



Campaign to Protect
Rural England
SOUTH EAST

CPRE South East eBulletin

24 September 2007

1. Water in the South East

CPRE South East has published a major report on water supply in the South East. It places a strong emphasis on coping with climate change and rejects reservoirs as the first choice technical solution. "Floods do not compensate for drinkable-water drought conditions", Christine Drury CPRE South East chair told the press. "The phrase 'water, water everywhere and not a drop to drink' has taken on a new meaning in 2007. The Government and the water companies have not woken up to the new realities of water supply. Their strategies rely too much on building reservoirs that may never fill. Only when there is a change in approach will there be a reasonable chance of balancing supply and demand through the difficult and uncertain decades ahead. In our report we recommend the urgent adoption of new policies which conserve and recycle the south east's increasingly scarce and erratic water supplies." (Press release: <http://tinyurl.com/yv57vj>). Bruce Tremayne for CPRE Oxfordshire told the Oxford Mail & Times "Building reservoirs only to waste the water through inefficient use is not part of the solution. As this report shows, building more sources of supply will not guarantee supply in the face of climate change, whereas careful use of the water we currently have will go a long way towards solving our problems." (Oxford Mail: <http://tinyurl.com/yqwxkz>). More on this report at the end of this eBulletin.

2. The South East Plan

A round-up of reaction to the Inspecting Panel report from the Examination in Public. While there have been a few sighs of relief, most councillors reported in the press are angry at the increased housing numbers and concerned about the problems of infrastructure.

Environment hammered. The South East Plan "is potentially disastrous for our wildlife" said Sue Walton of Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust. "The scale of development originally set out in the draft Plan was already pushing at the limit of the region's environmental capacity. This revised Plan... is a step too far at a time when there are huge uncertainties about water resources, waste water disposal, flood risk and sea level rise. How much more evidence does the Government need that we cannot keep hammering our environment?" (Wildlife Trusts: <http://tinyurl.com/yqjbd8>).

Buckinghamshire. The Bucks Herald launched its *Enough Is Enough* campaign. "We are urging readers to voice their protest against the independent panel's proposals, and we will raise your concerns at the highest level" (<http://tinyurl.com/374wgx>). Martin Tett, a member of Buckinghamshire County Council's cabinet, said: "Although these may appear relatively small numbers, much of the area is within the Green Belt and also the Chiltern Area of Natural Beauty. Finding large development sites will be very challenging" (Bucks Advertiser: <http://tinyurl.com/39j7db>). Councillors from Buckinghamshire and Aylesbury Vale District Councils expressed concern over the recommendation to build thousands of new homes around Newton Longville, which they say should be built east of the M1 instead (Buckingham Advertiser: <http://tinyurl.com/2rrabh>). Councillor Adrian Busby, leader of South Bucks District Council, was delighted the area got off so lightly: "It is not appropriate to demand high levels of development in places like South Bucks since to do so could only mean either the loss of Green Belt land, or the erosion of the character in our towns through higher and higher densities" (Bucks Free Press: <http://tinyurl.com/2lje42>).

Hampshire. Winchester alone will be forced to accommodate 12,240 houses over the next two decades. Winchester City Council cabinet member for housing, Cllr Tony Coates, said: "I think a greater supply might help the housing market to stabilise" (This is Hampshire: <http://tinyurl.com/3y2nkt>).

Kent. Councillors have slammed plans to increase the number of new houses in Wealden, after a proposed 20% rise in housing numbers across the district. Hailsham and Polegate were identified as 'one of the few opportunities in East Sussex to develop a major mixed-use urban extension.' But Wealden District Council says the report offers little in the way of tangible support for infrastructure (Eastbourne Today: <http://tinyurl.com/349ae6>).

Oxfordshire. Analysis by CPRE Oxfordshire has shown that far from being a boost to affordable housing, the recent Inspectors' report on the South East Plan, has instigated a cut of 960 affordable houses while increasing market houses by 7,060. Andy Boddington for CPRE said that the city could end up "with 'the worst of both worlds'—the loss of Green Belt land and fewer affordable homes than what had been originally proposed for central Oxfordshire... It shows that the Government-appointed inspectors have become besotted with the ambitions of developers to make big profits at the expense of housing that the workers and families in Oxford can afford" (Oxford Times: <http://tinyurl.com/2fdmga>).

