

Miss Elizabeth McCutcheon,  
County Hall,  
MAIDSTONE,  
Kent

Dear Liz

On 16th February 2006, we, the **SEERA Sub-Committee of the RTW Town Forum**, submitted our **response to the Vision for Kent consultation document**, to Kent County Council, with specific recommendations relating to three areas of concern arising from that document. Since you kindly acknowledged receipt of our response on 17th February, we have heard no more from KCC

A matter of considerable public concern has now arisen, however, which makes it necessary for one of our specific recommendations to be considered with urgency. We refer to the matter of water shortages in the County in relation to the housing construction policy of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. In our Response, we stated

'The incidence of climate change in recent times has given rise to increased variability in the availability of water. Especially in Kent, and more particularly with reference to Bewl Water, available water stocks have fallen to unacceptably low levels, and concerns are currently being expressed about the possibility of water rationing before the end of the forthcoming summer. Particular reference has been made to the danger of serious water shortages in the Weald of Kent. At the same time, the Office of the DPM continues to insist on the extensive construction of housing in the neighbourhood of Ashford, in circumstances which are clearly detrimental to the ecology of the County'

Today (22nd June) we read, in the weekly newsletter of the Move Channel, that (and we quote their report in full):

'The Campaign to Protect Rural England (Kent) says that demand for water is now so high that it is the only county with a year-round deficit in the balance of river and groundwater resources.

The county has less than half the available water per person than African countries like Rwanda and Sudan, a new report warns.

The CPRE report, *A Water Resource Strategy for Kent*, claims the construction industry is making "woefully poor progress" in building homes with water-saving measures included and calls for leakage from pipes to be drastically reduced, compulsory water meters and water being brought into Kent from other areas of the country.

Six companies supply water to various parts of Kent and all are currently operating hosepipe bans. They are Mid Kent Water, Folkestone and Dover Water, Thames Water, South East Water, Southern Water and Sutton and East Surrey Water.

CPRE Kent argues that the water companies plans to increase water abstraction will not be enough in the light of proposals to build 122,000 new homes in the region and would only see the drought situation "severely exacerbated".

It calls for leakage from pipes to be drastically reduced, installation of compulsory water meters and water to be brought into Kent from other areas of the country.

Hilary Newport, director of CPRE Kent, said: "The water companies assure us that they will be able to meet this demand. Regional planners appear to share this confidence, claiming that with water-saving measures built into every house and new reservoirs we will have more than enough water to supply our region's needs in 20 years' time."

"But in CPRE Kent we do not share this optimism. House builders are making woefully poor progress in delivering new homes built with water efficiency in mind - even in the growth areas of Ashford and the Thames Gateway.

"And while new reservoirs - or expanding those that we already have - may help to meet the demand, we have struggled to keep our existing reservoirs full over the last two winters." '

We feel sure that, in the ordinary course of events, your office will have been advised of this report from CPRE, but we would, nevertheless, welcome an assurance that KCC has, as a consequence of overwhelming evidence to support what CPRE states, made all appropriate recommendations to the Office of the DPM. We would ask you, therefore, to report to us in this matter.

with our kindest regards,  
for the SEERA sub-committee, RTW Town Forum  
Michael Larsen  
Michael Doyle

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On 26th June, I received a reply to that letter, from Mr. Dick Feasey, of KCC, and append a copy of that letter below.

Mr Michael Larsen  
SEERA Sub Committee  
RTW Town Forum

Dear Mr Larsen

Liz McCutcheon has forwarded your email to me for a reply on the concerns you raise regarding water resources in Kent and the approach of the DCLG (formerly ODPM ) to the matter of house building in Kent.

As a starting point it might be helpful to outline the position currently reached with the South East Plan, the mechanism by which Government will ultimately determine the level of new housing provision considered appropriate for the South East region, Kent and its constituent districts. The Regional Assembly (SEERA) submitted its draft South East Plan to Government at the end of March 2006 and this has been followed by public consultation which has recently ended. The next steps will be a Public Examination of the Plan commencing in November 2006 conducted by an independent Panel. The Panel will make recommendations to Government on any changes to the SE Plan that it considers are warranted. I have no doubt that the question of water resources and their relationship with the level and distribution of proposed house building in the region will feature in the discussions at the Public Examination given the extent of concern expressed on this matter and the range of views as to the nature and severity of the impacts.

The County Council would strongly support such debate given its own concerns over this issue and the pressure likely to come from a number of quarters (including Government itself) to

further increase planned rates of housebuilding in the region beyond those currently proposed by the Regional Assembly. It is important that the views of the body with the statutory responsibility for advising Government, the Regional Assembly and local authorities on this matter i.e. the Environment Agency - are clearly presented and open to scrutiny. The CPRE's paper is a useful contribution to the debate in this regard.

The Environment Agency has taken the view that the current SE Plan proposals should be manageable if sufficient progress is made with demand management and gains in the efficiency of water usage ( in both new and existing homes ) and timely investment is secured in new water resources in Kent and elsewhere. These provisos are clearly of central importance and KCC would look to Government, through the South East Plan, to establish clear commitment to the mechanisms required and infrastructure needed to secure the strategy as a whole and not simply its provisions for new development.

In its recent submissions on the South East Plan KCC has drawn attention to the implications of the Plan for resource consumption, including water, and the need to strengthen the policy framework to address this - a point raised in the Sustainability Appraisal of the Plan.

I hope this clarifies the present position.

Yours sincerely

Dick Feasey  
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Mr. Feasey's letter has since been acknowledged on behalf of the RTW TF, as follows

Dick Feasey  
Planning Policy Manager  
Strategy and Planning Division,  
Environment and Regeneration Directorate  
Kent County Council

Dear Mr. Feasey,

I am writing, on behalf of the SEERA Sub-Committee of The Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Forum, to thank you for your very thorough reply to our letter of 22nd. June.

with thanks,

yours sincerely,

Michael Larsen.

*(Appx re Vision for Kent.doc)*