

Report to:	Cabinet	6 February 2023
Lead Cabinet Member:	Councillor Peter McDonald, Lead Cabinet Member for Economic Development	
Lead Officer:	Stephen Kelly, Joint Director of Planning and Economic Development	

Draft Regional Water Resources Plan for Eastern England Consultation Response

Executive Summary

1. Water Resources East (WRE) are consulting upon their first full draft Regional Water Resources Plan. The plan covers the period to 2050 and is clear that unless urgent action is taken by all sectors, the region will face severe water shortages constraining agricultural production, economic and housing growth and endangering the east's iconic chalk rivers, peatlands and wetlands.
2. To tackle this a 'best value' plan is presented which includes demand side measures such as water efficiency, leakage reduction, universal metering and use of smart meters. In addition new sources of water supply such as water transfers, two new reservoirs and desalination plants at the coast.
3. Some detail is provided about the measures proposed in the Cambridge Water supply zone which supplies water to Greater Cambridge. Further detail will subsequently be provided in Cambridge Water's own draft Water Resources Management Plan, which is expected to be published soon.
4. The proposed response highlights the Councils' concern about the significant water issues facing the region. There is support for the demand side measures and supply side measures proposed for the Cambridge Water area and the Councils request that these measures are brought forward as soon as possible. The response says that the plan needs to seek to restore the status of our watercourses by planning for the most ambitious 'enhance' environmental destination.

Key Decision

5. No

Recommendations

6. It is recommended that Cabinet:

- a. Agree the consultation response to be sent jointly with Cambridge City Council set out in Appendix A and that this should be sent to Water Resources East.
- b. Agree that any subsequent material amendments be delegated to the Lead Cabinet Member for Economic Development in consultation with the Joint Director of Planning and Economic Development.
- c. Agree that any subsequent minor amendments and editing changes that do not materially affect the content be delegated to the Joint Director of Planning and Economic Development in consultation with the Lead Member for Economic Development.

Reasons for Recommendations

7. Water resources will be critical to the development of the Greater Cambridge Local Plan and this is an opportunity to put forward the views of South Cambridgeshire District Council jointly with Cambridge City Council on the draft Regional Water Resources Plan for Eastern England.

Details

Background

8. Water Resources East (WRE) is the independent, not-for-profit membership organisation tasked by government to create a regional water resources plan for Eastern England that looks ahead to 2050 and beyond. WRE are consulting upon their first full draft Regional Water Resources Plan between 14 November 2022 and 20 February 2023. This builds upon an emerging plan that was published in January 2022, to which Cambridge City Council and South Cambridgeshire District Council made a joint response.
9. It was anticipated that individual Water Company draft Water Resource Management Plans (WRMP) would be published at the same time as the draft regional plan, but these have been delayed. The Cambridge Water WRMP is expected to provide more specific information and detail to our local area. A response for Members to agree will be prepared when this plan is published.

Key issues highlighted by the draft plan

10. The draft Regional Water Resources plan shows that the region as a whole faces projected water shortages of more than 600 million litres of water per day by 2050, which is about a quarter of current water use. The deficit is being driven by population and economic growth, climate change and the urgent need to abstract far less water from rivers and groundwater which is having a detrimental impact on the environment. The plan is clear that unless urgent action is taken by all sectors, the region will face severe water shortages constraining agricultural production, economic and housing growth and endangering the east's iconic chalk rivers, peatlands and wetlands.

11. Public water supply is projected to have the largest supply-demand deficit in 2050, largely driven by the volume of water that is currently abstracted that will need to be left in the environment in the future. The Environment Agency will introduce caps to reduce the amount of abstraction in two stages. First to prevent further deterioration and then to move towards an environmental destination (a level of environmental improvement).
12. The draft plan sets out proposed measures to tackle this projected shortfall. Water companies will continue their drive in demand side measures such as reducing leakage, introducing universal metering and investing in smart metering. In addition significant supply side options will be needed in the region including two new reservoirs and in the future 'next generation' (net-zero carbon) desalination plants at the coast.
13. In addition to looking at the public water supply, the plan also looks at agri-food and other abstractors who do not have an established means of working together. The eastern region is key for crop growing and heavily reliant on irrigation. In the future it is likely that in moving towards net zero carbon the power sector will demand more water as hydrogen production and carbon capture, usage and storage are both water intensive processes.
14. The plan states that WRE's preferred environmental outcome is the most ambitious environmental 'enhance' scenario. This would support the achievement of 'Good Ecological Status' in all waterbodies, provide extra protection for European Protected Sites and Sites of Special Scientific Interest and deliver enhanced protection for chalk streams, wetlands and sensitive headwaters. However, the plan goes on to say that 'it is too early in the regional planning process to definitively know if the full extent of returns to the environment currently suggested under the 'Enhance' scenario will be necessary to achieve these goals' and that further investigation is required. At this stage the plan is based on the 'resilience' (Business as Usual +) scenario, which focuses on extra protection for European Protected Sites only, although the plan says that the set of actions and investments needed in the next 10 to 15 years are largely the same regardless of environmental destination. This 'resilience' scenario is also in line with the anticipated water company Water Resource Management Plans.
15. The key summary diagrams in the plan are reproduced in Appendix B. These are the Draft Regional Plan at a glance and the diagram of the 'best value' plan to 2050.
16. Greater Cambridge and a small part of Huntingdonshire is covered by Cambridge Water's area. Proposals in relation to demand management are plan wide and aim to reduce household consumption to an average of 110 litres/person/day. These focus around significant leakage reduction and 97% meter penetration. Also a full roll out of smart metering by 2035 in Cambridge Water's area. The plan also sets out specific proposals to increase water supply in Cambridge Water's area. These include optimising an existing licence in the gravels at Fenstanton, a time limited water transfer from Anglian Water by 2030 and supply from the proposed Fens Reservoir by 2035-37. The plan also shows rainwater