Surrey. Surrey County Council leader Nick Skellett is angry at suggestions that the Government will ignore the inspectors' report and will impose even higher housing provisions. "While I am greatly concerned that the inspectors are calling for a Green Belt review in Surrey, I shudder to think, with the already disproportionate share of the increase in new homes proposed for the county, what the implications for the Green Belt in Surrey will be if the Government chooses to impose some of the figures that are being banded about at the moment" (24dash: <http://tinyurl.com/2ju8kv>). New Government housing targets could put Green Belt land in Woodmansterne, Banstead and Epsom under its greatest threat ever. Surrey County Council said the authority had "cautiously accepted" the 10% increase in new homes proposed by the South East Plan but is disappointed so many of them seem earmarked for Surrey (icSurrey: <http://tinyurl.com/39r4hz>). A campaign group formed to prevent 2,500 new homes being built at Dunsfold Park has welcomed the recommendation by the Panel that the proposal should be turned down. But Dunsfold Park promoters say they could still submit a planning application by the end of the year (Surrey Advertiser: <http://tinyurl.com/2fpc4k>).

Sussex. Fears that roads, schools and hospitals could go into meltdown have been raised after the Government decided that the East Grinstead area must take up to 10% more homes in the next two decades. Mid Sussex MP Nicholas Soames said: "The new houses will simply bring the place to a grinding halt... The Government has to put its money where its mouth is and give us the infrastructure" (icSurrey: <http://tinyurl.com/yuxx6p>). Councillor Barry Groves rose the question of whether people living in Seaford would have first choice on the housing or whether it would mean other people from outside the area getting in first (Eastbourne Herald: <http://tinyurl.com/297zga>). East Sussex county councillors have welcomed the report. SEERA member Councillor Tony Reid, who is East Sussex County Council's deputy leader, said, "This is a ringing endorsement of the work the county council led to advise the Assembly on a strategy for the Sussex coast" (Hastings Observer: <http://tinyurl.com/2yjie7>).

3. South East Local Development Frameworks

Mid-Sussex. Mid Sussex District Council is considering its core strategy. Councillor Susanna Kemp said: "We live in a very attractive District with 58% of the District coming within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Finding space for these houses is a very challenging... given the very high quality of the environment and landscape of Mid Sussex. We are being forced to take this housing under pressure from the Government, and it is clear that Government must therefore invest directly into the necessary increased infrastructure, such as roads, schools, doctors' surgeries..." (eGov: <http://tinyurl.com/2bg8gc>).

Berkshire: Windsor core strategy rejected. The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead has been dealt a 'bitter blow' that threatens its strong cross-party defence of the Green Belt and its stance against unacceptably high levels of housing development. The setback comes in a report from the Planning Inspectorate rejecting six of the 26 policies in the draft core strategy of the LDF (eGov: <http://tinyurl.com/2w5t8z>). The future of Windsor's green belt looked bleak this week, as years of careful planning to protect it from runaway development lay in ruins (icBerkshire: <http://tinyurl.com/266no4>).

4. South East Campaigns

Radley Lakes, Oxfordshire. The Inspector's recommendation on town green status for the lakes has been further delayed. Campaigners have expressed dismay and are concerned that RWE npower will begin to drain Thrupp Lake before a decision is made (CPRE: <http://tinyurl.com/34jc6l>). "Cycle to recycle" and "switch off from npower" were the messages from Save Radley Lakes supporters who used pedal power to drive home their plea on a protest ride from Oxford to Abingdon via Thrupp Lake at Radley. Andy Boddington said: "RWE npower has been recycling ash for two years and should do more instead of dumping it in Thrupp Lake. Everyone is asked to recycle more these days and that's what npower should be doing instead of trying to carry out a cheaper option." (Herald: <http://tinyurl.com/yvmmsm>).

