

Response from Stephen Kelly 2nd August 2021

Dear Monica,

Thank you for your recent email outlining a series of specific questions about future development and the implications for water abstraction. I am sorry that my response was delayed by illness but set out below a response to each question that you have raised. To ease legibility, I have omitted most of your original text and reproduced only the questions with my reply.

1. Qualification of the Stantec Report

Question 1.1

Please could you identify the document, page and section that says 'above that already being planned for being tested in the new Local Plan'?

A: Apologies, the drafting in my earlier response was not clear. The existing Local Plan has growth within it that is being "planned for" – I note that re-reading my reply suggests that the two matters - planned and proposed future growth - are the one and the same. Previous growth was considered as part of the Local Plan process -including the growth at Waterbeach, Northstowe etc. I recognise that the Stantec report indicates that continued abstraction (given existing levels of abstraction) gives rise to environmental damage and it follows therefore that further abstraction will intensify that impact. It is the role of the EA, working with LPA and other agencies such as Cambridge Water etc to manage that impact through the specific consenting process. Me, my team, and both Councils have nevertheless recognised the importance of resolving that impact as we progress with a Local Plan that explores growth proposals and impacts into the future. Our exploration includes consideration of the existing planned growth from the previous local plan.

Question 1.2

Do you and other planners (Sharon Brown, Mike Huntingdon, Chris Carter, and any other planning officers) agree that the statements quoted here from the Stantec Report and the Environment Agency mean that we already unsustainable in water? If not, can you explain how else these statements can be interpreted?

A: Me, my officers and the Councils are aware of the conclusions from Stantec. After all, we commissioned and published the report.

Question 1.3

How is this existing pressure, for which significant remedial work is needed, being addressed?

A: The Shared Planning Service and leadership in both Councils have been engaging with all of the agencies responsible for resolving the water supply challenges and with MHCLG to press for early resolution of this issue. The Council has also engaged with Water Resources East and with Cambridge Water – and emphasised to government the need to resolve future water supply issues by alternative means. The Council is also continuing to engage with the Environment Agency on planning applications but also on the matter of future water supply and the Local Plan process.

2. The Amount of Growth that can be Accommodated

Your response claims existing Local Plan commitments (including current allocations for Northstowe and Waterbeach) can be accommodated, but I can find nothing in the Stantec Report that indicates this. It simply states that Cambridge Water have "between 2 and 4 MI/d available in the current Water Resource Management Plan.." (Stantec Report, Nov 2020, Section 3.3 'Constraints to Development' pg 19) Though even this is unlikely now that the Secretary of State has determined Cambridge Water as an area of serious water stress (see section 6). Estimated water consumption for Waterbeach New Town based on an extremely optimistic 110 litres per person per day is 2.9 MI/d, and for Northstowe, 2.6MI/d. Both exceed the lower availability in the current WRMP alone, let alone combined.

Question 2.1

Please could you provide the quote/ evidence which says existing Local Plans can be accommodated? Can you share the calculations which confirm these assertions?

A: Stantec on behalf of the councils have produced a forecasting model that indicates the likely growth in consumption from existing local plan commitments over time. This recognises that not all of the growth at the new settlements within the adopted local plans will happen in the plan period (even the new plan period to 2041). The conclusions suggest that growth in demand can be accommodated within the abstraction permits provided to Cambridge Water by the EA. As you have indicated, the recent designation of Cambridgeshire may mean that the permitted abstraction levels to Cambridge Water, when the licenses are renewed, may be reduced. That is a matter in the hands of the EA not the LPA and to date, the EA has not objected to, or advised the LPA that the planned growth in the adopted Local Plan should not be allowed to proceed. In those circumstances, the LPA is not in a position to decline to entertain such applications.

Question 2.2

Do you accept that previous efforts to reduce consumption through demand management and leakage reduction have failed? Do you, or do you not factor this in when making planning decisions?

A: The LPA relies upon the advice from the statutory consultees in this regard. The obligations and performance on water suppliers such as Cambridge Water to deliver improvements in performance around demand management and leakage controls is a matter for the EA to consider and then advise the LPA upon when providing their response to planning applications. The Council has no separate informed view on this matter.

Question 2.3

How will giving planning approval for any development impact on the Environment Agency's desire to see existing headroom prioritised for environmental benefit?

A: The Council and Environment Agency would expect to continue to work together (with other stakeholders and those involved, for example, with the OxCam Arc project) to achieve the outcomes everyone wants for the environment.

3. New Infrastructure Projects

Question 3.1

What are the water efficiency measures in place at Eddington? How is water usage at the site being monitored to see if they are actually working?

