



Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs

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Dear David,

Thank you for your letter of 20 July to the Rt Hon George Eustice MP about water infrastructure investment and strategic local planning. I am replying as the Minister responsible for this policy area. I apologise for the considerable delay in replying.

The duty to plan and provide resilient water and wastewater infrastructure, and to plan for growth, sits with water companies and not the Government. To enable sustainable growth, there has to be strong collaboration, and aligned local authority and water company planning.

Water companies have a statutory duty to produce Water Resources Management Plans (WRMP) every five years. These documents set out how, over a 25 year period, companies intend to provide resilient water resources taking account of climate change and population growth. The Government expects water companies and planning authorities to work together as these plans are developed, and has set out this expectation in our WRMP Guidelines. Local authorities are statutory consultees in the WRMP process.

The Government has introduced non-statutory Drainage and Wastewater Management Plans (DWMPs), which apply the same principles of WRMPs to the wastewater networks of water companies. Through the Environment Act 2021 the Government intends to make these plans statutory. Statutory planning will better enable sewerage companies to fully assess network capacity and promote closer working and development of collaborative solutions with others who are responsible for parts of the drainage network, such as local authorities. The Government expects water companies to make long-term plans including upgrading their water and wastewater networks to accommodate population growth in their areas of supply. Water companies have recently published drafts of their DWMPs for consultation. The Thames Water DWMP is available here. <https://www.thameswater.co.uk/media-library/home/about-us/regulation/drainage-and-wastewater/the-draft-plan.pdf>

Planning for growth requires the full participation of local government, water companies, and the regulators. Ofwat, the independent economic regulator for the water industry, funds water companies to deliver against their statutory obligations, including their obligations to provide resilient water supply to customers. Ofwat itself has a duty to promote sustainable development, including through challenging companies to account for population growth in their five-yearly business plans.

With the support of the Government, some regional planning authorities have worked with water companies to better understand the capacity and condition of their infrastructure networks.

For example, the Greater London Authority (GLA) has established data sharing agreements with Thames Water to provide geospatial and capacity information on their water and wastewater network. We recommend that South Oxfordshire District Council liaise with the GLA and Oxfordshire County Council, to explore this work.

Thank you once again for taking the time to contact me about this important issue.



REBECCA POW MP