South Downs National Park. CPRE President Bill Bryson championed the cause for including the Western Weald in the proposed South Downs National Park. "The South Downs and Western Weald attract more than 40 million recreational visits a year—more than any other national park. So it would seem logical... to make it as large as possible. The very opposite, however, appears about to happen. The inspector wishes to confer park status only on the lofty uplands which least need rigorous protection... and withhold it from the populous valleys, where developers would most like to plant their golf courses, executive estates and retail sheds." (Independent: <http://tinyurl.com/yughl9>). CPRE's Emma Barrington wrote in The Argus: "If the Government follows the inspector's recommendations then much of the western Weald would lose its AONB status. This could give the green light to large-scale development throughout the area, ruining it for ever" (<http://tinyurl.com/ytf7uc>). Ditchling should be included in the proposed South Downs National Park because there is a strong two-way visual connection between the village and the Downs (Mid Sussex Downs: <http://tinyurl.com/3y49vu>). More CPRE press coverage at del.icio.us/cpreoxon/SouthDowns; more information at CPRE Suffolk: <http://tinyurl.com/2fmg32> and CPRE Bryson: <http://tinyurl.com/2xj5dq>. As we go to press the South Downs online petition has received 2,823 signatures. Have you signed? (<http://tinyurl.com/39qth2>).

Glyndebourne Wind Turbine. The deadline for comments to Hazel Blears closed on 26th September. The Glyndebourne Coalition urged residents and members to write to the Secretary of State raising their concerns, particularly as GOSE were unable to pass the letters and emails they received requesting the application be called-in on to the Secretary of State. Glyndebourne Opera have just submitted an application for a 50m temporary meteorological mast (CPRE Sussex: <http://tinyurl.com/ynuxud>).

Uckfield. BBC's Inside Out Programme filmed at Uckfield in East Sussex, covering a campaign to build 750 homes on the edge of the town in an area of Ancient Woodland. Dr Roger Smith, CPRE Sussex Executive member and Woodland Specialist has been working with the Woodland Trust to challenge this development which is outside the development boundary for Uckfield and in an area of Ancient Woodland.

We're campaigning everywhere! CPRE Hampshire has produced a battle map showing its current campaigns (<http://tinyurl.com/2emqdk>). It has also been campaigning on roadside clutter. CPRE national campaigner Paul Miner told a conference that that a test on a 10-mile stretch of road in Hampshire proves that seven in ten road signs should be removed or incorporated into others (press coverage: del.icio.us/cpreoxon/Clutter).

CPRE in the Media. CPRE Oxfordshire has been logging CPRE's articles in the online press—114 articles have been tagged since the middle of August. They are listed at cprenews.cpreoxon.org.uk from where you can select them by campaign and county, and access the articles. This service is still under development and comments will be welcome: campaign@cpreoxon.org.uk.

5. Tranquillity

"Noise blight on ol' Blighty", the Sun newspaper chortled in its trademark fashion as its reported CPRE's its latest tranquillity maps (<http://tinyurl.com/2xejvv>). The Daily Mail published "the map revealing the eyesores and noise wrecking our rural communities" (<http://tinyurl.com/2y73lc>). The maps show how badly the countryside is suffering from urban intrusion, landscape disturbed by the sight and sound of nearby roads, urban areas and major infrastructure such as power stations, power lines and railways.

In the early 1960s, urban intrusion across England was just 26%, across the South East 33%. Now 50% of England and 67% of the South East suffers from loss of tranquillity (maps: <http://tinyurl.com/ypge8e>). Nationally an area the size of Greater London has been overshadowed by urban intrusion every two years. Ranking of South East counties (1=most disturbed; 9=most tranquil; data: <http://tinyurl.com/3akw6q>):

- ◆ Early 1960s: 1 Surrey; 2 Berkshire; 3 Buckinghamshire; 4 Kent; 5 West Sussex; 6 Hampshire; 7 Isle of Wight; 8 East Sussex; 9 Oxfordshire.
- ◆ 2007: 1 Surrey; 2 Berkshire; 3 Buckinghamshire; 4 Hampshire; 5 West Sussex; 6 Kent; 7 Isle of Wight; 8 Oxfordshire; 9 East Sussex.

