



The countryside charity
Bedfordshire

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CPRE Bedfordshire Briefing Document

Water Resources East

Draft Regional Water Resources Plan for Eastern England for Public Consultation - ends 20 February 2022

Water Resources East, a new organisation tasked by Government to create a “Water Resources Plan for Eastern England” warns that our region faces severe water shortages over the next 10 to 20 years.

Water Resources East (WRE) has been given the important task by government of developing a long-term Water Resources Plan for Eastern England covering the period from 2025 to 2050.

This new organisation has taken into consideration the views and needs of a range of sectors including Public Water Supply, Farmers/Growers and Land Managers, businesses of various types and the power industry.

The region, which includes the entire Anglia Water area (including north Bedfordshire), parts of Affinity Water, Essex & Suffolk Water and Cambridge Water, is currently designated as “seriously water- stressed” by the Environment agency.

The Draft Water Resources Plan for Eastern England has recently been published for public consultation here: <https://wre.org.uk/the-draft-regional-plan/>

CPRE Bedfordshire will be responding with our comments.

- The plan points out that severe water shortages will be caused by:
- Increasing demands for water from a predicted population increase of around 1.5 million people by 2050 together with a massive increase in house building
- The impact of Climate Change
- Environmental constraints on water abstraction reducing the amount of water available.
- Increase in drought resilience.

The draft plan states:

“The demand for water is growing with one of the highest rates of new housing development in the country. At the same time the region is experiencing less dependable weather patterns as a result of Climate Change, adding further pressure on the region’s scarce water resources and the natural environment”

It continues:

“Unless urgent action is taken by all sectors the region will face severe water shortages”

The solution says Water Resources East is a massive, multi-million £ investment programme in supply side water management including:

- 2 New reservoirs
- A new pipeline taking water from North Lincolnshire where there is an excess of supply and re-distributing it to areas of high growth like the Oxford - Cambridge Arc
- 4 new Desalination Plants along the East Coast from Lincolnshire to Essex.
- Upgrading Water Treatment Works across the region.

CPRE Bedfordshire welcomes this much needed holistic investigation of water resources across the East of England and congratulates the Government for encouraging this broad approach to determining the water supply issues facing our region - one of the driest parts of the country.

However, we do have some serious concerns regarding this draft Water Resources Plan:

1. The philosophy underpinning this Plan is not, in our view, consistent with an environmentally led approach to the development of water resources across the region.

This is highlighted by the following phrase in Para 2.1 of the Demand Forecast paper:

“noting that regional growth should not be constrained by the availability of water.”

We do not accept this “growth at any cost” approach.

Instead, CPRE Bedfordshire believes that growth in terms of housing, industrial development and population should be spread more equitably across the UK and not concentrated in the already over-developed East and South East of England. Thereby putting less stress on the already scarce water resources in our region together with the environment and biodiversity, both also in crisis.

2. Unspecified housing growth projections for the Oxford - Cambridge Arc need to be clarified.

The Demand Forecast used in the Plan relies on a range of un-specified Housing Growth Targets across the Oxford Cambridge Arc - see page 10 of the Demand Forecast.

It is unclear how these Housing Growth Targets have been determined since the Government has denied on several occasions that it even has a Housing Growth Target for The Arc and local authorities across The Arc have yet to publish their plans.

The Plan states in Para 2.1 of the Demand Forecast that: *“Robust housing and demographic forecast are a key consideration in planning guidelines for the Water Resources East Plan”*

CPRE Bedfordshire agrees with this statement and urges that the actual data used together with the sources should be published in full, by Local Authority area, in order that they can be independently assessed.

3. Biodiversity improvement resulting from the Plan is too low at just 10% (excluding any gain achieved from new reservoirs). See page 69 of the Plan.

The UK is now recognised as one of the most nature depleted countries on the planet- a 10% net gain in biodiversity is far too low and a target of 20% should be the objective.

4. The absence of a comprehensive and complimentary Sewage Treatment Strategy as part of the Water Resources Plan

In view of the deep public concern regarding the UK's unsustainable sewage treatment system and the environmental damage caused by the high level of raw sewage flooding the rivers of our region and being disposed of along the region's coastline, it is incomprehensible that this Water Resources Plan completely disregards the hugely important issue of sewage treatment capacity and water quality.

The issues of Water Resource and Sewage Treatment are strongly inter-linked and we urge Water Resources East to reconsider this matter and to incorporate a specific strategy for Sewage Treatment and disposal into the Water Resources Plan.

5. Pumping Water from North Lincolnshire to areas in need elsewhere in the region is not an environmentally sustainable solution to the identified water resource issues.

Moving water from one ecosystem to another different ecosystem using pipes and the rivers of the region is not a sustainable solution to the water resource issues identified by the Plan. There is already a very serious loss of biodiversity in our river systems and using them simply as drainage channels transferring water from one place to another will cause further damage.

CPRE Bedfordshire wonders if the people of North Lincolnshire have been consulted on this plan and which communities will be prioritised with water supply in the event of drought.

Will North Lincolnshire have the water resource to encourage industrial growth and new employment opportunities in their area?

6. The full cost of the investment programme proposed by WRE in the Draft Regional Water Resources Plan for Eastern England is unclear.

The cost of each of the proposals in the plan needs to be clearly identified and from this the total investment costs required to enable the Plan can be established.

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8 February 2023