

Welcome from Chris Murray MBE, Independent Chair of WRSE

I'd like to begin by thanking everyone who has engaged with the consultation on our draft best value regional plan for South East England – whether that's visiting our consultation webpages, downloading and reading our consultation document, attending our draft regional plan webinar, sending us a question or comment, or completing our online feedback survey.



Chris Murray

We really appreciate you taking the time to learn about what we're proposing and tell us what you think, just as you did for our emerging regional plan when it was published 12 months ago. As before, all the feedback we're receiving will help us further update our plan, with the finalised version to be shared with you later this year.

A reminder that our consultation is running until 20 February 2023, with separate consultations also being run by the six WRSE member water companies on their draft Water Resources Management Plans – each of which have been shaped by our proposed draft regional plan. I would strongly encourage everyone to have their say on our plan, as well as the company plans, with further details of how you can get involved in the weeks ahead set out on page 4 of this newsletter.

In my role as WRSE's Independent Chair, I have been truly impressed by the quality of collaboration between all those involved in developing our plan, including the WRSE team, water company colleagues, colleagues from regulators and government, as well as our wider stakeholders.

In particular, we're very grateful to our regulator and government contacts for their role in setting out their expectations of our plan, helping guide our efforts. As you can read on page 2 of this newsletter, it's also fantastic news that the Government and regulators have confirmed that regional planning will continue in future planning rounds. Of course, more broadly, I would like to say a huge 'Thank you' to everyone who has contributed to the development of our plan during our journey over the last three years.

Crucially, we're ensuring that our plan is one that can adapt over time to a variety of changing circumstances, such as how much population growth we see and what impact climate change has in the decades ahead. A key part of our work has been to identify the schemes that will be needed in all the potential future scenarios we may face, so we have a 'least regrets' approach to identifying the investment needed to secure our water supplies.

The cost of our draft best value plan, through to 2075, ranges from £10.7 billion to £16.4 billion, depending on the future scenario we face. Whatever the final cost, it's an amount that, ultimately, would be substantially funded through water company customer bills. While this is a significant investment, it's vital that we remember that the price of not investing sufficiently, in securing future water supplies and improving the environment, will be much greater in terms of adverse impacts on people, society, the economy and nature.

Amidst the continued economic challenges the UK is dealing with, with rising inflation driving large increases in the cost of living, we need to focus on the overall value our

draft plan would deliver. That's a challenge, given that, as a society, we've generally looked at the price we pay for water through bills, rather than the fundamental role water plays in supporting daily life, a thriving economy and a healthy natural environment.

Equally, we can't underestimate the importance of turning our planning into actions. Hard decisions need to be made to make progress now. The longer we take to do that, the tougher an already pressing challenge will become. The drought we experienced across the UK during 2022 is a 'real life' reminder of that, highlighting the need for cooperation and 'joined up' thinking across the water sector and beyond.

Finally, I want to thank Trevor Bishop, our Organisational Director, who will be leaving WRSE at the end of March this year. Trevor's contribution to our work has been immense and the sector experience he has brought to bear, along with his inclusive and open approach, has been invaluable in developing our plan. I'm particularly grateful to Trevor as, along with the wider WRSE team, he helped to make my arrival as Chair in April 2021 seamless.

As Trevor moves on, with our very best wishes for the future, I'm delighted to tell you that Lee Dance, currently Head of Water Resources at South East Water, will be joining us on secondment to take over as WRSE Organisational Director. Lee comes with a wealth of water resource planning experience and I'm looking forward to working with him as he prepares to officially take up his post on 1 April 2023.

Chris Murray MBE,
Independent Chair,
Water Resources South East.

Government confirms future of regional water resources planning

After making “significant progress”, Defra (the Department for the Environment, Food & Rural Affairs), Ofwat and the Environment agency say they envisage regional groups as being “front and centre in creating a secure and sustainable future” for water resources.

In a letter to the chairs of each regional group, Defra and the regulators stated they “expect regional groups to maintain and prepare regional water resources plans for future planning rounds” and build on the work done so far.

The letter went on to say that regional groups should “show strong leadership in a more holistic and integrated approach to water management”, working across sectors to secure water resources “in the face of the climate and biodiversity emergency”.