Some of the coverage featuring CPRE South East campaigners:

- ◆ **Hampshire.** "These are very worrying figures and paint a rather gloomy picture of the future," said Christopher Napier, chairman of Hampshire CPRE. "Some people say only 11% of the country is built-up but these maps show that with increasing roads and development that area is actually more like 70%. If people don't stand up for the countryside, we could find that the constant march of development and air traffic expansion takes away all our remaining undisturbed land" (This is Hampshire: <http://tinyurl.com/28d6t7>).
- ◆ **Oxfordshire.** Andy Boddington told Radio Oxford that the impact of new developments on the countryside can be minimised by good design to reduce light, noise and visual intrusion. A discussion on light pollution followed (recording: <http://tinyurl.com/2d3lcr>; Oxfordshire maps and press briefing: <http://tinyurl.com/2aaz9t>).

The maps made headlines around the UK, and from India to Canada. CPRE Oxfordshire's news tracking service has picked up 39 articles in the online media covering this campaign. Click on the Tranquillity tag at cprenews.cpreoxon.org.uk to see them.

6. Housing

Localhold. The Conservatives are promising to act to stop rural villages becoming preserves of the middle class and middle aged by offering incentives for landowners to provide land for development on the guarantee that it is only offered to local people and families. They propose that landowners can sell or donate land at a low price, on the basis that if the house built on the plot is subsequently sold on the donor can have first refusal at a price that reflected the increase in house prices, but not the rise in land values. The donor would then be able to sell on the property only to local people of limited means (Guardian: <http://tinyurl.com/2vunnh>).

Affordable housing. Housing minister Yvette Cooper announced a £500 million Housing and Planning Delivery Grant (HPDG), which reward councils which speed-up the delivery of affordable housing and maximise the land available for development (Politics: <http://tinyurl.com/2wq4xu>; CLG: <http://tinyurl.com/2gzbfx>). The Local Government Association said "It is disappointing that this announcement seems to be rewarding councils for playing a crude numbers game and ignores the needs of the majority of councils with housing challenges" (LGA: <http://tinyurl.com/2km8se>).

Buy-to-let. Research for South East England Regional Assembly suggests that buy-to-let contributes £5.2 billion to the South East economy and is increasing housing supply rather than squeezing out first time buyers (SEERA: <http://tinyurl.com/ysoam9>).

Second homes. Thousands in need of affordable housing in areas of high second-home ownership are being failed by government policy, according to the Commission for Rural Communities. Local authorities can increase the council tax paid by second homeowners from 50% to 90% of the full rate, but of the 354 local authorities in England, only three are spending the extra revenue on affordable housing for local people (Telegraph: <http://tinyurl.com/yvqbub>).

Ecohomes. Yvette Cooper is exploring how to use profits from the 160,000 homes to be built in the Thames Gateway to curb carbon emissions from the area's existing housing (Building: <http://tinyurl.com/3x8crf>).

7. Planning

Green belt park. Plans to build a Center Parcs holiday village in rural Bedfordshire have been given the go-ahead by DCLG, despite the site being in the green belt (24dash: <http://tinyurl.com/2rkgmn>).

Eco-towns. The number of new "eco-towns" to be built across Britain is to double to ten, Prime Minister Gordon Brown announced (24dash: <http://tinyurl.com/2elqgz>). Yvette Cooper will ask leading creative designers in urban and landscape architecture and transport planning from across the world for suggestions for the towns of up to 20,000 homes. The first phase of the competition will focus on the overarching design principles, particularly innovative ideas for low and zero-carbon living. The second will focus on the design of each town once sites have been determined. Expressions of interest by councils and developers to build the eco-towns will be made by the end of next month. The Government expects to announce the schemes that it will support in the first half of 2008 (Times: <http://tinyurl.com/2hrw6d>).

Green space good for climate change. More green spaces and medium density housing is required in Britain's towns and cities in order to combat climate change, according to a report from the Town and Country Planning Association (24dash: <http://tinyurl.com/2cm5xo>).

Design. Private homes should be built to the same design standards as grant-funded affordable developments, the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment said. New build homes should meet 12 of the 20 design criteria set out in the Building for Life set of standards, which are met by affordable housing developments. "The public assumes that new build homes will be a scar on their neighbourhood, rather than an asset to it," said Richard Simmons, chief executive of CABI (Inside Housing: <http://tinyurl.com/yrtkkw>).

Urban flooding. The Environment Agency has called for a single national body to be responsible for tackling urban flooding. The organisation, which is conducting a review into the floods in June and July, criticised the division of responsibility for surface water drainage between a number of different authorities and said urban flooding was not being managed in a coordinated way (Edie: <http://tinyurl.com/2tafnz>; Environment Agency: <http://tinyurl.com/3449lo>).

