

# Water supply 'most significant risk' to Cambs areas' future homes

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Water supply is the 'most significant issue' facing plans for future development in Cambridge and South Cambridgeshire councillors have said. Concerns have been raised by councillors about whether water companies will be able to supply enough water to the number of future homes planned to be built without causing unacceptable damage to the environment

Cambridge City Council and South Cambridgeshire District Council are working together to prepare a Joint Local Plan to guide future development in the area. A public consultation on the first proposals for the new local plan was held at

the end of last year. Councillors from both authorities discussed some of the feedback received at a Joint Local Planning Advisory Group meeting yesterday evening (Monday, October 24).

Councillor Dr Tumi Hawkins told the meeting that over 4,000 people responded to the consultation on the first proposals, and over 5,000 through the quick questionnaire. Officers explained that in the responses developers and landowners had tended to say they were happy the number of homes planned was above the housing target calculated from the national 'standard method'.

However, they said parish councils, community groups and individuals raised concerns over the negative effects of growth including the impacts on water supply, water quality, transport and healthcare infrastructure. They also said that the Environment Agency and Natural England had raised concern about whether the growth proposed could be sustainable "without causing further deterioration to the water environment". Officers explained the agencies had shared the intention to work with the water companies and the councils to address these concerns.

Officers also highlighted that 100 individuals supported by the Friends of the River Cam had objected over a range of issues, but the main concern being water supply. Councillor Simon Smith said: "I think that the question of future water supply has got to the point where it is the most significant risk to the local plan.

"It appears that the proposed investment that the water companies are proposing will take a long time to come, and here's a pun, on stream. Councillor Katie Thornburrow recently told me that once a reservoir is completed it takes two years to fill, that might be as late as 2037.

"We are a bit powerless in this respect, I think that this raises the need for a wider look at how all the required infrastructure is planned and coordinated, but water is top of the list."

Councillor Pippa Heylings said it had already been highlighted that they could not do further development without causing harm and said the councils were in a "really difficult situation". She also questioned what the 'contingency plan' was if the plans for future water supply could not meet the demand.

It was highlighted that ensuring water supply met demand was not a responsibility of the council's, but the water companies. Cllr Hawkins said that many of the planned homes were already included in the adopted Local Plan. She highlighted that the water companies and the Environment Agency knew about the homes already planned in the existing plan. She said: "The big question is did they really look at [the local plan] then?"

Caroline Hunt, the strategy and economy manager, agreed that water supply was a “really significant issue” for the Local Plan. She said they had been “very clear” in the first proposals about the issue and had set out steps that may need to be taken if there was not adequate water supply to meet demand.

She highlighted that a management plan was being prepared by the water companies about how future demand is planned to be met. Ms Hunt said the councils had to be “patient a bit longer” to wait for that plan to be published, and said that once the authorities have that information, officers would then be able to look at whether it meets the needs of the local plan.