

Media briefing:

Interim Water Study informs emerging Greater Cambridge Local Plan

The Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service (GCSPS) has published a range of research developed as part of an important stage of work on the new Greater Cambridge Local Plan. This includes an interim *Integrated Water Management Study - Strategic Spatial Options Review* for the Greater Cambridge area, to help inform the location and amount of development that may be planned for in the future.

How the study was developed

Consultants Stantec were appointed by open tender to carry out an Integrated Water Management Study for Greater Cambridge to provide a robust evidence base to support the development of the Local Plan. The interim results of this work have been used to assess the Strategic Spatial Options and to produce the current report. The remaining Integrated Water Management Study documents will be completed and published in 2021 as part of the Local Plan process.

The Environment Agency, Water Resources East, Cambridgeshire County Council, South Staffordshire (Cambridge) Water, Anglian Water and Natural England have been consulted in the development of the study and broadly support its findings. The study has been independently reviewed by nationally recognised expert Dr Geoff Parkin.

Key findings of the interim report

Water supply

- The current level of water abstraction from the chalk aquifer is widely believed to be unsustainable for the Greater Cambridge area, with potential to cause further environmental damage. Abstraction rates may need to be reduced significantly to safeguard natural river flow.

- There is no capacity to increase groundwater abstraction from the chalk aquifer. Future water demand and supply will need to be balanced in other ways, including greater water efficiency in new developments, along with measures by the water companies such as reducing leakages and shifting to more sustainable water sources, to ensure no additional detrimental environmental impact from future growth.
- Longer term solutions will include major new regional water supply reservoirs, transfer schemes and land use change. These options are all being explored and assessed by Water Resources East as they develop their Regional Plan for water management across Eastern England through to the 2050's and beyond. Large infrastructure such as major reservoirs are unlikely to be operational until the mid 2030s if we follow 'traditional' planning processes, and Water Resources East are looking at the best approach to ensure that these could be delivered earlier if required to meet the area's economic and environmental ambition.

Flood risk, Wastewater and Water Quality

- There are constraints to development due to existing areas of high flood risk, wastewater treatment capacity limitations, and existing water pollution in specific areas. As a minimum, development will need to mitigate any further detrimental impacts on flood risk, wastewater treatment and water quality, to have a neutral impact.
- However, there are also opportunities for major development to offer betterment to existing conditions, for example by reducing flood risk downstream, reducing water pollution, and supporting integrated water management schemes including more natural wastewater treatment options.
- Relocation of the Cambridge Wastewater Treatment Plant offers opportunities to expand capacity to support additional growth and to improve the level of treatment of effluent which has benefits for water quality.

Assessment of strategic spatial options

- Through measures such as much greater water efficiency for existing consumers and new homes, reducing leakages and shifting to more sustainable water sources, the current planned growth in the existing Local Plans, and the additional low growth level options being tested for the new Local Plan are plausibly capable of being accommodated.
- Current water supply constraints may not be absolute barriers to achieving medium or highest growth levels being tested for the new Local Plan, but they will not be achieved through 'business as usual' with current regulations and incentives for existing consumers and new development.
- Significant support from central government, financially and structurally, will most likely be required to develop new strategic supply options and infrastructure at regional scale (such as more rapid construction of new water supply reservoirs and transfer schemes).
- Under normal means of provision, these major infrastructure schemes will take time to implement, and this could result in the high growth level that has been tested not being achievable within the period of the new Plan.
- From a water management perspective, the best place to build new homes would be in new settlements, or to build large developments on the edge of Cambridge. This is because they can be designed from the outset for efficient and integrated water management, rather than having to 'bolt on' to existing infrastructure in the city or existing villages where there may be existing flood risk, wastewater and water quality constraints.

Next steps

This is an interim study and further work is being done to develop wider Integrated Water Management Study documents; a Level 1 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment, an Outline Water Cycle Study, and a Detailed Water Cycle Study, which will be published as part of the Local Plan process in 2021.

Water supply constraints and the need to reduce water abstraction in Greater Cambridge are not new problems and GCSPS is working collaboratively with

partners to find solutions. This includes working with Water Resources East (WRE), who are leading the first Water Plan for the region, to be published in draft in summer 2021, which will set out actions and timescales for management of sustainable water services across the eastern region.

The interim study will be considered later in November by the Joint Local Planning Advisory Group for the two local planning authorities – Cambridge City and South Cambridgeshire District Councils – through their joint Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service. This will be followed by a series of workshops with key stakeholders to consider the implications, along with other evidence base studies, for the emerging Local Plan.