London. The Mayor of London, Ken Livingstone appears ready to abandon the first planning objective for London by asking London's neighbouring counties to build more housing to accommodate London's burgeoning housing needs. Nigel Kersey, Director of CPRE London said: "This would seem to be an extraordinary volte-face by Ken Livingstone. London already suffers a net loss of some 100,000 people each year to neighbouring areas—these are mostly working people with young families who leave for "housing-related" reasons. Many will continue to work in London putting strain on commuter routes" (CPRE: <http://tinyurl.com/2e2fgg>). Mayor of London Ken Livingstone directed Kingston-Upon-Thames Council to refuse a planning application for a plant nursery that encroached on the capital's Green Belt. The Mayor said: "The Green Belt performs a valuable role in preventing urban sprawl. It should only be altered in exceptional circumstances" (London: <http://tinyurl.com/2capjq>). Boris Johnson took time out from his Mayoral campaign to pop into a charity shop where he waved triumphantly above his head a copy of Paradise Lost by John Milton. "This is about the destruction of Green Belt land," he muttered as he left the shop (Bromley Times: <http://tinyurl.com/yq3odr>).

Thames Gateway. Property consultant Savills has warned housebuilders they will need to raise completions in the Thames Gateway by two-thirds to meet government targets (Building: <http://tinyurl.com/2poku9>).

8. Water

Thames Water. The company is seeking views on its 25-year strategy. In contrast to the CPRE South East report, it sees new reservoirs, especially the Upper Thames Reservoir, as essential (see CPRE Oxfordshire Campaign Briefing: <http://tinyurl.com/2php6m>). The company is facing a potential fine of £12.5m from Ofwat for reporting and customer service failings (Ofwat: <http://tinyurl.com/2m26u3>; Thames Water: <http://tinyurl.com/3x3utw>).

Efficiency. 30,000 customers across London are being invited to take part in a study by Thames Water to measure how much water can be saved by installing the latest water saving technology in their homes (TW: <http://tinyurl.com/2jzbsg>). The European Commission has published a report outlining water-saving policies and mechanisms. The Commission estimates that usage would increase by 16% by 2030. However, the use of water-saving technologies and irrigation management could reduce excesses by as much as 43%, while water efficiency measures could decrease water wastage by up to a third. Overall, water use could be cut by 40% (Edie: <http://tinyurl.com/2s6kly>). British businesses are wasting 1.3 billion cubic metres of water every year. An investment of just £25,000 can yield actual savings of around £90,000 a year (Planet Ark: <http://tinyurl.com/22l95n>).

Abstraction. The Environment Agency is concerned that some water abstraction is affecting the environment. This cannot continue under the Habitats directive. The Agency is consulting on paying compensation for abstraction licences that are cancelled through increasing charges (EA: <http://tinyurl.com/2848x8>).

River Thames. Pollution warnings are expected along the Thames following tests that suggest untreated sewage from Thames Water is putting the health of rowers, canoeists and anglers at risk. The warnings will be in place until 2019-20, when the Thames Tideway Tunnel should be in operation (Guardian: <http://tinyurl.com/yr8n8>). The river heads the winter programme of Environment Agency river works, with almost £6 million being invested over the forthcoming months (EA: <http://tinyurl.com/25wnpa>).

9. Energy and the Environment

Kent energy. Campaigners hoping to stop a wind farm substation being built in their village have all but conceded defeat following government approval of the scheme. The development is part of the £1.5bn London Array project for 341 turbines in the sea between Kent and Essex. Swale Borough Council had refused planning permission for the substation at Cleve Hill (BBC: <http://tinyurl.com/2x5kpg>). Greenpeace campaigners called on Medway Council to ditch plans for a controversial new coal power station in Kent. They presented thousands of postcards signed by the public—including a giant one filled with coal—to the council (Greenpeace: <http://tinyurl.com/33qhxd>); BBC: <http://tinyurl.com/3xncuq>).