A: Please see: [Sustainability covering water, waste, energy, biodiversity at Eddington Cambridge - Eddington Cambridge \(eddington-cambridge.co.uk\)](https://www.eddington-cambridge.co.uk/sustainability/covering-water-waste-energy-biodiversity-at-eddington-cambridge-eddington-cambridge)

Question 3.2 - 'the horse'

Please could you provide evidence of funding for new reservoirs or pipelines and the timetable that is in place for them to be fully operational?

A: I am not able to provide details of the funding and timetable to deliver new supply from reservoirs or bulk water transfer at this time. Water Resources East water management

plan – due now in spring 2022 – is seeking to quantify the infrastructure required and programming associated with meeting future need. WRE have advised officers that alternative sources of water supply that would reduce demand from the aquifer can be provided. As the Local Plan process continues, officers have recognised that everyone will want confidence and certainty on the delivery of that alternative supply – particularly given the emphasis given to the environment in “the first conversation” around the new plan last year which we expect to carry through to the next draft.

Question 3.3- 'the cart'

Can you ensure that these 'additional developments' that might otherwise be dependent on increased abstraction, (which I assume are all of them bar Northstowe and Waterbeach which are dealt with separately, if allegedly inaccurately) are not given approval until the new water infrastructure in question 3.2 is fully operational?

A: The LPA is bound to make planning decisions in accordance with the development plan and any other material planning considerations. Whilst the definition of material planning considerations is drawn widely, in respect of water supply – and the abstraction of water and its effects on environmental quality, the LPA are obliged to consider this matter but to also have regard to the statutory role of the Environment Agency. The EA are the body responsible for managing the environmental effects of abstraction and advising the LPA of its conclusions. At this time, they have not advised the LPA to cease granting planning permission for any further development. In my view, without the clear advice of the EA, the LPA cannot withdraw or cease to grant consent for any development that would increase water consumption. We have however noted the comments and concerns expressed about this matter and will continue to engage with the EA and our environmental advisors so as to keep this matter under review.

Question 3.4

Please could you confirm that the proposed reservoir at Bourn, mentioned by Andy Willicot, and any other reservoirs, will not simply be filled by increased abstraction from the Chalk Aquifer or other equally over- abstracted sources? Where will the water for Bourn specifically, and other reservoirs come from?

A: I am not well sighted on the Reservoir that you refer to. Anglian Water are exploring options for further water storage in Cambridgeshire but I am not familiar with proposals for Bourn. I cannot therefore comment on this proposal.

Question 3.5

If you are considering the options of trading water from other regions what are the calculations for carbon capture?

A: This is a matter for Water Resources East, the water providers and the consenting/examination process associated with new infrastructure - and not the LPA. We would of course however be making representations to ensure that any water solution respects national and local carbon reduction objectives.

Question 3.6

What is the plan to resolve these governance issues?

A: That is a matter for the specific utilities suppliers and not a matter for the LPA.

4. Northstowe and Waterbeach

Question 4.1

Would you agree that this more recent assessment should override earlier reports? If not, what are the material planning considerations that outweigh this environmental constraint?

A: The LPA has consulted with the Environment Agency on the latest proposals for Northstowe. We will have careful regard to their response – which we would expect to have regard to the circumstances currently prevailing, rather than relying solely on earlier comments.

Question 4.2

Do planners working in Cambridge, South Cambs and Greater Cambs recognise the damage of long term increases in abstraction due to growth?

A: Me and my team recognise the issues raised by the current levels of abstraction and we have been working with the key stakeholders associated with resolving this impact to impress upon them the importance of addressing this issue. Given the scale of likely measures required, and the statutory and regulatory framework that is involved, the LPA is not however the lead authority able to deliver the required solution. In commissioning and publishing Stantec report, officers have sought to be open about the challenges faced by the area – and published the reports and evidence base to the local plan early to ensure that these issues were highlighted as soon as possible. Me and my team comprise a team

of public sector planners – committed to delivering sustainable development. We have chosen not to pursue careers that involve working for the interests of developers or landowners, but instead seeking to achieve public good. We are all acutely aware of the competing pressures and demands facing this area, of the communities range of views on Local Plan topics and are seeking to determine a sustainable and deliverable route to achieve the best balance of outcomes for the area.

Question 4.2

Can you acknowledge that you have read this and accept that 'many waterbodies did not have the flow required to support the ecology'? What do you understand this to mean?

A: I have read the report and noted the conclusions, including the central role that the report sets out for the EA in addressing the concerns about changes to natural flows and water levels. We are continuing to work with the EA to seek resolution of the matter – because we do recognise the adverse impact that abstraction commitments are having on the ecology of the area.

