

Press Notice for Information: Embargoed until 00.01, 20th October 2020

Embrace nature-based solutions to make England's new homes resilient to climate change – Policy Connect & Westminster Sustainable Business Forum

- New report from Policy Connect highlights that reduction in water supply as a result of climate change, combined with increased demand from new homes, means that England could run out of water by 2050.
- The report sheds light on the fact that many regions that suffer from too little water during the summer months also experience problems with too much water at other times of year. One in six properties in England are at risk of flooding, and since 2013, 85,000 new homes have been built within areas of high flood risk.
- It calls for the use of Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) and other nature-based solutions in new development to help conserve water, provide beautiful outdoor space to aid wellbeing, and help nature to thrive.

October 20th, 2020 - The latest report from Policy Connect, Bricks & Water: Building resilience for England's homes, calls for urgent action to ensure that new homes are water efficient, resilient to flooding and dispose of surface water sustainably.

Building on the success of their 2018 report into water and housebuilding, Policy Connect and the Westminster Sustainable Business Forum (WSBF) has recommended a practical set of measures to make new and existing homes more adaptable to adverse effects of climate change, including the reduced availability of drinking water and the increased risk of flooding.

Now more than ever, following the Covid-19 lockdown, people are relying on green spaces to help support their physical and mental wellbeing. However, there are wider environmental benefits to maintaining and improving green spaces as they can be used to manage surface water runoff and reduce the risk of flooding, alongside additional advantages such as improving air quality, preventing overheating and sequestering carbon.

Water efficiency

The WSBF warn that personal water consumption must be urgently cut from the current national average of 143 litres per person, per day (lpppd). Through a combination of measures such as changes to building regulations, introduction of a mandatory water label for fixtures and fittings, and increased metering, they report that it will be possible to reduce consumption below 90lpppd by 2050, at little-to-no cost to the householder. Introduction of a similar water labelling scheme in Australia saved consumers over \$1 billion (Australian) in utility bill reductions, and [112 billion litres of water in one year alone](#).

Property flood resilience

Increased property development exacerbates the risks from flooding in both new and existing communities and in spite of increased funding for flood defence schemes, it will not be possible to protect all homes. Property Flood Resilience (PFR) measures can help to reduce the costs of restoration following a flood and allow buildings to be re-occupied more quickly. The WSBF have recommended rapid acceleration of Property Flood Resilience measures, which are currently only being installed at a fraction of the pace required to adapt to the effects of climate change.

Sustainable drainage

The report calls for nature-based solutions such as Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) to be put at the heart of the Government's housebuilding programme. Traditional disposal of surface water to public sewers wastes water and increases the risk of flooding. However, the use of SuDS can help to conserve water, reduce flood risk, and improve community wellbeing through creation of green space. The report recommends changes to planning policy to mandate the use of high-quality SuDS in England and make the use of these systems the norm, rather than the exception.

The future of housebuilding

This year, the Government has renewed its efforts to deliver on its target of 300,000 new homes annually and 1 million by the end of this Parliament. These proposals include a Planning White Paper, a £12 billion affordable homes programme, and an updated National Planning Policy Framework. To support these reforms, the WSBF have put forward a set of practical measures to improve the 'water performance' of England's homes, ensuring that new communities are resilient to climate change, and provide safe and comfortable places for people to live.

Inquiry chair Baroness Ann Macintosh of Pickering said;

"This inquiry by the Westminster Sustainable Business Forum (WSBF) comes at a critical time for housebuilding in England. Ensuring that new homes are built to the highest sustainability standards will not only help the UK meet its commitment to reach net-zero carbon emissions by 2050, but will also ensure that communities are resilient to the effects of climate change, including the reduced availability of water and increased risks from flooding. In particular, the use of sustainable drainage systems can help to reduce flooding, prevent pollution incidents from Combined Sewer Overflows and provide spaces for nature to thrive. The WSBF have put forward a set of practical recommendations to ensure that buildings are constructed and retrofitted to be water efficient, resilient to flooding, and dispose of surface water sustainably."

Report author, Rob Allen:

"There is a perception that drought and flooding are rare events, which have little impact on our daily lives. However, based on the evidence that we have gathered from more than sixty individuals and organisations that contributed to this inquiry, this could not be further from the truth. By taking action now to improve the water efficiency, flood resilience, and drainage arrangements of new and existing homes, we can mitigate the impacts of climate change, which often disproportionately affect the most vulnerable in society."

Project co-sponsor, Yorkshire Water:

"Changes to planning policy and building regulations will be vital in ensuring that new homes help to address the twin challenges of drought and flooding that we are seeing more frequently as a result of climate change. However, such changes will only affect new properties and developing a system to improve the performance of existing homes is equally, if not more important. This is particularly relevant in the context of flood resilience, given the amount of undefended properties currently located within the floodplain that do not benefit from property flood resilience measures."

“Engaging people in understanding their flood risk and taking action is a real challenge, even in places like Hull which have a history of flooding and where the pioneering Living with Water partnership has been working hard to increase the take-up of property level protection. So it is vital that more is done to help people understand their risk and protect their homes. The latest Bricks and Water report sets out a pragmatic and sensible set of policy proposals which, if enacted, could make a significant difference in helping developers, landlords and owners to improve the water efficiency, flood resilience, and drainage arrangements of their homes.”

Project co-sponsor, South West Water:

“We are pleased to co-sponsor this inquiry by the Westminster Sustainable Business Forum, which closely aligns with our commitment to reduce water use and move to net-zero by 2030. The WSBF’s recommendations for introduction of mandatory water labelling, increased metering, leakage reduction, and behavioural change, will be crucial to achieving net-zero carbon emissions and delivering a sustainable public water supply.”

Notes to editor

About Policy Connect

Policy Connect is a cross-party think-tank improving people’s lives by influencing policy. It collaborates with Government and Parliament, through our APPGs, and across the public, private and third sectors to develop new policy ideas spanning health; education & skills; industry, technology & innovation, and sustainability policy.

About the Westminster Sustainable Business Forum

The Westminster Sustainable Business Forum (WSBF) is a high level coalition of leading businesses, parliamentarians, academics and public sector organisations working to promote effective sustainability policy in the UK.