Some key outcomes from the next round of regional plans were also outlined, namely:

- **Greater water supply resilience**, including new infrastructure, when needed, and improved resilience to drought beyond the public water supply
- **Improved water efficiency and demand management**, by identifying, using and championing best practice
- **Environmental protection and improvement**, secured through ambitious environmental planning, which proactively addresses pressures before they become a problem
- **Greater value for money**, delivered through robust evidence on water and infrastructure needs and scoping a broad, innovative range of options
- **Effective regional engagement**, by ensuring plans are informed by ongoing discussions with the public and key stakeholders, including local planning authorities and catchment partnerships.

WRSE Independent Chair Chris Murray commented: “Support from the Government

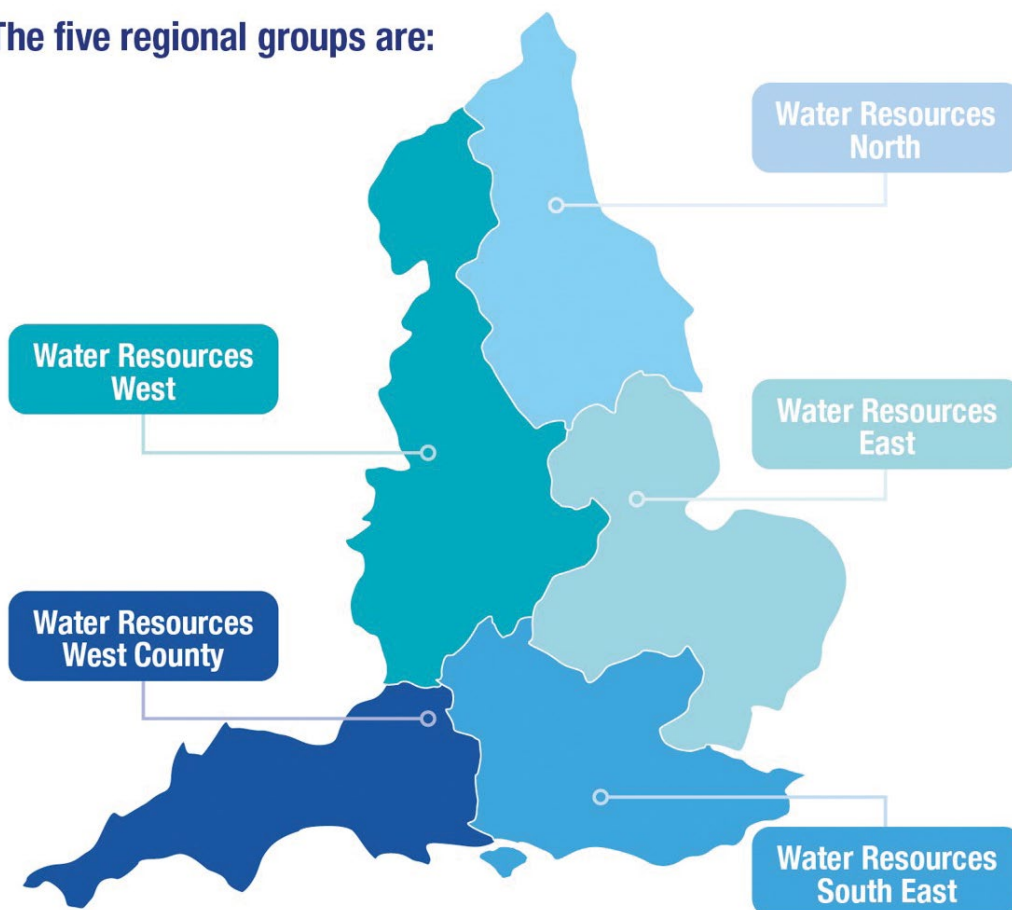
and regulators for regional planning is incredibly welcome, and this letter is very timely, as we start our own thinking about what we can do next to support our member water companies and stakeholders to, collectively, futureproof our region’s water supplies.

“We’ll carefully consider the points raised in the letter and understand how to map these across to our plans for the future. This includes whether we play a more centralised coordinating role across the South East’s water companies and users and how we can support the delivery of multi-sector solutions”.

Chris added: “We welcome the commitment to new policies and regulations to support demand management and will work with government and regulators to help develop and implement these.

“We’ll also build on our multi-sector work to identify more opportunities for jointly-funded projects – and encourage more support to unlock cross-sector funding.”

The five regional groups are:



Draft regional plan consultation continues

It's been a busy time during our consultation on our draft best value regional plan for the South East.

The plan was published on 14 November 2022, with a deadline of 20 February 2023 for feedback on it to be submitted to us.

Below is round up of some of the key consultation highlights so far.