Cuckmere Valley. A public consultation over whether the Cuckmere Valley in East Sussex should be flooded is getting under way. The Environment Agency believes the best long-term option is to allow it to go back to being a tidal estuary that can adapt to climate change. But local district councils have called for defences to be built, which would keep the valley as it is (BBC: <http://tinyurl.com/yocklg>).

Incineration. A battle which has lasted nearly 20 years ended when the final details of the planned Belvedere incinerator were approved by councillors (News Shopper: <http://tinyurl.com/2ysmft>).

Biofuels. Crops grown to provide biofuels will change the face of the British countryside radically by 2020 when up to 20% of agricultural land will be used to grow miscanthus and varieties of willow that grow up to 16ft (5m) tall (Times: <http://tinyurl.com/29d5wy>). Biofuels derived from rapeseed and maize cause 70% and 50% more emissions than fossil fuels. Releases of nitrous oxide are double the level previously thought. Nitrous oxide is 296 times more powerful a greenhouse gas than CO₂ (Times: <http://tinyurl.com/2gecg2>). Friends of the Earth is calling for the EU Commission to scrap its target for using plant-based biofuels for transport, after a leaked paper revealed the OECD has grave concerns about their social and environmental effects (Farmers Weekly: <http://tinyurl.com/323j2y>).

Coastal path. DEFRA secretary Hilary Benn has announced government plans to introduce a “coastal corridor” around England, just two weeks after the consultation on coastal access closed. The announcement has infuriated the Country Land and Business Association, which accused the government of making the consultation process a “complete farce” (Farmers Weekly: <http://tinyurl.com/yw4c97>).

10. Infrastructure and Transport

Traffic hell. Britain will descend into “traffic hell” with nearly 6m more cars running on British roads by 2031, the Campaign for Better Transport (formerly Transport 2000) has warned. It is urging the government to cut car use by investing in the rail network, as well as improving bus services and making public transport cheaper (Guardian: <http://tinyurl.com/2ozf7c>; CBT: <http://tinyurl.com/24c2td>).

Weymouth bypass. Ian Gillan, lead singer of heavy metal legends Deep Purple, has thrown his support behind the campaign to stop the bypass (Dorset Echo: <http://tinyurl.com/325vcp>; Bypass the Bypass: <http://tinyurl.com/2ynpsz>).

Bexhill-Hastings Link. Over 1,800 objections to the proposed Bexhill-Hastings Link Road through the Combe Valley have been made (Hastings Alliance: <http://tinyurl.com/225ca2>).

Thames Bridge. A virtual model is giving people the chance to see exactly how a new bridge planned across the River Thames will fit into the existing landscape. A permanent crossing between Shepperton and Walton-on-Thames in Surrey has been under discussion since the 1980s (BBC: <http://tinyurl.com/yry59j>).

Air corridor. The Civil Aviation Authority is again extending air corridors, affecting Hampshire, Berkshire and Oxfordshire in particular. (The deadline for objections has passed). In Berkshire, Inkpen parish clerk Gloria Keene said: "local businesses that rely on the tranquillity of the area to support the fragile rural economy based on tourism" (Newbury today: <http://tinyurl.com/ypcv8y>).

Stansted. The Examination in Public in public continues into a second runway. Stansted MP Sir Alan Haselhurst said: "The continued expansion of Stansted is not essential to the health of the aviation industry, however it does have a devastating effect on a beautiful tract of rural England. It's a creeping effect which encompasses communities which do not necessarily anticipate it... There's no national need for... air services... to be concentrated there. This contributes to over-crowding in the south east and re-enforces the imbalance of economic activity in the country" (Citizen: <http://tinyurl.com/3bykm5>).

11. Rural Affairs

Set-aside is set-aside. European Union ministers have suspended for one year the set-aside rules, which bar farmers from planting on 10% of their land, in an attempt to bring down soaring wheat prices (Telegraph: <http://tinyurl.com/27uea2>). DEFRA secretary Hilary Benn has announced a programme of environmental monitoring of farmland following the decision. "I share the concerns which Natural England, the Environment Agency and environmental and conservation groups—including the RSPB—have raised about the possible consequences if there is a substantial return to cropping of set-aside land," he said. (Farmers Weekly: <http://tinyurl.com/ywaozc>; Natural England: <http://tinyurl.com/yq2m77>).

