

## **Maidstone Borough Council**

### **Environment and Transportation Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

**Tuesday 15 February 2011**

#### **Securing Water Supplies**

**Report of:** Overview and Scrutiny Officer

#### **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 It appears to rain all the time in the UK, so why all the fuss? Despite having a seemingly wet climate, some parts of the UK do experience water shortages. Remarkably, the South East of England has less water available per person than Sudan and Syria. Each person in the UK uses approximately 150 litres of water a day. This takes into account cooking, cleaning, washing and flushing. This has been rising by 1% a year since 1930. This consumption level is not sustainable in the long-term. If we do not take action now, climate change, population shifts and behaviour mean the UK will face increased water stress in the future.
- 1.2 The Core Strategy is the principal document in the LDF. It contains the Council's overall ambitions and priorities for the District and will be used to decide what the District should be like in 2026. The Core Strategy will contain strategic housing allocations which are crucial to the implementation of the Strategy. The Core Strategy also contains a number of Core Policies that are applicable District wide and a separate section on Development Management policies. A great deal of information has been gathered to provide the basis for preparing the Core Strategy and is referred to as the evidence base. The Local Development Framework (LDF) is the set of policies that determines where and how development takes place in Maidstone. The LDF along with the Core Strategy will take into consideration Sustainable homes and the issue of water efficiency as it seeks to create a sustainable future for Maidstone. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee have a vital role to play in the decision making and policy development processes at Maidstone Borough Council.

#### **2. Recommendation**

- 2.1 The Committee are recommended to interview Building Control to understand the water saving methods that can be incorporated into new and existing developments.

The Committee are also recommended to interview Lee Dance Head of Resource and Environmental at South East Water.

Areas of questioning could include but are not limited to:

- What water saving methods are recommended to Developers that approach Maidstone Borough Council;
- At what stage in the 'Planning' process do Building Control have input to help inform developers on water efficiency;
- Does the current arrangement with the Planning and Building Control process work well in terms of progressing with the code for Sustainable Homes;
- What relationship does the authority have with the water company on water efficiency ;
- What marketing methods if any are used by the authority to raise the profile of water efficiency with new developers as well as ordinary householders making improvements to older properties;
- What marketing methods are used by the water company to raise the profile of water efficiency;
- Has Building Control seen a rise in awareness with the ordinary householder in terms of water efficiency;
- Has the water company seen a rise in awareness of the ordinary householder in terms of water efficiency;
- Had does the water company assess the success of water efficiency in relation to their supply;
- What are the long term aims and aspirations for Building Control; and
- What are the long term aims and aspirations for the water company?
- How can the Council, Water Companies and organisations like Waterwise work in a more joined up manner to meet the ongoing challenge of water efficiency?

### **3. Background Information**

#### 3.1 Sustainable Homes

**'The code for sustainable homes became fully operational in England in April 2007 and a code for new build homes became mandatory from 1 May 2008. Developments where notice or plans were received by a local authority prior to 1 May 2008 are exempt.**

**From 1 May 2008 a minimum of Code Level 3 is required for all new housing promoted or supported by the Welsh Assembly Government or their sponsored bodies and from 2 June 2008, Code Level 3 is required for all new self contained social housing in Northern Ireland. The code does not apply in Scotland.**

**In April 2007, the Code replaced Ecohomes for the assessment of new housing in England. The Code is an environmental assessment method for new homes based**

**upon BRE Global's Ecohomes and contains mandatory performance levels in 7 key areas:**

- **Energy efficiency/ Carbon Dioxide**
- **Water efficiency**
- **Surface water management**
- **Site waste management**
- **Household waste management**
- **Use of materials**
- **Lifetime homes (applies to Code Level 6 only).'**

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#### 3.2 Best Practice

Dover District Council's Core Strategy was agreed at an Extraordinary Council meeting on 24 February 2010 and contains the following objectives in relation to water:

- **Use natural resources more efficiently especially, land for housebuilding, water and energy, produce less waste and increase recycling; and**
- **Mitigate and adapt to the forecast impacts of climate change, in particular on the water environment and biodiversity.**

Dover (along with Folkestone) has been awarded Water Scarcity Status. Dover is a growth area with 5,000 new homes due to be built. Both these factors identified by the Environment Agency and Water Companies (Southern and Veolia Water South East) prompted a Strategic Flood Risk Assessment and a Water Cycle Strategy. The water company's long term aim is to provide a new reservoir and pumping station to deal with the impact of new development. According to David Whittington, Senior Planner and Urban Designer at Dover District Council, it was at the water company's insistence that water issues were explicitly included in their Core Strategy.