- More than 2,700 visits to our [consultation webpages](#), with over 950 downloads of [our consultation document](#) and 110+ views of our mini-collection of short 'explainer' videos
- We held a launch event for our plan at the Houses of Parliament in London on 16 November 2022 (see separate update below). More than 60 key stakeholders, including a number of MPs from our region, joined us at the gathering
- On 22 November 2022, we had over 190 attendees at the consultation webinar we held to share our draft plan and allow people to ask the WRSE team questions about what's proposed. [The recording of the webinar](#) has been viewed more than 140 times after we posted it online and sent the link to our stakeholder contacts across the region and wider UK
- As before, we also supported [a webinar hosted by the National Water Resources Framework Steering Group](#) on 17 November 2022. This was to launch the five draft regional water resources plans covering England and parts of Wales and was attended by 146 people.

At the heart of Westminster

A wide range of stakeholders and parliamentarians, as well as colleagues from the WRSE member water companies, were on hand for the launch of our draft regional plan at the House of Commons on 16 November 2022.

Over 60 people attended, representing regulators, environmental groups, local authorities, trade associations for large water users and other water resources regions. South East MPs and peers from the House of Lords also came, along with Chairs of parliamentary select committees and All Party Parliamentary Groups (APPGs).

At the launch event, hosted by Sir Geoffrey Clifton Brown, MP for the Cotswolds, guests were addressed by Professor Jim Hall from the National Infrastructure Commission (NIC), Paul Hickey from RAPID (the Regulators' Alliance for Progressing Infrastructure Development) and Charles Rangeley-Wilson from the National Chalk Stream Restoration Group.



Pictured left to right: Sir Charles Walker (MP for Broxbourne and Chair of the Chalk Streams APPG), Trevor Bishop (WRSE), and Charles Rangeley-Wilson (Author and Chair of the National Chalk Stream Restoration Group).

Professor Hall said the WRSE plan is the “type of strategic plan the NIC expects to see”, while Charles Rangeley-Wilson described it as “the best chance we’ve ever had to achieve a better balance” between the needs of people and the environment.

WRSE Organisational Director Trevor Bishop also shared an overview of the plan, highlighting why it is such an important milestone and how crucial it is to work

together to solve regional problems.

Trevor emphasised that we “no longer have the luxury of kicking the can down the road”, or have any easy options, and need to move to delivery.

We’re really grateful to our speakers and event host, and to everyone who joined us in Parliament, for their support and making our plan launch such a success.

Our regional plan - What happens next

Following the current consultation on our draft regional plan, we'll consider all the feedback and comments we receive, before publishing a consultation response in May this year.

We'll also check back with the other regional water resources groups to make sure all our

plans still work together in an integrated and joined up way.

We'll produce our final best value regional plan, taking account of all the views we hear during our draft plan consultation.

Publication of the plan will take place in late 2023. It will inform each of the final Water Resources Management Plans from the six WRSE member water companies, which will also be published for everyone to read.

The companies will then produce their five-year business plans, which will include the immediate investment needed in water resources between 2025-30.

For more details, please see [our draft regional plan consultation document](#).

Have your say on company water resources plans

A reminder that you can comment on the draft Water Resources Management Plans (dWRMPs) published by the six water companies serving the South East of England.

Links to each company's consultation webpages are set out below, along with the date each consultation is running until.

Feedback on all the published plans, including the draft regional plan, is welcomed.

However, please note that the consultations are separate. So, do make sure to respond to the relevant consultation(s), with comments on particular local issues or proposals to be directed to the appropriate company plan consultation.



[Consultation open until 20 February 2023](#)



[Consultation open until 20 February 2023](#)



[Consultation open until 20 February 2023](#)



[Consultation open until 20 February 2023](#)



[Consultation open until 20 February 2023](#)



[Consultation open until 21 March 2023](#)

What stakeholders think of our draft regional plan

The views of a wide range of stakeholders have helped inform and shape our draft best value regional plan, and will continue to do so as we work to produce a final plan in the months ahead.

Below is a summary of initial feedback from some of our stakeholders on what we're proposing:

Karen Gibbs, Senior Leader for Environment, Consumer Council for Water (CCW)



"We'd like to congratulate everyone involved in developing the draft regional plan, which is the product of so much hard work by the WRSE team, water company colleagues, regulators and a range of other stakeholders. We fully support the development of best value regional plans to deliver for customers and the environment, taking an holistic approach that involves other sectors that rely on resilient and sustainable water supplies.

