNOWS until these offsetting figures are finalised.

We will also require the contact details, at least a contact name and e-mail address, of the person we should contact to initiate the SNOWS application process.

To support the prioritisation of your application for SNOWS access, you should also make the information below readily available for SNOWS your WNS. Further details can be found in the [application prioritisation](#) section of this guide.

- The water efficiency achieved on-site for your development.
- The policy compliance of any affordable housing element of the proposal (*for residential applications only*).
- If your application provides community services or other infrastructure supporting development (*for non-residential applications only*).

SNOWS application process and deadlines

The SNOWS application process works in the following way:

1. A planning application is submitted to the relevant local authority Development Management (DM) team, including a Water Neutrality Statement (WNS) that indicates an intention to use SNOWS to cover the application's water offsetting needs. To support the SNOWS application process, the WNS should include the information identified in the [previous section](#) of this guide.
2. Your DM case officer will assess and validate the information submitted in your application and WNS. Once the case officer is satisfied with the water neutrality information submitted, they will prepare an Appropriate Assessment (AA) as part of the Habitats Regulations requirements. The case officer will consult Natural England and SNOWS with the AA.
3. Once SNOWS receives the consultation from the relevant DM team, we will log the application details into our central SNOWS register. We will then score your application using our [prioritisation system](#). This score will determine your application's place in our prioritisation queue. We will assess whether your application can secure SNOWS access depending on the current capacity within SNOWS.
4. If your application can access SNOWS, we will write to you setting out our access offer and we will advise your DM case officer that your application is able to access SNOWS. If your application cannot access SNOWS at the current time, we will write to you and your DM case officer to advise. Your application will remain in the prioritisation queue as long as the planning application remains live and should the access availability position change, we will notify you and your DM case officer.
5. Our offer letter for SNOWS access will include the SNOWS allocation required for your application (your offsetting requirement in litres per day) and the cost for SNOWS access. The letter will set out

the next steps of the application process and our terms & conditions will be included. The letter will also detail the documentation you will be required to send to SNOWS to comply with money laundering checks (see also the [money laundering information for SNOWS applications](#) section below). You are required to confirm your acceptance of the terms set out to secure your access to SNOWS – we must receive this within **14 days** of the date of the offer letter, otherwise your access request will be forfeited and your access allocation will be offered to another application.

6. Once you have confirmed your SNOWS access, we will send you a letter to confirm your access. This will include an invoice for the payment for your SNOWS access. This invoice must only be paid after you have received planning permission for your application.
7. The confirmation letter will also advise that you must secure your planning permission within **6 months** from the date of confirming your SNOWS access. If this time limit is approaching and you have not secured your permission, we recommend you speak to your DM case officer to liaise with the SNOWS team. However, in most cases, if you have not secured planning permission within 6 months, your access request will be forfeited and your access allocation will be offered to another application.
8. Once you have secured planning permission for your application, you must pay the invoice for your SNOWS access costs within **12 weeks**. Failure to pay the invoice in time risks your access request being forfeited and your access allocation offered to another application.
9. After we receive the payment for your SNOWS access, we will send you a Final SNOWS Certificate which will indicate that your application has been allocated to available capacity in SNOWS. You can use this final certificate to discharge the SNOWS obligations of a water neutrality condition on a planning permission.

Money laundering checks – information to be provided

As part of your SNOWS application, you will need to provide the information below prior to or at the same time as paying your SNOWS access cost invoice to enable us to carry out necessary money laundering checks, unless you have previously used SNOWS in the last 5 years. We recommend providing this information to us as soon as possible in the SNOWS application process to minimise any delays. This information can be sent to us, or we can be reached for further queries, via SNOWS@horsham.gov.uk.

- **Public sector body:** Signed, written instructions on headed paper.
- **Non-public sector business:** We will undertake our own checks but may request further information from you if necessary.
- **Individual:** Identification/s showing your name, permanent address, and date and place of birth, for example a passport, driving licence, utility bill etc.

Application prioritisation for SNOWS access

Below is a summary of the criteria that will be used as part of the SNOWS application prioritisation scoring.

- **Criteria 1:** Whether the application is affected by the *C G Fry* court decision. Applications that are affected may receive greater weighting.
- **Criteria 2:** Whether the application is a local authority ‘corporate priority’, which includes schemes in council plans or those approved by the council’s political leadership. These will be given greater weighting.

- **Criteria 3:** The extent to which water efficiency measures have been included in the application to maximise on-site water savings and minimise offsetting requirement. Applications that minimise their on-site water use will be given greater weighting.
- **Criteria 4 (residential applications only):** Whether the application is policy compliant in the delivery of affordable housing units. Applications delivering 100% affordable schemes made by registered or approved affordable housing providers will be given greater weighting.
- **Criteria 5 (non-residential applications only):** Whether the application provides community services or other infrastructure supporting development*. These applications will be given a greater weighting.

* Applications exclusively or primarily providing development essential for community services or contributing to the construction of essential infrastructure, such as educational facilities, medical facilities, community facilities, or minerals & waste development.