harvesting and greywater reuse in new development and Milton reuse, which is referring to the sewage treatment plant. Further detail will be provided in Cambridge Water's draft Water Resource Management Plan (WRMP) which must be in line with the Regional Plan and is due to be published imminently.

17. The Regional Plan is clear that it will need to be monitored and adapted and that if there are shortfalls in the water resources to be found or if more water needs to be found to deliver the 'Enhance' scenario for the environment that this will likely necessitate more desalination and sooner. It says that there are no other scalable options available in the region as all freshwater sources are at or near full utilisation, if not already over-exploited. The alternative to more desalination would be to postpone key benefits of the plan such as achieving the 1:500 drought resilience standard, for water companies to delay licence cap reductions later in the 2030s due to overriding public interest, or to scale back or postpone the delivery of environmental destination flows within some waterbodies.
18. The plan also sets out the policy priorities that it considers Government will need to address in relation to demand management. These include a roadmap toward tighter building regulations, a water labelling scheme and minimum water efficiency standards for taps, showers, toilets and white goods, non-household action to promote water savings and a national water consumption target.

Response to Draft Regional Water Resources Plan

19. A proposed joint response to the Regional Plan is set out in Appendix A. This sets out an overarching response and then responses to the eight questions posed by WRE as part of the consultation.
20. In summary, the response highlights the Councils' concern about the significant water issues facing the region and supports the measures in the regional plan to reduce the demand for water and provide new supply side measures such as the transfer from Anglian Water to the Cambridge Water area and the Fens Reservoir. The Councils request that these measures are brought forward as soon as possible as they will impact on the Councils' ability to deliver the homes and jobs that people need. The response also says that the plan needs to seek to restore the status of our watercourses by planning for the most ambitious 'enhance' environmental destination.
21. The proposed response was reported to Cambridge City Council Planning and Transport Scrutiny Committee on 17th January 2023. Members requested that the response was strengthened and this additional wording is included within the response presented at Appendix A. In particular the response to Question 2 was strengthened to show that the Councils think that it is imperative that the plan should do everything it can to restore chalk streams to 'good status' and would oppose any delay in sustainability reductions relating to water company abstractions. Reference was made to the importance of water quality as well as water quantity in the health of chalk streams in Question 7. Additional wording was added to Question 8 to highlight the changes needed to Building Regulations to enable Councils to include water efficiency policies of 80 litres/person/head. Also, at the request of South Cambridgeshire Members, wording was added to

Question 8 about the importance of soil management to reduce run-off from agricultural land.

Options

22. Members may decide to:

- a. Agree the consultation response as proposed, without making any further amendments;
- b. Agree the consultation response, making amendments; or
- c. Not agree to make a consultation response to WRE.

Implications

23. This is a response to a consultation and there are no significant implications.

Alignment with Council Priority Areas

Growing local businesses and economies

24. Adequate water resources will be key to the development of local businesses and the economy to be included in the Greater Cambridge Local Plan and it is therefore important to use this opportunity to comment on the draft Regional Water Resources Plan.

Housing that is truly affordable for everyone to live in

25. Adequate water resources will be key to the development of housing to be included in the Greater Cambridge Local Plan and it is therefore important to use this opportunity to comment on the draft Regional Water Resources Plan.

Being green to our core

26. The Draft Regional Water Resources Plan includes measures to improve the environment by reducing the amount of water that is abstracted and which is currently having a detrimental impact on the chalk streams and rivers in Greater Cambridge. The Greater Cambridge Local Plan will need to consider the water resources available as set out in the Regional Plan and Water Company WRMPs. It is therefore important to use this opportunity to comment on the draft Regional Water Resources Plan.

A modern and caring Council

27. Water resources is one aspect that will need to be taken into account in the development of the Greater Cambridge Local Plan. The Local Plan will be

subject to full consultation, which supports the Council's priority of being a modern and caring Council.

Background Papers

Background papers used in the preparation of this report include:

- Draft Regional Water Resources Plan (November 2022) for Eastern England and supporting documents <https://wre.org.uk/the-draft-regional-plan/>
- [Record of Executive Decision](#) – Consultation response to the emerging Water Resources Regional Plan for Eastern England (22 February 2022)

Appendices

Appendix A Proposed joint response to Draft Regional Water Resources Plan for Eastern England (November 2022)

Appendix B Key summary diagrams from Draft Regional Water Resources Plan for Eastern England

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