Local food. CPRE is contributing to programme on local food initiatives throughout England over the next five years, funded by a £10 million grant from the National Lottery. The Plunkett Foundation is launching Making Local Food Work to reconnect consumers to the land by increasing access to fresh, healthy local food with good, traceable origins (Farmers Guardian: <http://tinyurl.com/38bphu>).

Tesco 'has limited competition'. Regulators have accused Tesco of limiting competition and choice following its acquisition of a former Co-op store in Slough. The Office of Fair Trading referred it to the Competition Commission after Tesco was told to sell the site but failed to do so (BBC: <http://tinyurl.com/2ofro5>). Tesco responded that "consumers are well served by Tesco and other supermarkets (Tesco: <http://tinyurl.com/29jngs>).

Concrete children. A generation of children have never visited the countryside and believe their food originates at the supermarket, according to new research. one in five has never visited the countryside and 17% have been only "once or twice", meaning a third of children overall have the most fleeting of contact with the rural world (Daily Mail: <http://tinyurl.com/2telk8>; see also <http://www.face-online.org.uk/>).

Rural advisers. Gordon Brown has appointed MP Matthew Taylor to advise on the practical issues of land for local economic development, the provision of live/work space within rural communities, and affordable rural housing provision. His brief will include assessing the local implementation of new planning rules on rural housing following the recommendations of the Affordable Rural Housing Commission (24dash: <http://tinyurl.com/2a5guf>): Gordon Brown also asked Dr. Stuart Burgess, the government's Rural Advocate, to prepare a report on ways in which the rural economy can be strengthened (CRC: <http://tinyurl.com/2mt6e5>).

Regional TV. Council bosses in West Sussex are fighting to stop ITV merging Meridian Tonight with other local news programmes (24dash: <http://tinyurl.com/yqv66p>).

12. Diary

10 October. "Exploring tomorrow's low-carbon countryside", MERL annual lecture Jonathon Porritt, 5pm at MERL, Reading. Jonathon Porritt will explore the combined impact of climate change and diminishing oil supplies on UK farming and rural life. Admission free. Ticket required: 0118 378 8660 or merlevents@reading.ac.uk; www.merl.org.uk/news.

Abbreviations, Links and Definitions

CLG: [Communities and Local Government](#). EiP: [Examination in Public](#). GOSE: [Government Office of the South East](#). SEEDA: [South East England Development Agency](#). SEERA: [South East England Regional Assembly](#). SPA: [Special Protection Area](#). TBHSPA: [Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area](#).

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A Water Resource Strategy for the South East of England

13. Links

Full details of this study conducted by CPRE Kent hydrologist, Graham Warren, including the report, press releases and press coverage at: <http://tinyurl.com/yv57vj>.

14. Headlines

The report tells the government, Ofwat and the water companies that:

- ◆ We must stop extracting water to the detriment of the natural environment.
- ◆ We must stop assuming that the water needs of new developments can be met without a major drive for water efficiency and reduced leakage.
- ◆ Ofwat must be overhauled so that its first priority should be for measures to improve conservation, reduce leakage by water companies, and encourage and enable water efficiency by consumers.
- ◆ Development in those areas where water resources have already been identified as unsustainable should only proceed when an integrated water supply strategy has been put in place.
- ◆ The South East needs a region-wide strategy transcending water company boundaries and this may require a new body to deliver it.
- ◆ Reservoirs are increasingly unsound as a technical solution given the level of water stress from over-abstraction and their increasing unreliability under climate change conditions.

15. Summary

The recognition that the weather is becoming unpredictable and at times more extreme lies behind many of the arguments in this report. We now face the prospect of a progressive increase in the stress on water resources arising from: the need for water companies to comply with new and more demanding environmental controls on their abstraction from rivers and groundwater sources; the ongoing impact of climate change (forecast to bring wetter winters and drier summers); and the housing growth proposed for the South East. The water supply system in the South East is designed for predictable hydrological conditions, yet in recent years the region has seen drought alternating with flooding and the disruption of seasonal patterns. The assumption of predictable supply patterns has led to a relaxed attitude to wastage of water, and to excessive abstraction from rivers and boreholes in times of drought. But drought conditions can no longer be regarded as rare or extreme events.

