

Understanding water usage in the garden



Research approach
July 2021



The challenge we want to address

When the weather is hot and dry, water usage increases dramatically. We need to understand the extent to which garden water usage is driving this and what could be done to change consumer behaviour.



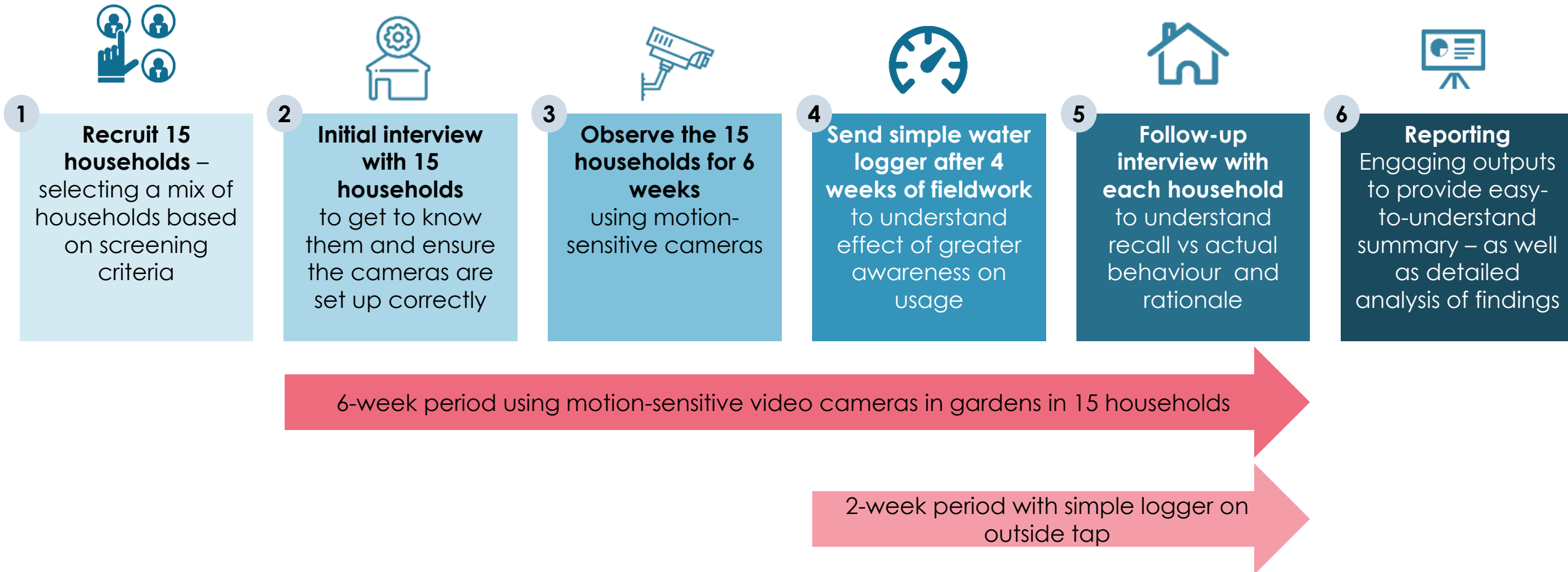
- When the weather is hot and dry, household water usage in the UK can increase by up to 25%.
- It is assumed (although not known for certain) that increased garden water usage explains much of this increase.
- Given the urgent need for water companies to reduce per capita consumption, there is a need to understand specific water usage behaviours – including in the garden – in further detail. For example:
 - How do typical behaviours (e.g. watering plants) vary between households?
 - What is the difference between what people say they do and what they actually do?
 - How could we improve behaviour change campaigns to make them more effective?
- The latest video camera technology offers the opportunity to understand these behaviours more accurately than ever before – without relying on self-reported, survey-style data.

