

Cllr Cornelie Usborne, District Councillor for Horam & Punnetts Town, Report for Horam and Warbleton Parish Council July 3rd 2023.

South East Water / Water Supply Crisis

Fortunately, the Horam & Punnetts Town area wasn't impacted by the water supply crisis in June, but it was an extremely difficult experience for many further north in Wealden. For the first time in decades, an Extraordinary Full Council Meeting was held at Wealden DC. The debate revealed very strong cross-party dissatisfaction at the performance of South East Water, highlighting the failure of this private company to serve residents' needs whilst making £millions of profits for its 3 international shareholder investors. You can watch the full meeting here (and flick through the index to see what different members said!)

<https://council.wealden.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=299&MId=5496&Ver=4>

Press release: <https://www.wealden.gov.uk/news/motion-passed-unanimously-over-water-supply-issues/>

The motion:

To consider the following motion as set out in the requisition notice for the extraordinary meeting, proposed by Councillor D White and signed by Councillors Benton, Cleaver, Collins, Gadd, Lunn, Millward, Reed and Shaw.

1. "The Council is extremely concerned at the recent failures on the part of South East Water to maintain an adequate supply of water to parts of the District. The Council asks the Leader and the Chief Executive to write to South East Water asking for:
 - a. a full explanation of the causes of the recent failures;
 - b. full details of the actions taken to address them and to mitigate the effects to local residents including details of when the company first became aware of the problems and the timing of its response; and
 - c. confirmation of the steps being taken to ensure that there is no recurrence of the failures.
2. Given the impact of climate change and the increasing demand for new housing in an area of acknowledged water stress, the Council also asks the Leader and Chief Executive to notify OFWAT and the Government of this Council's considerable concerns at the failures on the part of South East Water to maintain an adequate supply of water to our existing residents and the effect of this upon their health and well being and to ask the Minister for Housing, Communities and Local Government to support a reduction in housing numbers for the District until there is a long term solution to the water shortage."

Planning Committee South

On 22 June I chaired the committee for the second time and started it off with a preamble. I include excerpts:

..."Southeast Water curiously does not feature in planning applications. Is SEW to be considered in the same way as Southern Water in that it has a statutory duty to connect services to new developments?

if it is and if both water authorities state (or, in the case of SE Water imply) that they can provide the necessary service, then the Planning Authority and we, members of the Planning

Committee South, must take their statement at face value. This then gives us very little wriggle room.

I am stressing this since we have all been aware of the water crisis last week... and all of us in Sussex and Kent now have a temporary hosepipe ban.

SE Water supplying clean water, is obviously under severe strain. They blame record demand and a spell of hot water. But we know that they were privatised 35 years ago and focusing on shareholders etc. The root cause is surely underfunding for many years, an outdated system with multiple leaks. SE Water admit to a significant burst of a water mains last week and, I am told, pump failure. Moreover, no new reservoirs have been built for some time.

I won't mention the alarming figures of sewage spillage by Southern Water discharged into designated bathing waters as they had plenty of airtime.

Our residents say, surely the recent growth in developments must have exacerbated the situation. Should we not, they ask, put a stop to new housing until the problem is sorted? Yes, that seems logical – except our hands are tied behind our backs. That is the problem. Both SE Water providing clean water and SW collecting sewage have a statutory duty to connect new buildings to their services. We are legally obliged to approve planning applications when both companies have confirmed that this is the case. This is our dilemma.”

Update to Local Plan:

There was a delay in deciding whether to proceed with the Local Plan as Michael Gove, the Secretary of State at DLUHC wrote a letter indicating that housing targets may cease to be binding on local authorities. However, this has been slow to materialise.

We are stuck between a rock and a hard place, as signing up to a Local Plan now does mean that we potentially have to meet higher housing target numbers. According to the LURB, having a LP is associated with higher build out rates. Nevertheless, there has been uncertainty for too long and while our Local Plan is out-of- date, Wealden is vulnerable to opportunistic developers. Even if planning applications are refused at committee, they can get turned over at appeal and we are at the mercy of the Planning Inspectorate.

Therefore, work on the Local Plan is underway. To support the Local Plan, the Council is required to undertake a sustainability appraisal. The first stage in this sustainability appraisal is a Scoping Report, to review environmental, social and economic sustainability.

This scoping report is now out. The Consultation on the Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report runs from 26th June to 7th August. So if you have comments on the Plans, policies and programmes; the baseline data; the sustainability issues; the indicators, objectives and framework; or the appraisal methodology, Wealden District Council is asking for your consultation.

For *more information* on the Draft Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report and the consultation portal, please view the information published on: Wealden Local Plan - Wealden District Council. You can also email planning@wealden.gov.uk or phone: 01892 602008.

BNG or Biodiversity Net Gain

BNG is due to come into force in November this year, a component of the Environment Act. Sussex Nature Partnership. essentially brings together various bodies to make sense of the legislation (and lack of secondary legislation to implement the ambitions of BNG). The partnership includes East Sussex County, District and Borough Councils, Landowners, Natural England and Environmental Non-Government Organisations like the Sussex Wildlife Trust, Woodland Trust, Lost Woods, CPRE etc.

BNG is essentially an unregulated market that buys and sells nature. It is a matter for District, not Parish authorities, but Parishes can support the process, by identifying areas of strategic importance for biodiversity.

SxNP advises us to speak to Action in Rural Sussex. They can work with us to help us identify areas of strategic importance for biodiversity and potentially act as receptor sites for BNG, so that we can include these in our Neighbourhood Plan and get funding. No minimum size. A hedgerow could be considered. Also Paul Steedman, Director of CPRE Sussex is up to speed on BNG.

Constituency Boundaries

The Boundary Commission for England has changed the Parliamentary Constituency boundaries ahead of the next General Election. Horam & Punnetts Town will sit within the new *Sussex Weald* constituency. Danehill & Fletching, Buxted, Forest Row etc will sit within the new *East Grinstead and Uckfield* constituency.