

Housing expansion - where will all the water come from?

THE RECENT report prepared for Horsham District Council which suggested there may be a need to build more than 600 homes every year in the district for the foreseeable future is causing great debate - and rightly so.

It raises many issues but, if current projections of future population growth are accurate, there may be little choice.

A lot of the debate will revolve around where new housing should be built, clearly an important issue that has to be addressed. However, equally important questions need to be asked about the infrastructure which will be needed to support the additional



by **John Steele**
of the
Horsham
Society

population. This will include medical services, roads, energy supplies, etc.

Undoubtedly, among the most important is an adequate supply of fresh water and the effective disposal of sewage and wastewater. Water is so essential to our wellbeing and it cannot be assumed that there will always be an infinite supply.

A separate report

identifies capacity constraints in respect of sewage treatment, sewers, and water distribution but appears to be silent on the question of the availability of fresh water.

Southern Water already plans to fit water meters to some 20,000 dwellings in our area due to a perceived need on its part to conserve water. If we already have a water supply shortage the idea of adding 600 new homes each year must be viewed as impossible, or at least dangerous. This must be the case now that Southern Water has informed us that the South East is a water stressed area.

Where is the extra water to come from? Southern

Water says that the reason for installing water meters is that it makes it easier to find leaks in the distribution system. If this is the reason and money were invested to minimise leakage, we could save 3bn litres of water per day in this country, which would support a population increase of 22m and perhaps over 8m new homes.

But the general view within the water industry, including OFWAT, seems to be that reducing leakage in any meaningful way is too expensive. This seems at odds with the alleged reason given by Southern Water for installing water meters. However, if it is true, the only alternatives are to build new reservoirs, construct a

national water grid or reduce people's water usage by aggressive pricing policies.

A national water grid is a nice idea but it's probably impractical in the short term. Building new reservoirs may be forced on the water companies whether or not new dwellings are built as there is considerable concern about the over-extraction of water from our rivers.

The pricing option has enormous risks associated with it. Many people would be forced to reduce their water consumption simply because they couldn't afford the cost. The hygiene problems that this would present are too horrendous to contemplate.

What is clear is that we need a consolidated plan. There can be little doubt that if we really are currently experiencing a water supply problem in Horsham district then that needs to be dealt with before we embark on building even more houses.

The mañana approach will not be acceptable.

The Horsham Society is concerned about the past, present and future of the town. It seeks to promote good planning and design for the built environment and open spaces. Membership of the Horsham Society is open to anyone, who shares these concerns. For more information, visit our website www.horshamsociety.org or telephone 01403 263870.