

Bricks and Water – A plan of action for building homes and managing water in England

A Westminster Sustainable Business Forum (WSBF) report.



(Left – Right) Kathryn Brown, Jean Spencer, Angela Smith MP, Baroness McIntosh, Andrew Taylor, Jim Clark

About the report

Bricks and Water was year-long project that formed the WSBF's latest inquiry. The aim of the Bricks and Water report is evaluate how water and housing policy is currently being implemented in England, and set out an ambitious strategic plan for delivering water-efficient homes at volume, that are resilient to flooding.

This inquiry has been co-chaired by: Angela Smith MP, Labour Member of Parliament for Penistone and Stocksbridge and former Shadow Water Minister; and Baroness McIntosh of Pickering, Conservative Peer and former Chair of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Select Committee.

Scoping for Bricks and Water began in December 2016. The first scoping session was called 'Water and Infrastructure – a multi sector approach' and chaired by the Earl of Selborne. The second scoping session was held in April 2017 and chaired by Policy Connect CEO Jonathan Shaw.

The Steering Group for *Bricks and Water* met three times to discuss progress on the report (August 2017, November 2017, May 2018). WSBF would like to thank all the members of the steering group for giving their

time to improve the structure and content of this report. The steering group included a range of members from Parliament, industry and academia.

Speakers:

Baroness McIntosh of Pickering



“The report is all about building appropriate homes in appropriate places, and tackling the challenges of supplying water to these houses. This is against a backdrop of a growing population and adapting to climate change.

We want to see sustainable housebuilding - homes that are resilient, water and energy efficient, in a community that is resilient to flooding.”

Jim Clark, WSBF



"Flooding is a risk that could more than double in England by the mid-Century. It is also very expensive to tax payers, and annual clear up costs could be more than £2bn per annum by 2050.

There is also significant risk of drought in parts of England, with a projected 4 billion extra litres of water needed by the mid-Century.

Planning is struggling, with authority budgets reduced by almost half and over a third of staff lost in some cases. This has obvious implications for their ability to plan community adaption to climate change.

In Bricks and Water we are recommending a new sustainability code for housing – a 'Bricks and Water' code to rate homes to improve standards on water efficiency, green infrastructure, and flood resilience. This would be helped by the implementation of a Property Resilience Certificate, to improve house buyer's knowledge of these factors."



Kathryn Brown, Committee on Climate Change

"Climate change is already affecting the UK. We have good attribution studies for temperature and sea level rise. Rainfall and extreme weather are more difficult to attribute [to manmade climate change] but there are indicative studies of the risk of flooding having increased."

"With no further action on adaptation, we could see high water deficits in England by 2050, which is not that far off. But we can take action... The risk of surface water flooding is also a growing problem."



Jean Spencer, Anglian Water

“Anglian Water is preparing for a drier future, but we are water stressed. What’s interesting is that people don’t realise how scarce water resources are in the UK. The east of England has the same rainfall as Jerusalem.”

“We need a twin-track approach of reducing leakage, and reducing water consumption... Smart metering will play a key role in helping people use less water and understanding our systems better.”

“We need water companies and developers to both play their part in improving the resilience of housing and the water network.”



Andrew Taylor, Countryside Properties

"We are in an accepted housing crisis, and councils are being put under more pressure to deliver and speed up rates of housing. But we need to be careful not to forget quality, and think about the long term aspects. New houses will be around for 50-100 year plus, so this can make a significant difference."

"Most local authorities do not currently have the requisite resources for planning. From a developer's perspective this is important... There is currently a disconnect between the planning for housing and the planning for water."

"We are supportive of the proposed 'tougher, fairer and simpler' planning framework in the Bricks and Water report. Developers respond to clarity, certainty and consistency in regulations, we don't want a plethora of different rules at a local level."



Angela Smith MP

"We need to build more homes, but on one level I am quite worried because I think that we are doing it in entirely the wrong way, and we will find ourselves in 30 years' time with homes built in the wrong places and built to inadequate standards... The constant drive by Government of 'housing first' is a risk, I want the Ministry of Housing to take these risks to housing seriously."

Q&A

"We have long term planning for drainage, as we currently do for water resources."

"We need more data sharing from water companies to allow analysis by the Environment Agency, local government and academic institutions."

"Do we need to make better business case for SuDS (Sustainable Drainage Systems) in developments through the green space contribution?"

"Building homes to a target water efficiency of 100 Litres per person per day is laudable and achievable, but how do we make it hard wired so that the homeowner doesn't change out water efficient fixtures and fittings."

"Brown and green field development sites will require different SuDS management schemes as they rely on different business models. One size doesn't fit all so we need flexibility in making management arrangements for SuDS."

“Trials [by Anglian Water, Severn Trent Water and others] of offering a reduced infrastructure charge incentive to housebuilders to build to a higher water efficiency and SuDS standard still has low take-up. How do we get more developers to take up these initiatives?”

“There is not just an issue of political will needed to make progress in this area, but there is a very complex framework of regulations for builders and water companies. That is why we need to pushing for a new simple sustainability code for housing, which can be introduced now.”

“We don’t put a true value on water, how can get the public to value water better?”

“Changing the building regulations to improve standards on water efficiency and flooding and the developers will just get used to it, and everyone will adjust to the higher standard.”

About us

The Westminster Sustainable Business Forum (WSBF) is a high-level coalition of key UK businesses, parliamentarians, civil servants and other organisations, seeking to promote effective sustainability policy in the UK.

The WSBF brings together leading UK businesses who want to maximise business opportunities in the transition to a low-carbon economy, and share a belief in the need to operate in an environmentally, socially and economically sustainable way. We publish authoritative research reports; impact on government policy through in-depth roundtable policy discussions and outputs; and inform the wider sustainability debate by convening Parliamentarians, senior civil servants, business experts and other stakeholders at larger policy events and seminars.

The WSBF campaigns in the policy areas of sustainable construction and infrastructure, energy and water efficiency, planning, green finance and natural capital. We are independent, cross-party and not-for-profit.

WSBF members include: Albion Water, Anglian Water, the British Board of Agrément, CIWEM, Melius Homes, NERC, MIMA, Polypipe, Southern Water, Veolia, Wei Yang & Partners, and Willmott Dixon.

Policy Connect

The WSBF is part of Policy Connect, a cross-party think tank. We improve people’s lives by influencing public policy.

We collaborate with Government, Parliament and across the public, private and third sectors to develop our policy ideas from research, facts, data and consensus. Our work focuses on key policy areas including: health, education & skills; industry, technology & innovation; and sustainability. We shape policy in Westminster through meetings, events, research and impact work. We are a non-profit social enterprise and London Living Wage-accredited.

We are kindly supported by a number of members, who support us to raise the profile of the areas we work in to government and Parliament, including the devolved authorities.

Our team brings policy to life by collaborating across our key policy areas. This means we engage with a wide variety of stakeholders – it makes your policy insights, and our research and campaigns, richer for it. It means we deliver you personalised political information, expert opinion, and impactful policy recommendations from the heart of Westminster (and beyond).

If you have found today of value you may wish to get more closely involved with us. For further information on our work and joining us as we develop innovative research and transform policy, please contact info@policyconnect.org.uk / 0207 202 8585.