Development pressures in the South East are making this problem worse. The House of Lords has already questioned concentrating the highest rate of growth in the region with the greatest stress on water resources but we are still increasing the stress on our water systems by building more houses than can be coped with. The government's desire to substantially increase housebuilding levels exacerbates the stress on water supply and the problems of runoff. We are creating more hard runoff from roofs and roads, and gardens concreted for parking and decked for patios. This is worsening flood risk.

The consequence of these stress factors is that current arrangements for water supply are degrading the environment. Water tables and rivers have been seriously depleted and wetlands degraded. The wildlife dependent on these has been forced into narrower corridors, with some populations reduced to crisis levels.

The level of stress on water supply in the South East and the consequent stress on the natural environment has got to the point where we need to think differently about water and behave differently too. That requires change by consumers, companies and regulators.

Consumers seem more ready to change than do companies and regulators. They are willing to cut consumption for cost and environmental reasons, and it is important that they have the facilities and the right pricing signals—metering, tariff increases and water saving equipment. Where this is underway it has been shown to be successful, but it needs to be more actively and urgently applied across the South East.

There is a strong case for a region-wide strategy transcending water company boundaries—one which is environmentally sustainable and delivers best value for money for consumers. Delivery of this strategy may require the creation of a new body with the expertise and resources to formulate a strategy, and the authority to direct the water companies in its implementation. There is also a case for making more effective use of the natural and artificial links that already exist between the South East and adjacent water rich areas.

Water companies in the South East leak 1,137 million litres a day of the 5,373 ml/d of clean water supplied (21%). The current standard of performance, the Economic Level of Leakage (ELL), should be replaced by a broader-based assessment which also includes environmental and social sustainability. At the same time, more than half of the effluent processed in the Southern Region is discharged to sea. This is a unique resource which can be treated and put into supply at relatively low cost. It constitutes a sustainable and drought-proof solution which can be implemented within a three-to-five year time frame.

The proposed Upper Thames Reservoir near Abingdon in Oxfordshire is judged to be poor in terms of its local environmental impact and its long term environmental sustainability. As the impact of climate change grows, it is possible that pumping water out of the Thames will damage its ecology. The reservoir may not be viable at 380 ml/d without substantial transfers from outside the region. The difficulties of abstraction are illustrated by Bewl Reservoir in Kent, which has already faced refilling difficulties.

Development in those areas where resources have already been identified as unsustainable should only proceed where an integrated water supply strategy has been put in place and other planning criteria are satisfied. Failing this, government must accept that many consumers will face a regime of crisis management in which hose pipe bans will be a more or less permanent feature.

16. Conclusions

- 1) **Supply.** Water supply in the South East is already in deficit and by 2025, the public water deficit could be as much as a billion litres a day.
- 2) **Limits.** The government has failed to recognise the reality of water limits as a constraint on housebuilding or the need to change regulatory frameworks.
- 3) **Regulation.** Water companies are working under the wrong regulatory and financial frameworks. Investment in conservation and recycling should have a much higher financial priority. The concept of an "economic level of leakage" is outdated and does not encourage water companies or consumers to increase conservation.
- 4) **Reliability.** As river flows become less reliable, the water storage assumptions for reservoir construction are becoming less dependable, yet these still underpin arguments for reservoir construction.
- 5) **Reuse.** Water reuse and indirect recycling of waste water through water courses is largely ignored by the industry but it should be a major structural component in water supply strategies.

17. Recommendations

- 1) **Environment.** The first priority should be to reinstate the water environment. There must be a more equitable balance between the needs of the environment and the needs of public supply.
- 2) **Limits.** Government planners must take greater account of the environmental limits of water supply when planning housing expansion and eco-towns.
- 3) **Regulation.** Ofwat's remit should be changed to give it a much stronger emphasis on conservation and the influence of "economic level of leakage" in its thinking should be reduced.
- 4) **Efficiency.** We need a new approach to our thinking about water supply. Incentives for water companies to conserve should be consistent with conservation measures for consumers. All new buildings must be water efficient and retro-fitting of existing homes should be tested as part of S106 agreements.
- 5) **Supply.** Water supply strategies must change. Reservoirs are no longer the first choice technical solution. Water recycling needs to be a leading part of all water company's business plans. Discharge of fresh, clean wastewater to the sea must stop.