The aims of this research:

- **Observe, through ethnographic filming**, garden water usage behaviour – exploring:
 - Everyday garden behaviours, such as plant-watering and hot tub use.
 - Hot weather garden behaviours (times of peak water demand), such as paddling pool use or water fights – specifically exploring why demand rises in these periods.
 - How usage varies across households.
- Assess **dissonance between recalled and actual** (filmed) behaviour.
- Provide insight to support **communications and behaviour change activities** about “good” or “bad” garden water usage.
- Explore **whether garden water usage is thought to have changed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic**.



We have outlined below a provisional plan for delivering the research.



We aim to include a Steering Group who will oversee the research – including representatives from organisations such as Waterwise, CCW and the Environment Agency.



1

Recruit 15 households – selecting a mix of households based on screening criteria

We will recruit households likely to be higher users of water in the garden – using proxies such as garden size / type and use of specific garden products (e.g. sprinkler, hosepipe, pressure washer, hot tub, pond) to identify this. We will recruit a range of household types, incl. a mix of urban / rural households.



2

Initial interview with 15 households to get to know them and ensure the cameras are set up correctly

Via video call, ensuring participants are comfortable have given informed consent – incl. knowing that they can ask for footage to be deleted. We will provide each household with 2 motion-sensitive cameras, to ensure coverage of most of garden and outdoor tap.



3

Observe the 15 households for 6 weeks using motion-sensitive cameras

Extended fieldwork period likely to include dry and wet weather, to enable understanding of behaviour variation. We will monitor and code footage as fieldwork progresses. **We may not use all 6 weeks' worth of footage**, depending on the weather. We will ignore first 72 hours of footage – so participants can get used to the camera.



4

Send simple water logger after 4 weeks of fieldwork to understand effect of greater awareness on usage

We will post participants a very simple water logger* which they can attach to their main outside tap. While we will not be able to see the data from this logger directly, we will ask participants to tell us about what it shows at regular intervals. *This is our preferred logger at this stage.



5

Follow-up interview with each household to understand recall vs actual behaviour and rationale

We will ask respondents to recall garden water usage behaviours during observation period, and compare against the video data. We will ask participants to tell us about their reaction to the logger data.



6

Reporting Engaging outputs – as well as detailed analysis of findings

We will film the final interviews, showing selected video clips / logging data to participants and asking them to explain specific behaviours – providing “Gogglebox”-type clips for the final reporting.

Indicative timeline

By observing households through August and September, we hope to witness variation in weather and how this links to garden water usage.

- We will host weekly update calls for the core project team.
- We have included two suggested review points for the Steering Group here, to review the final research materials and the emerging findings – these can be adapted as preferred.
- *The full timeline is also available in Excel format (as not very visible here).*

		July			Aug					Sep				Oct			Nov					
w/c		12 th	19 th	26 th	2 nd	9 th	16 th	23 rd	30 th	6 th	13 th	20 th	27 th	4 th	11th	18th	25th	1st	8th	15th	22nd	
Research design	Project specification signed off	x																				
	Recruitment specification signed off		x																			
	Recruitment of participants			x	x	x																
	Draft research materials shared		x																			
	Provisional research materials agreed			x																		
	Steering Group meeting to review research materials					x																
	Final changes to research materials				x																	
Fieldwork	Fieldwork set-up (posting cameras and briefing packs to households)					x	x															
	Initial interviews (15 households)						x	x														
	Video observation (6 weeks per household)						x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x								
	Intervention with logger (after 4 weeks)									x	x	x										
	Follow-up interviews												x	x	x							
Analysis	Analysis of data													x	x	x	x	x				
	Steering Group meeting to review early findings															x						
	Draft report delivered																		x			
	Final outputs (incl. videos) agreed																				x	

We plan to publish the research on completion. To support this, Blue Marble will deliver:



Short summary film



Additional video clips showing behaviours of interest



Full report



Presentations x 2

- All participating organisations will have equal access to the final outputs and plan to publish the research at the same time – publicising the final outputs on their websites and social media as part of a unified “Launch Day”.
- The final outputs will be authored by Blue Marble and signed off by all participating organisations prior to publication.



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