"We are clear that the South East of England faces some of the biggest water resources challenges in the UK, with the strong demand

management actions in the draft WRSE plan being key to successfully addressing these obstacles. This includes bringing down leakage, an ongoing priority for customers and something that is vital to support effective engagement with households and businesses on using water wisely and how that can support resilience and a thriving natural environment. People will be more reluctant to do their bit in saving water if they regard water companies as not playing their part.

"In terms of the draft regional plan and the forthcoming water industry price review, we fully understand the need to invest now – in progressing new infrastructure schemes and more effective behaviour change campaigns – to secure resilient and sustainable water supplies for the future. However, this must be accompanied by a robust affordability scheme to ensure that customers are protected, should they need help with their bills."

Kelly Hewson-Fisher, Water Specialist, National Farmers' Union (NFU)



"As an organisation, we have been supporting the development of the five regional plans, which are all based on a multi-sector approach, including taking account of the needs of the farming and horticultural industries.

"That's a positive and welcome step forward. However, making the most of this opportunity and fully engaging with the regional plan process has not been easy for us and those we represent – not least of all as there is currently no national or regional water resources plan for agriculture and no investment funding pot to support schemes to deliver additional resilience for agricultural water supplies.

"This is something that needs to be addressed moving forward, especially given the importance of secure and sustainable water supplies for agriculture and horticulture – the South East of England is renowned nationally and beyond for its fruit production, livestock and vineyards. Reliable water supplies are essential for a thriving agricultural sector that can support increased food security, help improve public health – for example, through higher average consumption of fruit and vegetables, and contribute to sustainable economic growth.

"We will continue working with the regional groups, the Environment Agency and Defra to promote water for food production as an essential element of planning for water resources. This includes progressing the introduction of a national agricultural water resources planning framework to guide a coordinated and integrated approach."

Cat Moncrieff, Head of Water & Land Stewardship, South East Rivers Trust (SERT)



"The draft plan is a good start, which raises the profile of long-term planning, the water-scarcity challenge, and the importance of keeping our rivers flowing.

"That said, there remains much to do to turn the plan into a reality. This includes locking in environmental improvements for the lifetime of the plan – currently, there's no certainty for the environment beyond 2035. Approval now for major water supply schemes, like Broad Oak Reservoir in Kent and the Grand Union Canal regional transfer, would provide confidence that new water sources will be in place to support reduced abstraction from threatened habitats, such as chalk streams.

"We also want stronger action by the Government to support the measures in the plan to reduce demand for water. For example, by

accelerating the introduction of new building regulations around water efficiency, something that is needed now, not in 2060, as is planned.

"We're pleased the draft plan is taking account of the water needs of other sectors, like agriculture, but we feel further work is needed to fully understand these and ultimately build resilience for non-public water supplies

"Our big disappointment is the small number of catchment-based schemes included in the plan – given that more than 200 potential projects were put forward and considered. We understand this is the result of regulatory guidance being applied, so that only schemes that can demonstrate a quantifiable water resource benefit can be included. However, natural landscapes play a vital role as giant sponges, holding back and filtering water to provide flood risk and water supply benefits. For us, the regulatory system needs to catch up and appreciate the inherent value of catchment and nature-based solutions for water resilience, people and nature."

Hello & Goodbye – Important change to WRSE team

A new, but familiar, face is joining the Water Resources South East (WRSE) team.

Lee Dance, South East Water's Head of Water Resources, will become WRSE Organisational Director from 1 April this year. He's replacing Trevor Bishop, who is moving on after three years in the role.

Reflections from Trevor Bishop

"It's been an incredible journey over the last three years, and I consider it a privilege to have been part of such a positive change in the water sector, with the development of the first-ever regional water resources plans.



"In particular, there's been genuine partnership working between the five regional groups, water companies, government, regulators, stakeholders – like environmental champions and those from sectors including farming and energy – as well as many others. In that spirit, our member water companies and regulators have given us the opportunity to think and act differently, and explore new and better ways of working.

"The result of our efforts so far is the draft regional plan for South East England that's currently out for consultation. It provides a road map for timely and much needed action and investment to ensure we have safe, sustainable and resilient water supplies for the future.

"Finally, I want to say a huge personal 'Thank you' to the WRSE team, as well as all the partners we're working with, for their support in my time with WRSE, and I'd like to wish everyone, including my successor Lee Dance, every success in finalising and delivering the regional plan."

