

Thank you for giving FeCRA the opportunity to voice concerns from residents. In the FeCRA response to the draft Greater Cambridge Sustainable Design and Construction Supplementary Planning Document we stated that residents had told us that they were concerned that, whilst the document focuses on water efficiency, it is clear that it has not been demonstrated that there is sufficient water supply within Greater Cambridge to support future development and furthermore that existing ground water abstraction is impacting water flows in chalk streams in the region and may need to be reduced, especially in the light of climate change.

Many residents are sharing concerns with us that the situation with groundwater around Cambridge is critical: I quote one letter:

Simply as yet a further illustration of the water flow in the Cam I'd like to draw attention to the current state of the waterway along the upper river known as Paradise Creek which runs along Grantchester Meadows on the street side of Paradise Island. Two years ago the creek was dredged from the top end the length of the street and through the help of Guy Belcher and volunteers the stream was cleared also at the bottom end. As a result the water again flowed well all along. Since the summer of 2019, however, the waterway has become clogged up with pondweed growing in great clumps. (I have also removed some pennywort from along the stream). The top of the water is now covered with duckweed and appears almost completely stagnant. (Any courageous kayakers inevitably get covered in duck weed as they struggle to get through.) This is a particular local problem but it is a new phenomenon. I have not seen this in the forty eight years I have been living in our current house. The new growth and blocking effect of the weed that now fills what low level of water there is in the creek well illustrates, I believe, the poor state of water flow in the upper river. Just another example of the problems we are experiencing.

The Cherry Hinton Brook and the village pond in Comberton have almost entirely dried out in 2019. At Barrington a sliver of water is all that is left of the River Cam. Although the Nine Wells augmentation infrastructure is in place it is not yet operational, so Hobson's Brook continues to suffer.

At the recent CamEO Catchment event we heard from river groups, including Cam Valley Forum, that the whole Cam river system is in crisis and there was a strong feeling at the meeting that rivers should have rights and that regulation and management of catchments should be free from conflicts of interests. The issue of rivers having rights has received attention in national media and from environmental lawyers such as Client Earth.

The dire state of Southern England's rare and unique chalk streams, which account for three quarters of Europe's chalk streams, including the Rhee, the southern Cam and the Granta, which unite and flow into Cambridge, has already been the subject of an emergency debate in the House of Commons. Politicians and river campaigners like the pop star Feargal Sharkey have questioned what right we in the UK have to lecture others about the rain forests when we are doing nothing to protect our own precious and endangered chalk stream landscapes.

But what is being done to address this? It appears to be business usual even though Cambridge hosts the David Attenborough building, the Cambridge conservation initiative, and a Cambridge conservation forum. The dire state of the River Cam and the water crisis did not feature on the agenda of the recent Keeping Cambridge Special event organised by Cambridge Ahead and Cambridge Past Present and Future with the Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service and involving council leaders. City and South Cambs residents are telling us that they have not even had the statutory engagement required for the early stages of the Local Plan and an opportunity to share concerns.

Despite all the publicity about these water concerns the Greater Cambridge Partnership did not consult river groups, local councillors, or residents about landscape strategy for the South East Corridor. In the exhibitions it was as if the river was invisible.

In the meantime a massive expansion has just been approved by South Cambs DC for the Wellcome Sanger Institute. There are also proposals for an agritech business park at Hinxton, the Uttlesford development, and the Duxford aviation business park. Where would the water for all of this come from? And what about the impact on the river and its wildlife?

The Environment Agency has for years lacked the teeth and the funds and the will to rescind abstraction licences. This point was made by Stephen Tomkins at the 2015 FeCRA Workshop attended by city leaders including the Leader of the City Council Lewis Herbert, and the then Director of Planning, Patsy Dell.

Using water more efficiently is important, but efficiency will not increase the maximum volume of water that can be supplied on a sustainable basis without impacting the environment.

As a result residents are saying that REFUSAL of developments is necessary where there is no available water to supply them and/or the environmental impacts caused from supplying that water outweigh benefits of the grant of that permission. A similar point applies to sewage, especially where this is to groundwater. The purpose of the planning system should be to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development, whose objective can be summarised as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The current system does not do this and does not meet the burden of proof under the Habitat Regulations Assessment for the water quantity and quality of the Natura 2000 and Ramsar sites.

We strongly suggest that all planning applications should at application stage confirm their total required annual water usage and have accompanying documentation from water companies to confirm that such water can be supplied and discharged in a sustainable manner.

As an alternative, we suggest that all developments are subject to Habitat Regulations Assessment based on their cumulative and in-combination impacts on the available water supply.

Conservation and enhancement of biodiversity should be considered as a key element of good planning and design.

We believe that that the only solution is to revisit the regulatory regime and the current Environment Agency licencing system and limit Cambridge Water's abstraction.