Question 5.1

Which water efficiency measures, such as grey water recycling, rainwater harvesting and water saving showers and taps etc, have been installed in the most recent developments such as Marleigh, the Ironworks in Mill Rd, the Timber Works, various developments in Trumpington, and any other major developments in Cambridge and South Cambs, other than Eddington?

A: The Planning Authority has sought to apply through conditions the water conservation standards provided for within the Local Plan to qualifying new developments approved after the adoption of the last Local Plan. However, as you will be aware, the government has served to constrain the freedom of LPA's to apply more rigorous standards. Details of specific measures in place for each development will vary depending upon the size and scale of the development, building typology etc and the time when the planning permission was granted. Whilst most developments now underway will include low flow pipework etc, the provision of other strategic solutions will depend upon development formats, building use and scale. For details of each scheme, I would encourage you to review the respective planning permission records for the development.

Question 5.2

If these very new developments do not have some or any of these water saving measures, can you explain why this failure has occurred?

A: The adopted Local Plans for the area sought to require water saving measures to the maximum level possible at that time under the legislation. The LPA can only require development to achieve the Local Plan standards – no more. In some cases developers do go further but government limitations on LPA's to insist on lower water consumption standards have prevented the Council from requiring more radical solutions to reduce water consumption to date.

6. The Implications of Cambridge Water being designated an Area of Serious Water Stress

Question 6

In view of Cambridge Water being designated as an area of serious water stress by the Secretary of State, and data from the Environment Agency that shows Cambridge Water need to reduce abstraction by 22 million litres per day from current levels, perhaps you can clarify how Cambridge Water's current WRMP accounts for this to your satisfaction?

A: This is a matter for the Environment Agency to advise the LPA and Councils upon.

7. Summary

Based on the most recent evidence, current levels of abstraction and discharges from the existing built development in Cambridge and South Cambs are already unsustainable and impacting on our ecology. There has clearly already been a failure to find solutions in time, whether due to inadequate WRMPs from Water Companies, regulatory failure from the Environment Agency, weakness from planning officers and elected councillors to resist the growth lobby and big money, or government deliberately forcing unsustainable growth on Cambridge and South Cambs at the cost of ecocide. Some chalk streams, such as Coldhams Brook, are near enough biologically dead.

Any additional growth will clearly make an already bad situation far worse. It will also be in breach of the National Planning Policy Framework, and specifically for water within Water Framework Directive, which states that

'Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.'

Please could you demonstrate that sustainability is achievable and genuinely deliverable and that present impacts can be removed, by providing the information requested in the questions above?

If this is not possible can you explain why further development is justified on the Cam Chalk Aquifer despite the environmental harm?

A: The definition of sustainable development embraces environmental, social and economic considerations. Our Local Plan “first conversation” recognises the growing significance of climate change and environmental considerations in the spatial planning for the area. The Development Plan for Greater Cambridge is seeking to engage with these wide ranging interests but with appropriate emphasis on these two key themes. We are at the start of that journey – and have already identified and recognised the implications for sensitive ecosystems such as the chalk streams. Both Councils and my team have therefore focused time and resource to engage with and energise the critical statutory agencies who are primarily responsible for and able to address these matters. Notwithstanding our recognition of the issue of water stress and existing levels of abstraction the LPA cannot unilaterally declare an embargo on any further growth. To do so would be to risk losing control of all planning outcomes through the appeal process – which would default to national policy and the responses of statutory providers. In those circumstances, the “tilted balance” of the NPPF centred upon the continued delivery of a supply of new homes would apply – which in my view would have far wider adverse consequences for the quality of new development and its impact upon Greater Cambridgeshire environment.

As my response above highlights, there remains a lot of further work to be done on this issue by a number of agencies. I hope however that my response to your questions is helpful in understanding how the LPA is approaching this issue at this time.

Yours sincerely



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Please note that as a result of new working arrangements I have adopted in response to the Covid pandemic, this email may be received by you outside of your normal working hours. This does not mean that I am expecting a reply “out of hours” and should not be interpreted as an expectation that you will reply to me outside of your normal working day.

From: Monica Bijok <monica@camart.co.uk>

Sent: 30 July 2021 14:52

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Subject: RE: Complaint response

Dear Jemma,

Many thanks for the update. I hope this will not keep being kicked down the road while important planning decisions are being put before planning committees.

I attach the questions that have not been answered again for the benefit of everyone cced.

The response has now been delayed by 2 weeks in total. If Stephen is unable to answer the questions by the end of next week, I will not accept further delay and lodge another complaint.

Either there is enough water for further growth or there isn't. If there isn't, then this needs to be out in the open, and Greater Cambridge Planning need to justify the environmental harm if recommending further development for approval.

Kind regards,

Monica Bijok Hone