Looking ahead with Lee Dance

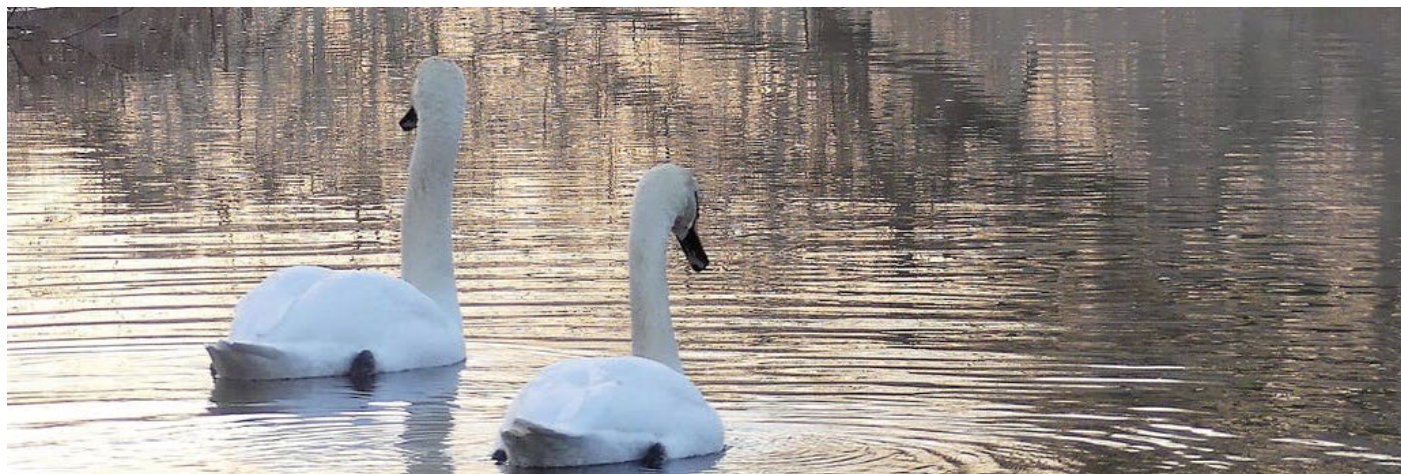
"I'm delighted and excited to be joining WRSE and am looking forward to working with a wide variety of partners to successfully tackle the major future challenges we face as a region.



"Between now and the end of March this year, I'll be working closely with Trevor Bishop and the WRSE team to make sure there's a smooth transition. The immediate focus will remain on working through the responses we receive during the draft regional plan consultation, and using that feedback to shape and inform the final version of the plan which will be published later in 2023.

"Our regional plan has come a long way, with some distance still to go. However, there's a huge body of great work to build on, starting with engaging with our WRSE member water companies and wider stakeholders on how this round of planning has gone, and where we want to go next.

"Lastly, I'd like to thank Trevor for the significant contribution he has made to the development of a regional plan for the South East of England, and wish him all the very best for his next venture."



Broad Oak Reservoir – Securing water supplies, benefitting people and nature

A proposed new reservoir at Broad Oak, near Canterbury in Kent, is included in [our draft regional plan](#) and [South East Water's draft Water Resources Management Plan](#). It could be operational by 2036, with the potential for this date to be brought forward to 2033.

Plans to build a reservoir at Broad Oak have been around since the 1970s. Under the current proposals, the reservoir would be able to store up to five billion litres of water,

to provide an additional 22 million litres for supply to customers each day. The reservoir would be filled over a period of time through a mixture of water taken from the Great Stour river and rainwater.

As well as the reservoir and an associated water treatment works, it's planned to develop an education centre, public foot and cycle paths, an art and sensory trail, as well as picnic areas for visitors to enjoy.

To make sure the scheme supports the ambitions of local people for the site, South East Water wants to work with communities to help shape what could be delivered and

what the site could offer in the decades ahead. As part of this effort, the company is re-establishing the Broad Oak Reservoir Community Panel and asking people to sign up if they would like to be a member – for example, local residents, community representatives and businesses, as well as people with an interest or expertise in the environment.

If you'd like to find out more about the panel, or the plans for Broad Oak Reservoir, please visit the project's web-pages at: [Broad Oak Reservoir | Get Involved South East Water \(engagementhq.com\)](#).



How Broad Oak Reservoir could look once completed

How to stay in touch with us

Visit our website www.wrse.org.uk. Sign up to our email updates via www.wrse.org.uk/contact-us

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