

REFERENCE

2627281

RELEASE DATE

4 September 2026

SUBJECT

Larne wastewater catchment capacity, development commitments, planning consultation responses, hydraulic modelling and environmental risk.

RESPONSE

NI Water considered the request under the Environmental Information Regulations 2004. The response addressed additional and clarified requests following an internal review. It did not replace the separate internal review decision.

NI Water holds individual planning consultation and technical records but does not hold the requested consolidated catchment figures for developments receiving positive consultation responses that remain unbuilt or unconnected. The records do not contain consistent searchable fields from which the requested dwelling numbers, Population Equivalent figures, construction status and connection agreement totals can be objectively extracted or calculated. Producing these figures would require interpretation and reconciliation of individual records. Regulation 12(4)(a) was applied to the specified recorded information not held, rather than simply because it was not contained in a single dataset.

Current wastewater loading is calculated using properties identified as built through the Pointer dataset. Planning permission or a positive planning consultation response does not, by itself, reserve wastewater capacity or include an unbuilt development in current loading. The validity period of a technical response is distinct from the legal status of planning permission.

NI Water follows industry guidance for hydraulic modelling. The Larne model was selected for updating in late 2024 following requirements identified by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency and the availability of additional monitoring data. At the date of the response, further verification was continuing, with completion estimated for late 2026. No separate policy defining the requested five year review criteria or completed final review output was held.

NI Water explained that the different planning consultation responses reflected the treatment of existing planning permission and anticipated additional sewage loading, rather than a change in the operational status of the catchment. The earlier categorical statement concerning an obligation to provide a connection was withdrawn. Any future connection application would require separate consideration. No separate recorded headroom recalculation or the requested records explaining the continued validity of the Bankshead consultation response were identified.

NI Water did not hold the requested collective environmental risk classification, discharge volumes, spill frequencies or comparative environmental calculation for committed but unbuilt developments. The absence of these records does not mean that no environmental risk exists.

The previously supplied current loading figure was 27,640 Population Equivalent (PE), with recorded headroom of 5,360 PE. The difference of 1,544 PE between overall loading and the residential and other property figures related to additional factors for hotels, educational premises, caravan pitches and consented trade discharges, rather than a separately identified total for future development commitments. Numerical headroom does not establish that further development can be accommodated, as treatment compliance and network constraints also apply.

NI Water considered the presumption in favour of disclosure and the public interest in transparency concerning wastewater capacity, planning decisions and environmental performance. Regulation 12(4)(a) was applied where the specified recorded information was not held and could not therefore be disclosed.