#### 3.3 Maidstone's Position

Maidstone's Core Strategy 2006-2026 is in its draft stage with a public consultation to follow in early 2011. It has been suggested that Maidstone will be creating 10,080 new homes which would maintain its growth point status but due to current funding shortages it would make use of existing infrastructure and opt for the dispersal option rather than an Urban Extension. This could change during the consultation process.

Building control enforces a standard for new houses which is equivalent to level 1 in the code for sustainable homes in regard to water efficiency. The planning department can insist on a higher level being implemented.

Level 1 is 120 litres per person, per day of potable (drinking) water consumption reduced through the use of water efficient fittings, appliances and water recycling systems. The Water Efficiency Calculator is used by Building Control which is **'the Government's National calculation methods for the assessment of water efficiency in new dwellings in support of Building Regulations Part G 2009 and the code for Sustainable Homes 2009 and subsequent versions. The calculator assesses the contribution that each internal water fitting (micro component) has on whole house water consumption, measured on litres per person per day based on research into typical water use.'**

**'Due to the impacts of user behaviour it will not relate directly to the actual water use in the home but will provide a benchmark assessment of the typical consumption of a specification of fittings and their impact on water efficiency. It is not a toll for the design of water demand and drainage systems' (Code for Sustainable Homes).'**

**'To reach level 3 of the Code for Sustainable Homes, for example, developers must reach the following minimum standards:**

- **Achieve 25 per cent reduction in carbon emissions from energy use in the home, compared to a similar home built to the building regulations;**
- **Install water saving measures like low flow taps with the aim of achieving a maximum usage of 105 litres per day;**
- **Ensure effective surface water management around the home; and**
- **That the wider environmental impact of the construction materials is reduced.'**

**'Beyond reaching these minimum standards, to hit Level 3, the builder also has to attain a score by choosing from a range of voluntary measures, such as by providing:**

- **More energy efficient lighting;**
- **Cycle storage;**
- **A home office;**
- **Recycling facilities;**
- **Enhanced home security; and**
- **Enhanced sound insulation.'**

It is the Government's ambition that all new homes will meet a zero carbon standard by 2016

### 3.4 Water Companies

Maidstone's drinking water is supplied by South East Water and Southern Water deal with sewerage and waste water but do supply water in some areas.

Both companies focus on water efficiency on their websites and link to campaigns and organisations promoting this. Southern water's slant appeals to the customer's desire to save money with the slogan **'save money, save energy, save water'** and the message **'you can help the environment and save money with a water metre'** both featured on their website. South East Water has a front page link to the **'Big Tap Challenge'** which is a national campaign giving useful tips on saving water. One of the tips references brushing your teeth and states that **'a bathroom running tap uses 6 litres of water a minute.'**

Both South East and Southern Water have put their names to the Big Tap Challenge Campaign which is in conjunction with Waterwise. Waterwise is a UK NGO focused on decreasing water consumption in the UK and building the evidence base for large scale water efficiency. They are the leading authority on water efficiency in the UK

Waterwise is an independent, not for profit organisation that receives funding from the UK water industry and from sponsorship and consultancy work.

## 4. Impact on Corporate Objectives

4.1 Considering water efficiency methods in the areas of Planning and Building Control and the long term vision of the Core Strategy through recommendations should help to deliver the Council's objectives for the Borough to be a place that is clean and green, a place to achieve prosper and thrive and a place with efficient and effective public services.

4.2 There is no risk involved in considering water efficiency methods.

## 5. Reference

Code for Sustainable Homes, Technical Guide (May 2009, Version 2).

[www.bigtapchallenge.co.uk](http://www.bigtapchallenge.co.uk)

[www.waterwise.org.uk](http://www.waterwise.org.uk)