

Background

Water is often taken for granted, often at seeming low cost. However, the reality water is an increasingly stressed natural resource under pressure from rising demand due to population growth, intensification of agriculture, industrial use, domestic extravagance, and climate change.

East Anglia is facing some tough challenges with its water resources some of which are attributable to the elaborate population growth forecasts for East Anglia. Anglian Water's recent Water Resources Management Plan (WRMP) predicts that by 2060 there will be a forecast water shortage **of between 307million litres a day and 472million litres a day** depending upon various planning and environmental scenarios. This is a water deficit equivalent to that required to supply a city the size of Birmingham.

According to the National Farmers Union (NFU), Agriculture is a major industry in the region, with sales of output from farms totalling almost £3 billion in 2010. However, the local farming community faces water resource stresses such as:

- Reduced rainfall leading to soil moisture deficit, increasing requirements for spray irrigation of their crops.
- In some areas of water deficit such as the Fens, farmers have already faced irrigation bans and restrictions by the Environment Agency to conserve groundwater levels and wildlife conservation.
- During 2018 there was a conflict over available water between abstraction for public water supplies and farm irrigation
- Farmers are ever more looking to produce higher value crops such as salads, which will increase the need of irrigation to keep the crops healthy.

Competing demands for water resources also place additional pressures on local environments:

- Over abstraction can lead to the drying up of wetland areas such as the Fens, impacting on the local flora and fauna, and vital biodiversity.
- There is a risk of over abstraction leading to saline encroachment in some of the Norfolk Broads. This would be catastrophic for the preservation of unique freshwater eco-systems, potentially harmful to amenity value of the Broads, and damaging to the local economy.
- Increased irrigation often leads to increased surface run off from the land depositing unwanted nutrients and pesticides into the receiving watercourse and increasing silt deposition, all of which can be catastrophic for healthy eco-systems.
- Increased abstraction results in increased wastewater flows (sewerage) being received at wastewater treatment works. These sites ultimately discharge to a receiving watercourse, which, although regulated by the Environment Agency, contain nutrients, bacteria and sometimes solid matter all of which are potentially detrimental to the ecosystems of receiving watercourses.

East Anglia is facing immense water resource pressures and it is imperative that as custodians of the Environment we do our best to manage this precious resource in a sustainable way. This means working creatively with stakeholders to ensure water of sufficient quality and quantity to help drive and protect the local economy and enhance the environment.

Water Resources Policy

Legislation

We will continue to seek and encourage sound legislation that protects the Norfolk environment from the effects of excessive water abstraction and discharges and to ensure that such legislation is interpreted and used in a consistent manner. In order to do this, we will:

- Respond to consultations proposing regulatory changes;
- Lobby for legislative change where it is clear that change will be beneficial for the environment;
- Use the planning consultation process to challenge and oppose planning proposals which undermine the legal framework for protecting the environment and enhancing biodiversity;
- Highlight and encourage regulatory programmes for reducing unnecessary water wastage in businesses and in households in the county.

Water Abstraction and discharges

Although water abstraction and discharge are licenced by the Environment Agency there are many influences that affect the volumes of water abstracted and subsequently discharged into receiving watercourses. We will:

- Actively support a holistic approach to the management of water resources that adjust to the needs of the environment, society and the local economy;
- Strive to promote and influence the reduction of East Anglia's current average per capita water consumption of 133 litres per day, through education, information sharing, metering and other incentives;
- Strive to promote and influence better use of wastewaters through water reuse
- Work with local water companies to reduce their network leakage and thus reduce their abstraction requirements;
- Oppose any proposals for water abstraction detrimental to the environment;
- Lobby the farming community to adopt efficient use of irrigation water;
- Promote and support water management by creating new wetlands, flood water flow balancing to protect people and property, and provide potential new sources of abstraction for irrigation
- Monitor and where necessary challenge proposals for the development of new water sources such as desalination plants, reservoirs and large-scale pumping schemes;
- Challenge wastewater discharges deemed to be detrimental to the receiving watercourse;
- Lobby landowners to reduce and minimise surface run off from their land into adjacent watercourses;
- Strive to promote and influence catchment management plans that protect the local environment.