



Water White Paper – Water Infrastructure First

Water as a solution, not a blocker to housebuilding and growth

Better Connections 2017



Better Connections, the HFI's consultation paper from its Housing Infrastructure Pilot research, examined how public and private bodies could identify, plan and unblock infrastructure obstacles. It was built with a cross-industry expert group and set out eight core areas of recommendation.

Where water connections break down

- A water company and a housebuilder could not agree how to build over a mains pipe. Homes were taken out of the plan and fewer were built as a result.
- Solutions accepted by a utility in one part of the country were refused by another, leaving builders unable to argue the case for innovation.
- Smaller builders carry the weakest negotiating position on price, priority and timing of connections.

The Better Connections Paper eight core areas of recommendation

- 1 Better housing supply administration
- 2 Better industry contact and booking
- 3 Effective technical mediation
- 4 Housing installation arbitration
- 5 Intervention powers
- 6 Funding innovation
- 7 Local infrastructure prioritisation
- 8 National infrastructure prioritisation

Why water matters

- **Water is now the binding constraint**

Abstraction limits, wastewater capacity deficits and flood risks increasingly decide which housing allocations can proceed. A deeper understanding of water solutions and options is needed to accelerate delivery.
- **Delay carries a measurable price**

Around 61,000 homes sit stalled, with an estimated £25bn five-year cost in lost construction activity, foregone land value uplift and reduced regional productivity. (Public First research)
- **Climate concern is rising**

Surface water flooding across English communities has risen 43% since 2018, overwhelming legacy combined sewers and adding risk to sites already consented. (Environment Agency)
- **The environment has to gain too**

In stressed catchments, growth needs to protect river health not damage it.

New Water Infrastructure



Funding and delivering water infrastructure ahead of, or alongside, major housing developments — for better environmental outcomes in new towns and villages.

Research focus

- 'Infrastructure first' models that de-risk sites and accelerate housing delivery
- Governance and delivery models across utilities, councils, developers and regulators
- End-to-end water management: clean and wastewater, surface water, SuDS, catchments
- Planning, regulatory and consenting barriers — and the changes that would remove them
- Nature recovery outcomes: biodiversity net gain, water quality, flood and climate resilience

Finance and investment

Advance funding by institutional investors with risk-sharing, guarantees and blended finance — repaid through land value capture, connection charges, developer contributions and revolving infrastructure funds.

Policy underpinning practical delivery

The Water First Initiative pairs policy and regulatory reform proposals with leading engineering solutions, so recommendations reach government with a delivery route and housebuilders have practical options and potential solutions.

Policy and regulatory reform

Engineering and manufacturing

Regulated water operation

Institutional investment and funding

Housebuilding and growth

Get involved –

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Find out more at www.thehfi.uk

Policy expertise · Engineering delivery · Regulated operation · Long-term capital · Housebuilding and growth