The interim *Greater Cambridge Integrated Water Management Study - Strategic Spatial Options Review* can be found with the wider evidence base findings on the Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service website, www.greatercambridgeplanning.org/localplan.

Comments

Dr Robin Price, Managing Director of Water Resources East (WRE) commented: “It is clear that the Greater Cambridge area has high economic ambition, and like others, we welcome the clear recognition that this cannot be delivered at the expense of the environment, particularly the iconic chalk stream landscape which surrounds the city. The quality of evidence in this study is excellent, and comes at exactly the right time for Water Resources East to build it into our Regional Plan for water resources, which we will be co-creating with stakeholders including water companies, local authorities, community and environmental groups and regulators over the next two years. We know that major investment in new water infrastructure will be required if Greater Cambridge is to meet its economic and environmental ambitions, particularly in the face of a changing climate. We look forward to collectively thinking differently as to how this infrastructure could be developed and delivered in the most timely and sustainable way.”

Cllr Dr. Tumi Hawkins, Lead Cabinet member for Planning at South Cambridgeshire District Council, commented:

“We are determined to balance the need for new houses alongside caring for the natural environment. To do this we are committed to developing an extremely thorough, well-researched and rigorous understanding of water issues across the board, and I’m delighted to have a strong start here in the publication of this interim study which has been reviewed by a leading independent academic in the field.

“I am pleased to see excellent collaboration between water resources partners in helping inform this study and it is very good news indeed that we will have a regional plan that will drive at scale the strategic sustainable water management services we really need across Greater Cambridge, both now and in years to come”.

Cllr Katie Thornburrow, Executive Councillor for Planning Policy and Open Spaces, Cambridge City Council, commented:

“We have recognised for some time that water is a major local issue, and that we cannot create sustainable development in our area without really understanding the whole water cycle locally and regionally. This interim study is an important step forward towards developing a Local Plan that helps to reduce our environmental impacts and deliver the great places we want to see.

“We look forward to working closely with partners to find the right solutions to the very real challenges, and we look forward to doing so in greater depth when the other water cycle studies currently being developed, are completed and published in 2021.”

A spokesperson from South Staffordshire (Cambridge) Water commented:

“We recognise that there are challenges in our Cambridge region around proposed growth and ensuring that water supplies are environmentally sustainable and secure both now and in the future. We are working with the planning authority and regional water resources partners to ensure that we manage water supplies over the long term. We will consider all options to remove pressures on chalk streams without impeding the economic growth of our region”.

Strategic Growth and Infrastructure Manager for Anglian Water, Allan Simpson commented:

“Living in one of the fastest growing regions of the UK means that we are acutely aware of our responsibility to carefully balance the demands of our customers with those of the wider environment, and we also know in the face of a rapidly changing climate, that we can't do this alone.

“We welcome the opportunity to continue this work with all partners in the Greater Cambridge area to ensure we develop a holistic plan to manage the demand for water and support growth and the local economy without compromising the environment.”

Ends

Notes to Editors

About the Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service

The Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service is the planning authority for Cambridge City Council and South Cambridgeshire District Council. As one of the largest planning services in the East of England operating in one of the fastest growing economies in the UK, we determine around 7000 planning and related applications per year with some 150 staff. We are developing the emerging [Greater Cambridge Local Plan](#) as well as the [North East Cambridge Area Action Plan](#), as well as supporting work on 14 [Neighbourhood Plans](#).

About Stantec

Stantec are working with GCSPS and partners via their Cambridge office.

Further details [About Stantec](#)

About Dr Geoff Parkin

Dr. Geoff Parkin, PhD FCIWEM C.WEM FGS, is a nationally and internationally recognised expert in water resource management, with over 30 years' experience in groundwater modelling and assessment through research, teaching, and working with regulators, water companies, local authorities and local community groups.

About Water Resources East

Water Resources East (WRE) was formed in 2014 by Anglian Water, who were keen to learn from international best practice on how to develop a more collaborative approach to water resource management planning in a region under significant pressure due to population growth and economic ambition, the need for enhanced environmental protection and significant climate change impacts.

Water Resources East is a not for profit organisation, operating as an independent, inclusive, collaborative, exploratory and forward-thinking membership body. Working with over 120 member organisations, and a wider stakeholder network across Eastern England, WRE will be working over the next three years to turn the regional strategy into a single, multi-sector best value adaptive Regional Plan for water management across Eastern England through to 2050 and beyond. WRE are committed to doing this through a detailed co-creation, engagement and collective decision-making process with key local, regional and national stakeholders, including regulators and policy-makers.

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